

# THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CALLER



DR. OSMAN LATIFF

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DR. OSMAN LATIFF

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“These millions of people who embraced Islam without coercion did so because it embodied in people who had really embraced and implemented its teachings, people who had ‘absorbed’ the reality of Islam and translated it into real life. When others saw this shining image, they opened their hearts to Islam; otherwise, they would not have embraced the new religion in scores and within such a short time, and would not have won the battle. The sword may open the ground, but not the hearts, and if Allāh told His Messenger:

*“Were you severe or harsh-hearted, they would have broken away from about you.”<sup>1</sup>*

This address was to Muḥammad, who was a Messenger, so what about the ordinary conquerors if they do not possess moral conduct?”<sup>2</sup>

### Muhammad Qutb

“The world is in dire need of hearing the message of Islam. Man is not fortunated with all provisions from Allāh and nor with guidance. Man is in a state of neediness, requiring food for one’s bodily needs and so too their souls are in need of guidance.”<sup>3</sup>

### Muhammad al-Ghazali

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1 Al-Qur’ān, Chapter 3, Verses 159.

2 Muhammad Qutb, *How to invite people to Islam* (London, Al-Firdous Publishers: 2012), pp. 255-256.

3 Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Dirāsāt fī al-da‘wa wa al-du‘āt* (Cairo, Nahdet Misr: 2007), p. 18.



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لَا يَشْكُرُ اللَّهُ مَنْ لَا يَشْكُرُ النَّاسَ

“Whoever does not thank people has not thanked Allāh”,<sup>4</sup>

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4 Abi Dāwūd 4811

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“My Lord! Truly, I am in need of whatever good that You bestow on me!”<sup>5</sup>

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5 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 28, verse 24.



## Introduction

This book is about *daʿwah*, about inviting others to the message of Islam. It is also about who we are to become in light of *daʿwah* - our state of being in relation to conveying the message; it is about *daʿwah* and about how to become *duʿāt*, and how to seek personal and social transformation through *daʿwah*. The book is a manual, that presents examples and analysis from the Qurʾān and Sunnah and from scholarly outlook that draw on insights into our human character and how we can better relate to ourselves, to others and to our relationship with Allāh.

Though we may know something about *daʿwah*, knowledge alone does not give us immediate access to transforming our state of being. We need to try and bridge the gap between what we might know, and the internalisation and actualisation of that knowledge. There might exist a gap between what we know and who we seek to become in light of that knowledge. This book is about helping us to bridge that gap.

A state of being exists in relation to what is in a person's heart, and how we relate to ourselves, to others and to Allāh. 'To be' then is to be related. Allāh instructs in the Qurʾān: "Be devoted to the worship of your Lord "alone"—in accordance with what these prophets read in the Scripture and what they taught."<sup>6</sup> The Arabic verse,

كُونُوا رَبَّانِيِّنَ

connotes to become people of wisdom, knowledge and piety.<sup>7</sup> The place of these vital characteristics, integrating and actualising them is one of the key focal points of this book.

By looking closely at the lives of the prophets and messengers of Allāh, we are able to see how they were able to carry out their mission to their respective nations and peoples by inculcating in their characters the most

6 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 3, verse 79.

7 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 3 (Cairo, Dār al-Tawfiqiyya: 2004), pp. 351-353.

esteemed characteristics. It is in knowing, internalising and actualising such characteristics that the book calls attention. As the nation now entrusted to carry on this prophetic call, we must endeavour to engage with our duty in the best way possible. This book, may Allāh accept it as an offering to this task of *daʿwah*, seeks to assist the caller to Islam in this journey.

This book is presented here in three main sections. Addressing the subject matter of *daʿwah*, in the first section, it seeks to answer the question of What is *daʿwah*? This section establishes a strong foundation for the work of presenting Islam. If you don't know what you are doing and with what aim, then you are sure to be lost in your endeavour; no matter how sincere your efforts and intentions may be. This section seeks to prevent this being the case.

The second section considers some important prerequisites for the work of *daʿwah*. These include calling to what one knows, and considering reflections on how one perceives: the world, themselves, the other, society, their *daʿwah* work; as well as in turn, how one is perceived by others. This section, therefore, serves an incredibly useful purpose for those who seek to engage with this obligation with humility and sincerity, as it calls one to reflect deeper on their intentions and the way in which they are putting themselves out into the world.

The third section of this book presents seven areas for development of character for the *dāʿī*. It does this by first providing an overview of the area, value or characteristic, such as a commitment to truth, or showing empathy and compassion, etc. It then goes into a narrative from the Qurʾān or a narrative from the lives of the prophets, or their companions. As it delves into these examples, it draws out learning related to the area of character development, bringing out lessons that can be learnt and insights that might help us to gain a deeper meaning of the Qurʾānic or prophetic narrative.

Most importantly however, each sub-section provides guidance of how the reader may take steps towards developing that key character trait, value or aspect of their personality and persona as a Muslim, and as a caller to Islam. This analytic approach assists the *dāʿī* to gain a deeper understanding of what it means to be familiar with 'knowledge', or 'wisdom' for example; benefitting the reader by engaging them in a conversation with advice from the Qurʾān, and prayers of the prophets, to assist the caller to Islam in their duty to call to the truth, to transform themselves and perhaps this being the main aim of the book – to change the reader.

It is, of course, Allāh the Almighty who is the guider of hearts and minds. We are required however to learn, and constantly strive to do and be better in ourselves, in order to grow towards such noble characteristics as shown and taught through examples espoused in this book. It is hoped

this text goes a significant way in helping us on our journey of change, as well as our efforts to change and advise the hearts and minds of those we encounter. The Opening to which, no doubt, comes from Allāh, the Almighty, alone – the Creator of our hearts and minds, the giver of life, death, and eternal life.

*“Know that Allāh revives the earth after its death. We have certainly made the signs clear for you so perhaps you will understand.”<sup>8</sup>*

#### NOTE

After the name of God, ‘Allāh’ one can say ‘Tabāarak wa Ta‘āla’ or ﷲ ‘Subḥānahu wa ta‘āla’ (Glorified and sanctified is He’; the Prophet Muḥammad’s name is followed by ﷺ ‘ṢallAllāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam’ (Peace and blessing be upon him); after the names of all other prophets one can say ﷺ ‘alayhi-salām’ (Upon him be peace). Where the names of companions of the Prophet are mentioned one can say ﷺ ‘RaḍiyAllāhu ‘anhu’ (May Allāh be pleased with him) or ﷺ ‘RaḍiyAllāhu ‘anhā’ (May Allāh be pleased with her).

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8 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 57, verse 17.





Da<sup>ʿ</sup>wah



## What is *Da<sup>ᶜ</sup>wah*?

The most important knowledge for the caller to Islam is a knowledge that was the key message of all the callers appointed by Allāh – Prophets and Messengers. The message is so vital that it is the prime reason for the creation of human beings – to know, love, revere and worship the One true God. All matters rest upon this foundation, that God is One and that He has no partners in His worship, in His Lordship and in His names and attributes. This belief in the Oneness of Allāh (*tawḥīd*) was the message espoused by all of the Prophets, and the call of all who followed them in truth. Allāh is the only *Ilāh* (deity worthy of worship). The *Ilāh*, as the fourteenth-century theologian Ibn al-Qayyim explained, “is He to whom the hearts are inclined to out of; love, reverence, penitence, honour, glorification, fear, hope and trust.”<sup>9</sup> Similarly, his contemporary Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī said, “Ilāh is the One Who is obeyed and not disobeyed out of; His majesty, reverence, love, fear, hope, trust, asking from Him and directing prayers to Him.”<sup>10</sup>

The invitation of the Messengers was therefore for the most important matter, the worship of Allāh alone. The approach of the caller (*dā<sup>ᶜ</sup>ī*) is to centre his focus on this call. Everything he or she calls to should have at its focus the disseminating of this message:

“And We sent not before you any messenger except that We revealed to him that, “There is no deity except Me, so worship Me.”<sup>11</sup>

“We sent a messenger to every community, saying, ‘Worship God and shun false gods.’ Among them were some God guided; mis-

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9 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Igāthat al-laḥfān min maṣāyid al-shayṭān* vol. 1. (Dār ‘Ālam al-Fawā’id: 2010), p. 27.

10 Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī, *Kalimat’ul-Ikhlāṣ wa taḥqīq ma<sup>ᶜ</sup>nahā*. (Al-Maktab al-Islami: 1977), p. 23.

11 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 21, verse 25.

guidance took hold of others. So travel through the earth and see what was the fate of those who denied the truth.”<sup>12</sup>

*Da‘wah*, literally ‘to invite’ or ‘to call’ has its place at many points in the Qur’ān and is used at different places and for different ends. Its trilateral root *dāl‘ayn wāw* (د ع و) occurs 212 times in the Quran, in seven derived forms. Allāh, for example, challenges humankind to produce something like the Qur’ān, “a Surah like it and call your helpers other than Allāh, if what you say is true.”<sup>13</sup> The plural imperative of the verb is used – *wad‘ū shuhadā’ukum* (call your helpers). The same usage is found in the verse, “Those idols you invoke besides Allāh are created beings like yourselves. So, call upon them and see if they will answer you, if your claims are true!”<sup>14</sup> The word used is *fad‘ūhum* (so call upon them). Six times is it used as the noun *da‘wat* (دَعْوَة) which is “to call” and four times as the active participle *dā‘ī* (caller), shown here in Sūrah al-Aḥzāb as a description of the purpose of the Prophet’s mission ﷺ:

“And one who invites to Allāh, by His permission, and an illuminating lamp.”<sup>15</sup>

As al-Sa‘dī points out:

“Allāh sent him to call people to their Lord, show them the way to paradise, and enjoin them to worship Him, which is the purpose for which they were created. This requires him to adhere to that to which he is calling them and to describe in detail the message to which he is calling them, by teaching them about their Lord and His divine attributes; declaring Him to be far above that which is not befitting to His majesty; describing all types of servitude to Him; calling people to Allāh by the most effective means; giving each one who has a right his due; and being sincere in calling them to Allāh alone, not to himself or seeking any kind of self-aggrandizement, as might be the inclination of many people. All of that was by Allāh’s leave, and by His will and decree.”<sup>16</sup>

Islam places a great emphasis on the need for human beings to strive in pursuit of God’s divine pleasure. It challenges man’s deviation and heedless

12 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 16, verse 36.

13 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 2, verse 23.

14 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 7, verse 194.

15 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 33, verse 46.

16 Al-Sa‘dī, *Tafseer al-Sa‘dī* (Juz’ 22-24) (Riyadh, International Islamic Publishing House: 2018), p. 40.

pursuit of the ephemeral, in place of seeking the bounty and generosity of God. God has afforded man the privilege of life, of his senses and countless blessings; too many to enumerate. He reassures mankind that He has not left them alone but is forever close, forbearing, kind and merciful. Allāh is al-Qarib (the Ever-Near). He describes in the Qurʾān that anybody who calls upon Him alone and sincerely, He will respond:

“When My servants ask you O Prophet about Me: I am truly near. I respond to one’s prayer when they call upon Me. So let them respond with obedience to Me and believe in Me, perhaps they will be guided to the Right Way.”<sup>17</sup>

The rhetorical use of the same root word *daʿā* in this verse is a beautiful demonstration of anaphora (*ujību daʿ wataḍ-ḍāʿī idhā daʿ ān*), informing us that the mercy of God extends to His entire creation in that He is All-Near and His forgiveness is accessible to the sincere hearted.

The essentiality of calling others to the way of Islam is reflected in many Qurʾānic verses, of them are the following:

“Because of that, you O Prophet will invite all. Be steadfast as you are commanded, and do not follow their desires. And say, “I believe in every Scripture Allāh has revealed. And I am commanded to judge fairly among you. Allāh is our Lord and your Lord. We will be accountable for our deeds and you for yours. There is no need for contention between us. Allāh will gather us together for judgment. And to Him is the final return.”<sup>18</sup>

“Say, O Prophet, “This is my way. I invite to Allāh with insight—I and those who follow me. Glory be to Allāh, and I am not one of the polytheists”<sup>19</sup>

“Invite all to the Way of your Lord with wisdom and kind advice, and only debate with them in the best manner. Surely your Lord alone knows best who has strayed from His Way and who is rightly guided.”<sup>20</sup>

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17 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 2, verse 186.

18 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 42, verse 15.

19 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 12, verse 108.

20 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 16, verse 125.

“And whose words are better than someone who calls others to Allāh, does good, and says, “I am truly one of those who submit.”?”<sup>21</sup>

*Da‘wah* is to realign humanity back to their original way, to uncloud what obscures of one’s *fiṭra*, one’s innate disposition. To this end, the *da‘ī* should consider that everyone has adopted, in the course of life and through an uncountable set of social experiences, memories, human encounters, encountering or witnessing of trauma, social conformities and so many other variables, that together constitute a worldview. It is this worldview that speaks, it is in the confirming or defending of such a worldview that a *da‘ī* will be exposed.

Remember that most people have held their beliefs for a long time, and such beliefs are confirmed for them in their social circles, places of worship on a regular basis and in their epistemological outlooks. Few people stand in the possibility that whatever they have held on to throughout life might in fact be wrong, and even if they know it might be wrong few are prepared to overcome their ego in order to admit it and fewer still are prepared to accept and adopt a new way of thinking and being. In a striking verse, man’s alienation from the truth and its effects on one’s internal state is set against the possibility of effective change. ‘Death’ and ‘life’ are juxtaposed in the verses, reflecting both the revival of the earth after its death and so too the revival of hearts after their hardening.

“Has the time not yet come for believers’ hearts to be humbled at the remembrance of Allāh and what has been revealed of the truth, and not be like those given the Scripture before—those who were spoiled for so long that their hearts became hardened. And many of them are still rebellious.

Know that Allāh revives the earth after its death. We have certainly made the signs clear for you so perhaps you will understand.”<sup>22</sup>

Ibn Kathīr explains, “This Ayah indicates that He brings subtleness to hearts after they have become hard, guides the confused after they were led astray, and relieves hardships after they have intensified. And just as Allāh brings life back to the dead and dry earth by sending the needed abundant rain, He also guides the hardened hearts with the proofs and evidences of the Qur’ān. The light (of faith) would have access to the hearts once

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21 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 41, verse 33.

22 Al-Qur’ān, Chapter 57, Verse 16-17.

again, after they were closed and, as a consequence, no guidance was able to reach them.”<sup>23</sup> According to *tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, Allāh is able to “restore such hearts to humbleness.”<sup>24</sup>

A similar set of verses stress on the same reality about the potentiality of human change:

“And We have not revealed to you the Book, [O Muḥammad], except for you to make clear to them that wherein they have differed and as guidance and mercy for a people who believe.”<sup>25</sup>

“And Allāh has sent down rain from the sky and given life thereby to the earth after its lifelessness. Indeed, in that is a sign for a people who listen.”<sup>26</sup>

Ibn Kathīr explains the same thing about this verse, that “just as the Almighty made the Qurʾān life for the hearts that are dead due to their disbelief, so He revives the earth after its death by what He sends down on it of water from the sky.”<sup>27</sup>

These verses teach the *dāʿī* an important lesson about not losing hope and remembering that it is indeed Allāh who guides even the most stubborn of hearts. Not all is lost, even when intense *daʿwah* efforts are not reciprocated as one would have hoped, but in the quiet passing of time hearts can slowly find their place back, just like seasons of drought can pass and rain soon enough replenishes the earth, allowing growth and produce. Allāh informs us that there is a conscience at work in every man. Even in the midst of a prevailing negative status quo, such a conscience can be awakened.

The *dāʿī* must see every situation as a potential *daʿwah* opportunity, however random it appears to be. The beautiful thing about conversing is that it challenges presumptions; we might assume how an individual will react to our words based on the words alone; and not the circumstantial life experience of the listener that draws landscapes of consciousness around those words. Words are more than intelligent phonetic constructs. They are someone else’s interpretation too. The words of one are heard, sometimes learnt and memorised by the other, and such words can reignite and rekindle copious feelings, thoughts and emotions that stem from states of

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23 Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Lebanon, Dār al-Maʿrifā:2003), p. 1563.

24 Al-Mahallī and al-Suyūṭī, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* (Dār al-Ikḥāa, 1992), p. 539.

25 Al-Qurʾān, Chapter 16, Verse 64.

26 Al-Qurʾān, Chapter 16, Verse 65.

27 Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Lebanon, Dār al-Maʿrifā: 2003), p. 1563.

consciousness about which the *daʿī* is unfamiliar. The *daʿī* should never therefore think that his words are ineffective, since effects are not measured by single moments of a conversation.

The art of communication is as much about listening than it is about talking. Remember that your words, when effective, are sometimes the result of listening to another person. Instead of scripting a message, to respond means of course to listen first. To listen to what people have to say in terms of their feelings, their concerns and confusions and then to expand on what they have said from an Islamic framework is a way of effectively listening and communicating. For this we should remember a few things: to not manufacture a response whilst someone is talking, but instead to truly listen; to not read into their words. Words are vehicles for meaning and if you truly understand someone it will aid your discussions and the strategy you will adopt

The characteristics discussed in this book are each reflected in the many examples of Prophets' own qualities, in their calling their respective peoples to the worship of Allāh alone, meaning to all of what Allāh loves, and is pleased with; sayings, actions, external, and internal. The qualities of the *daʿī* (caller) are universal, applicable to a myriad of human situations and encounters. To take on these qualities as a *daʿī*, and to apply them to these situations and encounters, to call people towards the worship of Allāh alone, is what it means to be making – the effort of *daʿwah*.



## The purpose of Da‘wah

During the caliphate of ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, the Prophet’s companion al-Nu‘mān ibn Muqarrin was sent with a delegation by Sa‘d ibn abī Waqqāṣ to the Sasanian Emperor, Yazdagird. The purpose of the mission was to invite Yazdagird to Islam. Before al-Nu‘mān delivered his message, he addressed his comrades, “If you wish I can speak for all of you, unless another person wishes to speak.” The opening words here are insightful in that they reflect a union in task and purpose. Al-Nu‘mān was selected to speak but the mission and its objective was bigger than him and it was important that this was shown. The *dā‘ī* would remember before he speaks that it is not vainglorious intent that motivates him but a desire to make Allāh’s word the highest, which means that the truth is declared most clearly and in a way that the audience becomes most susceptible to it.

There are a range of things that can help with this. From devising a pre-engagement strategy so that the most suitable individual be asked to speak, but this of course will change and range all the time depending on audience and context. Another thing that can be considered is social standing and repute – like the inmates with Prophet Yūsuf. At other times the urgency of a matter would mandate an urgent reaction like the man who came running from the furthest end of a city, as described in Sūrah Yasin.

It should never be assumed that any one person can be the most effective at any given point. Instead, different people might well be suitable for different situations. When Allāh tasked prophet Mūsā with proceeding to the Pharoah, Mūsā was very mindful of his difficulty in speaking; his prayer is a reflection of a humble imploring and provides us an insight into the kinds of worries Prophet Mūsā was having about his own ability to effectively deliver the message to the Pharoah. As Ibn Kathīr points out, the task was a great one - to deliver the message to the greatest ruler on earth with the largest army and most formidable empire, and so that his people, the *Banī Isra’īl* could understand him.<sup>28</sup> Ṭabarī explains that Mūsā was asking

28 Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Lebanon, Dār al-Ma‘rifah:2003), p 1010.

that Allāh grant him a clear understanding of the divine revelation and an ability to deliver it clearly, “make easy for me every path I take and every aim I pursue for Your sake, and make bearable for me all the hardships that lie ahead of me”.<sup>29</sup> Al-Sa‘dī explains that, “Part of making his task easy is guiding the caller to handle matters in an appropriate manner and to speak to each person in the way that is appropriate for him, using the approach that will make the message more easily accepted.”<sup>30</sup> Abū al-Tufayl reported: ‘Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib, may Allāh be pleased with him, said, “Speak to people only according to their level of knowledge. Would you like for Allāh and His Messenger to be denied?”<sup>31</sup>

The prayer of Prophet Mūsā enables us to consider the great importance of supplication in every matter. Giving *da‘wah* can sometimes be difficult. It is normal to feel nervous sometimes particularly when in a new environment and speaking to someone with whom one is unfamiliar or even someone who is antagonistic. It is useful to remember Prophet Mūsā and his situation with the Pharaoh as well as to learn and read the same supplication as him during such times.

Al-Ṭabarī explains that “so people may understand my speech” means so that there is clarity in what I address to them and go over with them of my words.”<sup>32</sup> Prophet Mūsā was concerned about the message more than he was about himself. His mission was inspired by a sincere commitment to truth. He was concerned about how the message ought to be conveyed so that the intended purpose of deliverance and understanding could be fulfilled. Another profound illustration of Prophet Mūsā’s approach to sincerity is found in what follows. Though he had made his supplication to Allāh in the hope that he would not become encumbered by his lisp when delivering the message, he also requested that his brother Harūn join him in the task.

“and grant me a helper from my family,”<sup>33</sup>

“Aaron, my brother.”<sup>34</sup>

“Strengthen me through him,”<sup>35</sup>

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29 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 16 (Cairo, Dār al-Tawfiqiyya: 2004), p. 178.

30 Al-Sa‘dī, *Tafseer al-Sa‘dī* (Juz’ 16-18) (Riyadh, International Islamic Publishing House: 2018), p. 122.

31 Al-Bukhārī 127

32 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 16 (Cairo, Dār al-Tawfiqiyya: 2004), p. 178.

33 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 20, verse 29

34 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 20, verse 30

35 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 20, verse 31

“and let him share my task,”<sup>36</sup>

“so that we may glorify You much”<sup>37</sup>

“and remember You much,”<sup>38</sup>

According to al-Ṭabarī what is intended is “That we exalt you more through remembrance of you.”<sup>39</sup> The entirety of worship is of course centred on the remembrance of Allāh and Prophet Mūsā requested his brother’s aid in order to fulfil that purpose of all human creation – to know, love, remember and worship God. This then is the essence and purpose of *daʿwah*, to seek that Allāh be exalted. Everything we do in fact should be predicated on this. Your strategy in *daʿwah* in relation to who you select to speak to, what you choose to say, when and how you say it are all factors which connect to the overriding premise.

How do we become like this? Ibn Kathīr relates from Mujahid that “The servant is not among those who remember Allāh much until he remembers Him standing, sitting and lying down.”<sup>40</sup> This suggests that there needs to be a continuous spiritual development in the life of a Muslim which will have great effect in the propagating of Islam. We have mentioned the example of Prophet Sulaymān in the Qurʾān, and how his example was intended to encourage the Prophet ﷺ with patience and strength. Imbued in that example is the great place of remembering Allāh constantly.

Everything we do should have the purpose of making the word of Allāh the highest, including *daʿwah*. At one time the Prophet ﷺ was asked about a man who fights to prove his courage, or out of pride and honour for his close relatives, or to show off. The Prophet ﷺ said: ‘Whoever fights so that the Word of Allāh may be supreme is the one who (is fighting) in the cause of Allāh.’<sup>41</sup> This becomes an important principle guiding the intentions and motivations of the *dāʿī*, i.e. to ensure that it is the religion that one seeks to serve with the goal that Allāh is known more, is loved, is remembered, is worshipped more; this is the purpose of *Daʿwah* – to make the word of Allāh the highest.

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36 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 20, verse 32.

37 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 20, verse 33.

38 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 20, verse 34.

39 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 16 (Cairo, Dār al-Tawfiqiyya: 2004), p. 179.

40 Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Lebanon, Dār al-Maʿrifā:2003), p. 1011.

41 Ibn Mājah 2783



# Prerequisites for Da'wah



## To call to what one knows

The beginning of the Islamic call is one deserving of much reflection. The opening words of the Qurʾān afford us with essential demarcations about matters of ontology and metaphysics. The opening verse ‘Read!’ stands as a jolt into human consciousness reflected in sacred time with the Prophet’s ﷺ startlement: “I cannot read”. The imperative to ‘read’ underscores the importance of education in the process of personal development. Reading, focused on an enhancement of faith and spirituality enables cultures and civilizations to advance and for hearts to become enlightened. The path to learning through the seeking of knowledge is the way to know the Creator. The Qurʾān declares: “Know, therefore, that there is no god but Allāh...”<sup>42</sup> ‘Read in the name of your Lord who created’ is a call to a transcendental knowledge away from ego and vainglory that is oftentimes the stimuli for man’s seeking of knowledge. The personality Qarūn, an oppressive figure in the time of Prophet Mūsā, rested on his self-worth projection and hubristic mannerism. He attributed the accumulation of his treasures to his own knowledge and undertaking: “He said, “I was only given it because of knowledge I have.”<sup>43</sup> Knowledge, here, then is not intended to know, revere and spread the message of God but is instead mastered for self-indulgent pursuit and exploitation of others.

Ṭabarī describes the verse as instructing, “Read O Muḥammad in remembrance of your Lord.”<sup>44</sup> It is not for the sake of one’s self but a reading ‘in the name of your Lord’. Life’s entire purpose and objective is informed by the opening verse. According to al-Razi, it suggests “seeking help in the name of your Lord and take it as a means to acquire what has been made difficult for you...and let all that you do be in the name of that Lord and solely for Him.”<sup>45</sup> In taking residence in the house of Islam and working

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42 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 47, verse 19.

43 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 28, verse 78

44 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 30 (Cairo, Dār al-Tawfiqiyya: 2004), p. 274.

45 Al-Razī, *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* vol. 32 (Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya: 2004),

to furnish that house it is thus the Lord of that house that one serves. Ibn ‘Aṭīyya notes the importance of ‘In the name of one’s Lord’, that *Bismillah* (in the name of Allāh) was crucial in the project of Prophet Nūḥ to build an ark of safety for him and the believers: “And he said, “Board it! In the Name of Allāh it will sail and cast anchor. Surely my Lord is All-Forgiving, Most Merciful.”<sup>46</sup>

The most essential requirement for the *da‘ī* is that he or she only speaks about that concerning which they have good knowledge. There is no requirement to speak about anything about which one is not familiar. The advice of ‘Alī ibn abī Ṭālib is poignant: “It is from knowledge for the one who does not know to say: Allāh knows best.” Knowledge is not simply that which one can narrate, the transmitting of information, but that which impacts upon one’s heart, that which is practiced and valued. “Moses said to them, ‘Beware, do not invent lies against God or He will destroy you with His punishment. Whoever invents lies will fail.’”<sup>47</sup>

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p. 15.

46 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 11, verse 41.

47 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 20, verse 61.



## To see *ʿ* to be seen

A beautiful verse which explicates the call, purpose and focus of the *da<sup>c</sup>wah* carrier is found in Sūrah Yūsuf. The verse comes through at the end of the Sūrah and its positioning tells us something about the culmination of events in the narrative of Yūsuf and how the reminder to the Prophet about a prophetic way preceding him comes to be epitomised in the events surrounding his own mission to his people. The Prophet ﷺ was a *da<sup>c</sup>ī* and the best of them. His approach and mannerism in conveying the call is forever for us an example and so this verse underscores the approach of the *da<sup>c</sup>ī*.

“Say, ‘This is my way; I invite to Allāh with deep insight, I and those who follow me. And exalted is Allāh; and I am not of those who associate others with Him.’”<sup>48</sup>

Al-Ṭabarī comments, it is as if God is saying: ‘This is the call that I call to and the path that I am upon from calling to monotheism and sincerity in worship to Him away from idols and statues, culminating in obedience to Him and abandoning of disobedience...I call for God to be worshipped alone without partners and with certainty in Him and I call with deep insight those who believe in me.’<sup>49</sup> The *da<sup>c</sup>ī* reminds his listeners of the Qur’ān, that he has knowledge and certainty and no doubts. *Al-baṣīra* is knowledge and understanding that enables one to distinguish between truth from error. Ibn Kathīr notes that he calls with deep insight, certainty, both intellectual and legalistic (*shar<sup>c</sup>ī*) proofs. Al-Ghazālī explains that “... the soul which perceives with inner sight (*tabṣīra*) is of greater worth than the body which sees with ocular vision.”<sup>50</sup> His words here are a reflection of a beautiful tradition in which the Prophet ﷺ, when arranging to visit a

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48 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 12, verse 108.

49 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 13 (Cairo, Dār al-Tawfiqīyya: 2004), p. 81.

50 Al-Ghazali, *On Disciplining the Soul and Breaking the Two Desires*. Trans. T. J. Winter (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1995), p. 16.

blind man in Medina, told his companions that the man instead was not in fact altogether blind:

“Jabir bin ‘Abd-Allāh (Allāh be pleased with him) said, the Prophet ﷺ said, “Take us to the man with vision who lives in Banū Wāqif so that we can visit him.’ And that man was blind.”<sup>51</sup>

The tradition is insightful for what it reveals of the way the Prophet ﷺ did not recognise the man through his disability, but instead inverted our understanding of what the disability means in the first place. The vision referred to is the man’s accurate spiritual vision; his spiritual eyes were unclouded; though his physical eyes were blind.

Though the man was indeed blind, he was not to be castigated as such or looked down upon because of it. The Prophet ﷺ showed that not only are differences we observe in this life temporal in relation to how things will fare in the next life, but that there is a more profound way by which we can recognise and make sense of our differences. Allāh in the Qur’ān says:

“Have they, then, never journeyed about the earth, letting their hearts gain wisdom, and causing their ears to hear? Yet, verily, it is not their eyes that have become blind – but blind have become the hearts that are in their chests!”<sup>52</sup>

The *dā‘ī* should be presentable and not wear clothing that could act as a distraction from the message he will be conveying, like something lavish or so out of tune from the socio-cultural norm to which he belongs. In a multi-cultural society such as the UK the average person is used to seeing Muslims dress in a variety of cultural and religious attire and therefore will not see a *thawb* for example as a dress alien to what exists in British society. Muslims are required to dress modestly and have their *awrah* covered in public at all times. The Prophet ﷺ wore a range of clothing in his life, including: *qamīṣ*, *jubbah*, *izār*, *trousers*, a *turban*. He preferred white clothing, and said:

“Wear the white among your garments, for indeed they are among the best of your garments, and shroud your dead in them.”<sup>53</sup>

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51 Al-Bayhaqī, as-Sunan al-Kubra 21372

52 Al-Qur’ān, Chapter 22, Verse 46.

53 Al-Tirmidhī 994

# Characteristics of the Caller



## Righteousness (*Taqwa*)

Upon the Muslim is the need to nurture within himself qualities of *taqwa*. This is necessary in and of itself and outside of the necessity of *da'wah*, and is the motivation for the Muslim to act responsibly in all matters: “Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allāh is the most righteous of you.”<sup>54</sup> *Taqwa* is to be mindful of Allāh and respectful of His limits – to fulfil all that is required and to shun what is prohibited – this makes one act righteously, and with integrity. It forms the foundation of our religion. The *dā'ī*'s vision is one moulded not primarily by how effective he or she is in communicating the message of Islam but primarily moulded by his or her connection with Allāh, i.e., through one's relationship with Allāh.

When the Prophet ﷺ was preparing his companion Mu'ādh ibn Jabal for his *da'wah* to the Christians of Yemen he advised him to “Have *taqwa* (fear) of Allāh wherever you may be, and follow up a bad deed with a good deed which will wipe it out, and behave well towards the people.”<sup>55</sup> The advice is extremely edifying and encompassing as it pertains to the life of the servant of Allāh. Al-Fawzān in his commentary on this ḥadīth explains, “It is obligatory up on the Muslim to fear Allāh in any place; when he comes out with the people and when he is alone; His conduct with Allāh should not change. But if he shows piety and religiosity when he is with the people but confronts Allāh with sins and violations whenever he is away from the people; then that is hypocrisy.”<sup>56</sup> The Prophetic instruction “wherever you may be” encapsulates the essentiality of abiding by a sincere disposition; of remembering that it is Allāh alone who knows one's full state; in the domain of *da'wah* to know that in some places the believer may be more in need to safeguard himself from temptations and adopt a stronger patience. The Prophetic advice then to Mu'ādh ibn Jabal is very pertinent and applicable

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54 Al-Qur'ān, Chapter 49, Verse 13.

55 Al-Tirmidhi 1987

56 Saalih al-Fawzaan, *The Explanation of Imam al-Nawawi's 40 Hadīth: Explanation by Sheikh Dr, Saalih al-Fawzaan* (Dar Makkah International, 2020), p. 213.

in every context of transitioning through our temporal ‘here’, ‘there’ and ‘elsewhere’ spaces in life, and of course for the *dā‘ī* when he leaves his home and enters into different landscapes. A trip to the town centre for example is not like being at home and one should be mindful about abiding by that state of *taqwa* in all affairs and situations, and that the inner working of one’s internal state culminates in his or her outer actions. Upon the believer is to be cautious of one’s internal state and for each soul “look what it has sent forth for tomorrow”. Ṭabarī explains “let each person look to what he or she is sending forward for the Day of Judgement of good actions – each good deeds that will be a means of salvation for him or evil actions that can draw on divine punishment.”<sup>57</sup> What one sends forward is an action, which begins with an intention and is then preserved thereafter through sincerity and seeking forgiveness:

“O believers! Be mindful of Allāh and let every soul look to what deeds it has sent forth for tomorrow. And fear Allāh, for certainly Allāh is All-Aware of what you do.”<sup>58</sup>

And,

“O Prophet! Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and guard their chastity. That is purer for them. Surely Allāh is All-Aware of what they do.”<sup>59</sup>

“And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their chastity, and not to reveal their adornments except what normally appears... Turn to Allāh in repentance all together, O believers, so that you may be successful.”<sup>60</sup>

Here the believer is cautioned against the misuse of one’s gaze. This is perhaps most relevant for the *dā‘ī* since he may be in a place where many women have gathered. His objective, of course, is to convey the message of Islam and for this he can speak to either gender but there should still be a state of caution that one does not overstep boundaries. The Prophet ﷺ taught “O ‘Alī, do not follow a glance with another, for you will be forgiven for the first, but not for the second.”<sup>61</sup> Controlling one’s gaze is “purer for

57 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 28 (Cairo, Dār al-Tawfiqiyya: 2004), p. 55.

58 Al-Qur’ān, Chapter 59 Verse 18.

59 Al-Qur’ān, Chapter 24 Verse 30.

60 Al-Qur’ān, Chapter 24 Verse 31.

61 Al-Tirmidhī, 2701

one's religion", as Ibn Kathīr explains, "as it has been said whoever protects his gaze Allāh bequeaths him a light in his perception and he is able to see with his heart."<sup>62</sup>

The Prophet ﷺ then instructed Mu'adh to "follow up a bad deed with a good deed which will wipe it out." The advice has of course a general applicability for all Muslims but is contextually crucial for the *dā'i* since it imbues a great sense of hope-bearing and reliance on Allāh in informing the believer that one should not lose hope in the mercy of Allāh if he falls into sin. The believer is to remember that he has a Lord who is Ever-Near to His servants and the continuous doing of good in life can overcome a sin, and the habitual state of a person more inclined to doing good can help to diminish a person's inclination to sin. The advice highlights the importance of good deeds as a protective and preventative measure against wrongdoing. As al-Fawzaan points out, "So deal with yourself with this standard, increase your righteous deeds and repent from sins."<sup>63</sup> For the *dā'i* in a new environment, exposure to sin may be more palpable, and hence the Prophetic advice stands out in its relevance. The third instruction "and behave well towards the people" is covered in a separate chapter below on 'Good Character' but a few points here can be mentioned. A great representation of one's faith is presented through one's character. A person's integrity, truthfulness, kindness are all traits that are exemplified in one's behaviour and these can often be the most impactful when conveying the message of Islam, meaning that what people tend to remember are not always the words spoken; but how they were spoken, not always the things that were done; but about how they were done. The Qur'an describes,

"Then We made you their successors in the land to see how you would act."<sup>64</sup>

Al-Razī explains that Qatāda said: "Our Lord spoke the truth. He did not make us successors in the land except to see our doings, so let God see the good in your actions, in the night and day."<sup>65</sup> There are many encouragements to adopting a good character and these are considered in the later chapter. From them is the following *ḥadīth*:

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62 Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Lebanon, Dār al-Ma'rifa: 2003), p. 1112.

63 Saalih al-Fawzaan, *The Explanation of Imam al-Nawawī's 40 Ḥadīth: Explanation by Sheikh Dr, Saalih al-Fawzaan* (Dar Makkah International, 2020), p. 216

64 Al-Qur'an, Chapter 10, Verse 14.

65 Al-Razī, *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* vol. 17 (Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya: 2004), p. 45.

“Nothing is heavier upon the scale of a believer on the Day of Resurrection than his good character. Verily, Allāh hates the vulgar and obscene.”<sup>66</sup>

The task of the companion and *dā‘ī* Mu‘ādh ibn Jabal was exacting, yet the words of the Prophet ﷺ provided important guidelines to enable Mu‘ādh to be the most effective caller whilst also teaching him to maintain a discipline of *Imān* and character in his being and through his travelling.

The Arabic root of *ḍalāla* (deviation/straying/misleading) occurs nearly two hundred times in the Qur’ān to remind life’s traveller to be on guard, calling instead the faithful to observe *taqwā*. Linguistically, *taqwā* comes from the verb *waqāya* (WQY) and has the meaning of protection and taking precaution. The Qur’ān reminds that the best provision one can take on life’s journey, is this mental and spiritual state of alertness, *taqwa*:

“...Provide well for yourselves: the best provision is to be mindful of God (*taqwa*) - always be mindful of Me, you who have understanding.”<sup>67</sup>

“...the garment of God-consciousness is the best of all garments- this is one of God’s signs, so that people may take heed.”<sup>68</sup>

In these two Qur’ānic verses we find *taqwa* as a key prerequisite for life’s journey and as the best spiritual ‘garment’ one can wear. Throughout this book one will find multiple examples of conduct and virtuous characteristics of the caller to Islam, each of which imbue with qualities of such pietistic approaches, and feature as vital to the success of *da‘wah* and of the life of a Muslim generally.

Though the first verse cited above was revealed concerning pilgrims who had not prepared themselves sufficiently for the journey, there is a broader consideration in the verse – about the provisions required in this life to prepare oneself for the next life. As Ibn Kathīr explains, “When He commanded them to provide provisions for travel in this world, He guided them to the provisions of the Hereafter, which is the adherence to piety... When he mentioned material clothing, He made it a guide to focus on one’s spiritual clothing, which is *khushū’* (reverence), obedience and piety, and he mentioned that it is better than one’s outer clothing, and more beneficial.

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66 Al-Tirmidhī 2002

67 Al-Qur’ān, Chapter 2, Verse 197.

68 Al-Qur’ān, Chapter 7, Verse 26.



‘Aṭā’ al-Khurasānī thus comments that the provision of piety here means the provision of the hereafter.”<sup>69</sup>

One of the premier points of the Qur’ānic message therefore is the development of inner qualities of piety that culminate in closeness to God (*al-qurbatu ila-Allāh*). The Qur’ān instructs the faithful to be mindful of the workings of one’s *nafs* (inner self) and the way it can both resonate with pietistic sentiments as well as undercut our potential to attain that closeness to God. It instructs on the development of inner qualities such as the fear or consciousness of God (*taqwa*), steadfastness (*istiqāma*), and patience (*ṣabr*). These can be pursued in a range of ways and for various ends. For example, the Qur’ān mentions the importance of abiding by *taqwa* in a diverse range of instances, from fulfilling rights of inheritance (2:180), the establishing of prayer (6:72), the act of fasting (2:183), the pilgrimage of Ḥajj (2:197), in keeping company with the pious (43:67), in relation to marriage and divorce (2:241), in the law of contracts and discharging trusts (2:282-283) and others. One such time when *taqwa* is ordained for the believers is at times of conflict, as a kind of spiritual law governing the practice of physical struggle.

It is this that will enhance any work the Muslim involves himself in, including *da`wah*. In a letter written by ‘Umar bin ‘Abdul ‘Azīz to his military deputies he advised them to be on guard against their own sins in light of the context of success in their earthly struggles:

“You must fear Allāh in every situation you find yourselves. Verily, the fear of Allāh is greater for preparation, a better plan, and a stronger force. There is nothing of the hostility of your enemies that deserves more caution than your own selves and those with you who are sinfully disobedient to Allāh. For I fear the sins of the people more than the plots of their enemies. Verily, we were only transgressed by our enemy and given divine support over them due to their sinful disobedience. Were it not for that, we would have no power over them.”<sup>70</sup>

In a very well-known conversation between the Prophet’s companions ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and ‘Ubayy ibn Ka‘b, ‘Umar once asked ‘Ubayy: “O Ubayy, what is your understanding of *Taqwā*?”

He replied by asking, “O Commander of the Faithful, have you ever walked a thorny path?”

69 Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Lebanon, Dār al-Ma‘rifa:2003), pp. 186-187.

70 Ḥilyat al-Awliyā’ 5/302

‘Umar said, “Yes I have.”

“What did you do when you walked that path?” Ubayy asked.

‘Umar said, “I rolled up my garments up to my shin, so I could see the ground and see my feet. And I would put one foot forward and another back, out of fear of being pricked by a thorn.”

‘Ubayy then said, “O Commander of the Faithful, that is *Taqwa*.”<sup>71</sup>

In Imam al-Bayhaqī’s account the question instead was posed to the Prophet’s companion Abū Hurayra.<sup>72</sup> What the account illustrates is that in life’s journey one will, at different points, times and situations, be exposed to things that can have a negative bearing on one’s Iman. These are the ‘thorns’ in one’s path. But one should be on guard and use his inner strength to try and repel and push back against temptations, to lift up one’s garment and tread carefully.

### A state of gratitude

In the domain of *da‘wah* we should be cautious of some important things:

The state of gratitude is one we must always observe. To be grateful is to be conscious of the blessings of Allāh, and these favours cannot be enumerated: “And He has granted you all that you asked Him for. If you tried to count Allāh’s blessings, you would never be able to number them. Indeed humankind is truly unfair, totally ungrateful.”<sup>73</sup> Upon us however is the responsibility to be conscious and appreciative of these blessings. *Shukr* means to recognise the favours of Allāh, and to use one’s limbs to act in gratitude for those favours, as defined by al-Jurjānī.<sup>74</sup> Allāh describes in the Qur’ān: “Work thankfully, family of David, for few of my servants are truly thankful.”<sup>75</sup> Al-Qurtubī explains in his commentary that one’s entire state of being should be involved in the act of gratitude, that it means to “act with the actions of gratitude...actions with one’s limbs, with one’s tongue.”<sup>76</sup> The *dā‘ī* should remember the great favour of Allāh in choosing him or her for the task of communicating the message that He has chosen for mankind. It is a favour of immense blessing and one that should never be taken for

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71 Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Lebanon, Dār al-Ma‘rifa:2003), p. 36.

72 Al-Zuhd al-Kabīr, Ḥadīth: 978.

73 Al-Qur’ān, Chapter 14, Verse 34.

74 Al-Jurjānī, *Kitāb al-Ta‘rīfāt* (Beirut, Dar an-Nafaes: 2003), p. 203.

75 Al-Qur’ān, Chapter 34, Verse 13.

76 Al-Qurtubī, *Mukhtaṣar Tafsīr al-Qurtubī*, vol. 3 (Beirut, Dār al-kutub al-‘ilmiyya: 2001), pp. 510-511.

granted. The *dā'ī*, in calling others to Islam, becomes a representative of the messengers of Allāh and before him is a legacy of such individuals who sacrificed greatly for this cause.

Ibn al-Qayyim differentiated between a *shukr al-ām* (general gratitude) and *shukr al-khāṣ* (more specific state of thankfulness). The general type is to thank Allāh for one's food, drink and clothing and strength of one's limbs. The specific type of *shukr* is to be more mindful of one's internal states – of one's Imān, belief in *tawhīd* and for the strength of one's heart. These are the driving forces for all the good a believer does and what is represented in the general *shukr* are the means by which one's external state of faith is actualised. There is a valuable supplication the Prophet ﷺ encouraged us to read on a daily basis. The *dā'ī* should learn this and be diligent in his reading of it:

The Prophet ﷺ stated that a person who has recited (the underlying) in the morning, he has pleased (praised, glorified) Allāh for His favours of the morning, and if he has done so in the night, he has thanked Allāh for His favours of the night:

اللَّهُمَّ مَا أَصْبَحَ بِي مِنْ نِعْمَةٍ أَوْ بِأَحَدٍ مِنْ خَلْقِكَ فَمِنْكَ وَحَدِّكَ لَا  
شَرِيكَ لَكَ فَالْحَمْدُ وَلَكَ الشُّكْرُ

*“O Allāh, whatever favours You have bestowed upon me and all other creations is only from you. You are One, You have no partners. Praise and Shukr (thanks) be to You.”*<sup>77</sup>

If recited in the night, then recite *مَا أَمْسَى بِي* in place of *مَا أَصْبَحَ بِي*

Allāh instructs in the Qurʾān, “...Be mindful of God, so that you may be grateful.”<sup>78</sup> It is through one's *taqwa* that he or she is called to mind to observe gratitude at all points.

“...but remain conscious of God, and know that God is with those who are conscious of Him.”<sup>79</sup>

“Everything in the heavens and the earth belongs to God. We have commanded those who were given the Scripture before you, and We command you, to be mindful of God. Even if you do ignore Him; everything in the

77 Abū Dāwūd 324.

78 Al-Qurʾān, Chapter 3, Verse 123.

79 Al-Qurʾān, Chapter 2, Verse 194.

heavens and the earth belongs to Him, and He is self-sufficient, worthy of all praise.”<sup>80</sup>

The *dā‘ī* can make note of the privileges afforded his people. Safety, family, comfort, health and wealth are great blessings, and ones perhaps shared in a communal sense. It can be a point of conversation to draw on such favours and recognise them as blessings in each other. At the height of this matter however is to be forever thankful for the gift of *Imān*. Ibn Taymiyya explained the verse, “Is not Allāh most knowing of those who are grateful?”<sup>81</sup> by commenting: “they are the ones who truly know the value of *Imān* and thank Allāh for it.”<sup>82</sup>

### Steps towards Righteousness (*taqwa*)

The caller to Islam must always ensure that truthfulness guides his words and behaviour. The world seeks not only words that are congruent with rational sense and spiritual harmony but also conduct that is reflective of the beauty of Islam. Such beauty was felt by multitudes of people across the world during the expansion of Islam, people who formed communities of trade and soon enough embraced Islam due to what they witnessed of fair dealing and comradeship between Muslim travellers and traders.

The Qur’ān calls the faithful to speak words of clarity and in a direct fashion and for a good purpose, qawlan said: “*O you who have believed, fear Allāh and speak words of appropriate justice.*”<sup>83</sup> He will [then] amend for you your deeds and forgive you your sins. And whoever obeys Allāh and His Messenger has certainly attained a great attainment.”<sup>84</sup> According to Ibn ‘Abbās the meaning of *saddād* is “He who is inwardly and outwardly harmonious.” And it was said: It is only in desiring the face of God”<sup>85</sup> What Ibn ‘Abbās means in “inwardly” and “outwardly” is that there ought to be a sincere verbal and actualised disposition of character. An upright word is a sincere word, emanating from a heart that genuinely desires good to prevail in that situation. One of the ways the *da‘ī* can bring to fruition such an approach is by:

1. Asking Allāh constantly for success.

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80 Al-Qur’ān, Chapter 4, Verse 131.

81 Al-Qur’ān, Chapter 6, Verse 53.

82 Ibn Qayyim, *Madārij al-Sālikīn*, vol. 2 (Beirut, Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya: 2004), p. 355.

83 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 33, verse 70.

84 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 33, verse 71.

85 Al-Qurṭubī, *Mukhtar Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī* (Beirut, Dar al-kutub al-‘Imiyya). p. 602

2. remembering to recite his morning and evening supplication as a reminder about the need to be sincere:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَعُوذُ بِكَ أَنْ أَشْرِكَ بِكَ وَأَنَا أَعْلَمُ وَأَسْتَغْفِرُكَ لِمَا لَا أَعْلَمُ

“O Allāh I seek refuge in You from knowingly associating partners with You, and I seek Your forgiveness for that which I do not know”<sup>86</sup>

3. To remember the general attitude towards uprightness in the life of a Muslim and that speaking clear words of truth is a part of that. Allāh describes in the Qurʾān:

“Verily, those who say: “Our Lord is (only) Allāh,” and thereafter stand firm and straight on the Islamic Faith of Monotheism, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve. Such shall be the dwellers of Paradise, abiding therein (forever) – a reward for what they used to do.”<sup>87</sup>

4. The *daʿī* is a messenger of the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ. One of the most prime things we might have first learnt of the Prophet ﷺ was his being referred to as *Al-sādiq al-Amīn* (the truthful one). The Prophet’s reputation as a trustworthy individual pervaded the town of Makkah long before his prophethood began. He was known for never lying, or giving false witness or ever encouraging others to do so. Remember that what you say is what you do; in keeping one’s word the identity of a Muslim’s trustworthiness is kept. It is of little use in saying something, but then not living up to the standard of what one is saying: “How despicable it is in the sight of Allāh that you say what you do not do!”<sup>88</sup>
5. Think about seeing goodness in others. A *daʿī* is also a leader, a visionary, one who needs to see ennobled qualities in others and knows and can foresee the effects of such qualities. When the Christian community of Najran requested from the Prophet ﷺ that he send them a truthful individual he informed them that I will send you *rajulan amīn* (a trustworthy person) *haqqa amīn haqqa amīn* (undoubtedly trustworthy). When each member of

86 Aḥmad 4/403

87 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 46, verse 13-14.

88 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 61, verse 3.

the crowd thought that perhaps the Prophet would choose him, he sent `Amir ibn Abdullah ibn al-Jarrāh, known as Abū `Ubaydah ibn al-Jarrāh and said, “And every nation has a trustworthy guardian, and the trustworthy guardian of this Ummah is Abū `Ubaydah ibn al-Jarrāh.”<sup>89</sup> So impressive was the teaching of al-Jarrah, and the quality of the person who came to be recognised by it, that during the caliphate of `Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb he once asked his congregation to make state their aspirations. They began to detail how they would do well with treasures of the world which they would then readily spend in the cause of Allāh. Upon hearing their biddings, `Umar replied that if he was to aspire, he would wish for men like Abū `Ubaydah ibn al-Jarrāh.<sup>90</sup>

6. The *da`ī* should know that the Qur`ān warns against deliberately misconstruing a clear message of the truth and of confounding the truth with falsehoods and erroneities from insincerity and for worldly gain. When people are insincere it is not the truth they uphold but instead personal greed and interest: In Sūrah al-Baqarah we find a sequence of verses that shed crucial light on the dangers of insincerity and its effects, and also practical guidelines that act as a buffer against man’s mendaciousness:

“Do not be the first to deny them or trade them for a fleeting gain. And be mindful of Me.”<sup>91</sup>

“Do not mix truth with falsehood or hide the truth knowingly.”<sup>92</sup>

“Establish prayer, pay alms-tax, and bow down with those who bow down.”<sup>93</sup>

“Do you preach righteousness and fail to practice it yourselves, although you read the Scripture? Do you not understand?”<sup>94</sup>

“And seek help through patience and prayer. Indeed, it is a burden except for the humble.”<sup>95</sup>

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89 Ibn Mājah 154

90 Al-Hākim (3/266)

91 Al-Qur`ān. Chapter 2, verse 41.

92 Al-Qur`ān. Chapter 2, verse 42.

93 Al-Qur`ān. Chapter 2, verse 43.

94 Al-Qur`ān. Chapter 2, verse 44.

95 Al-Qur`ān. Chapter 2, verse 45.

One might summarise the verses and their teachings as such: 1) Be aware of twisting or hiding Islamic belief and practice and what stem from them for monetary advantages. A similar thing can be said here about fame and popularity. 2) Remain committed to one's obligations and remain in the company of those who worship. This is particularly instructive – ‘Bow with those who bow down.’ The other place in the Qur'an that contains the same instruction concerns Maryam (O Mary! Be devout to your Lord, prostrate yourself in prayer and bow along with those who bow down.”<sup>96</sup>). There is a spiritual buffering in remaining close to places wherein Allāh is remembered and worshipped. The sanctity of space and performance of righteous actions within that space forge an identity of purpose and connectedness with other believers. In that space of togetherness will the *dā'ī* worship the one he or she calls others to worship and find spiritual enhancement through the hearing of His word being recited and taught:

“The true believers are only those whose hearts tremble at the remembrance of Allāh, whose faith increases when His revelations are recited to them, and who put their trust in their Lord.”<sup>97</sup>

“Those whose hearts tremble at the remembrance of Allāh, who patiently endure whatever may befall them, and who establish prayer and donate from what We have provided for them.”<sup>98</sup>

“Yet when Allāh alone is mentioned, the hearts of those who disbelieve in the Hereafter are filled with disgust. But as soon as those gods other than Him are mentioned, they are filled with joy.”<sup>99</sup>

“And patiently stick with those who call upon their Lord morning and evening, seeking His pleasure. Do not let your eyes look beyond them, desiring the luxuries of this worldly life. And do not obey those whose hearts We have made heedless of Our remembrance, who follow only their desires and whose state is total loss.”<sup>100</sup>

The *dā'ī* should seek out people of knowledge, and further his or her Islamic studies. This, for the purpose of acting on knowledge before one's intention to convey it. Malik bin Dinar said,

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96 Al-Qur'an. Chapter 3, verse 43.

97 Al-Qur'an. Chapter 2, verse 2.

98 Al-Qur'an. Chapter 22, verse 35.

99 Al-Qur'an. Chapter 39, verse 45.

100 Al-Qur'an. Chapter 18, verse 28.

“Whoever acquires knowledge in order to act on it, his knowledge humbles him. And whoever seeks it for a purpose other than it, it increases him in arrogance.”<sup>101</sup>

Likewise, Bishr bin Al-Ḥārith said,

“The virtue of knowledge lies in acting upon it, then one ascends because of it.”<sup>102</sup>

It is important to be close to one’s local Imam and seek advice and guidance from them. Having the masjid on your side and with you as you embark on your journey to call mankind to Islam can be very beneficial. There might be times when you need to have access to the masjid or utilise the masjid for open days or to invite important townspeople and thank them for their community services while using the occasion to gift Qur’ān copies or run an introduction class on Islam, or have an open questions and answers event. Make it a practice to remain in the service of the masjid, therefore, for the sake of Allāh.

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101 Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Al-iqtidā’ al-‘ilmil ‘amal (Knowledge Mandates Action)* (New York, Al-Ibaanah Book Publishing: 2006), p. 29.

102 Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Al-iqtidā’ al-‘ilmil ‘amal (Knowledge Mandates Action)* (New York, Al-Ibaanah Book Publishing: 2006), p. 38.



## RIGHTEOUSNESS: CASE STUDIES

*Imagine you begin da'wah feeling prepared and after some time of busying yourself in that work you slowly begin to feel as though your Imān is not as strong as it should be . What should you do?*

The *dā'ī* should remember that his primary focus in life is to be a devout servant of Allah, and that *da'wah* is one of the ways in which he or she can draw closer to Allah. In the Qur'ān, from its very beginning, in its opening chapter Al-Fātiḥa (The Opening) calls on the believers to pray: "It is You alone we worship and You alone we ask for help."<sup>103</sup> This prayer is repeated in every unit throughout the entire day emphasising that all hope, veneration, love and beseeching is directed to Allah alone who alone responds to those who call on Him. Ibn Abbas commented: "Worship is for you alone, and your aid is sought in obedience to you, and in all of life's affairs."<sup>104</sup> The *dā'ī* must ask Allah for all success, should ask Allah to put *barakah* in all his affairs, should be constant in his morning and evening *adhkar* so that he is better protected in all his deeds.

Supplicating in fact is precisely what worship is, as the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ here explained: "Supplication is the essence of worship."<sup>105</sup>

In becoming that devout servant, one should realise that seeing all things from the perspective of the heart's nourishment should become a vital outlook. The first thing you should do is to make *dū'ā* – to ask Allah for help, for increase, for blessings in your work. Also, account yourself – take a regular moment to look within yourself and ask if you are doing those things that will benefit you in the next life. Think about your *khushū'* (subsistence/focus) in ṣalāh, about your remembrance of Allah, about your relationships. Think about your charity giving and compassion - a companion of the Prophet once approached him, complaining about the 'hardness of his heart.' The Prophet asked, would you like for your heart to soften and for your needs to be fulfilled? The man affirmed that he would. The Prophet then said, "Have mercy on the orphan, wipe over his head (in kind affection), feed him from your food, and Allah will soften your heart and fulfil your needs."<sup>106</sup>

103 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 1, verse 5.

104 Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Lebanon, Dār al-Ma'rifa:2003), p. 25.

105 Al-Tirmidhī 3371

106 Aḥmad 7576

Secondly, remember that *shayṭān* seeks to demotivate you from what you are doing. Don't let that happen. The Prophet advised: "Strive for that which will benefit you, seek the help of Allah, and do not feel helpless."<sup>107</sup> Therefore, be sincere when giving *dā'wah*, fulfil your obligations as a Muslim and place your trust in Allah.

*What if you are trying to be righteous and maintain taqwa in your dealings but sometimes feel a sense of self-righteousness, that you are doing something perhaps most people are not. How do you deal with such feelings?*

It is crucial for the *dā'ī* to instil into his heart and mind that he is only doing a good deed because of Allah's divine favour and mercy by allowing such a situation to exist, to put him in that situation, to preserve him in that situation and to enable him to say or do something seeking His favour. It is indeed a favour from Allah that he has kept you busy in calling others to His way. It is one of the most privileged things anybody can be doing, and this requires humility and gratitude. We are told:

"They regard their acceptance of Islam as a favour to you. Tell them, O Prophet, "Do not regard your Islam as a favour to me. Rather, it is Allāh Who has done you a favour by guiding you to the faith, if indeed you are faithful"<sup>108</sup>

The verse emphasises that, though we should undoubtedly feel honoured and pleased, we should not become boastful and egotistical. The way of a Muslim is to carry himself with uprightness but to be humble in himself – to know that everything depends on divine grace and that he should show utmost gratitude and humility. The prayer of Prophet Mūsā is beautiful in this context and is one the *dā'ī* should learn: "My Lord! Truly, I am in need of whatever good that You bestow on me!"<sup>109</sup>

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107 Ibn Mājah 79

108 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 49, verse 17.

109 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 28, verse 24.

## Sincerity

*“...though all they are ordered to do is worship God alone, sincerely devoting their religion to Him as people of true faith, keep up the prayer, and pay the prescribed alms, for that is the true religion.”*<sup>110</sup>

In more than a dozen instances does the Qurʾān relate an occasion wherein a Prophet neared his people as a warner with the words “I truly fear for you...” A tone of emphasis (*innī*) is used in every instance. The other common feature in the verses is their opening exclaim “O my people”. Both opening exhort and ending phrase reflect sincerity and genuine concern in the prophetic messages. The phrase “O my people!” is reassuring in that it evokes a collective sense of identity positioning. The prophet is not alien to his people but instead a part of the fabric that makes us town and village. “O my people” also suggests a familiarity with time and space as it revolves around the socio-cultural fabric of a shared society.

In conveying the message of Islam, the caller must not forget the undercurrents of life which tug at every human being and how the Qurʾānic narrative interweaves instructions and intellectual reasoning with an appeal to heart and emotions.

A great demonstration of the Prophet’s dealing with his enemies in a way that reflects a spirit of magnanimity and patience is seen in his conduct at the battle of Uḥud. It is reported that during the Battle of Uḥud, the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said, ““O Allāh, forgive my people for they do not know,” he voiced his supplication when his enemies slashed his face.”<sup>111</sup>

What emerges is the Prophet’s genuine, sincere concern for the salvation even of his enemies, and this is a repeated motif with the prophets of Allāh, described throughout the Qurʾān. Prophet Nūḥ, for example, explained his objectives to his people in the following words:

<sup>110</sup> Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 98, verse 5.

<sup>111</sup> Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān 985.

“I convey to you my Lord’s messages and give you sincere advice. And I know from Allāh what you do not know.”<sup>112</sup>

Prophet Hūd said to his people:

“I convey to you the messages of my Lord, and I am to you a trustworthy advisor”<sup>113</sup>

Another example comes from Prophet Ṣāliḥ who said to his people:

“O my people! Surely, I conveyed to you my Lord’s message and gave you sincere advice, but you do not like sincere advisors.”<sup>114</sup>

Such words are actualised with deep belief and concern in the man, described in Sūrah Yāsīn, who came running from afar to deliver news to his people to follow the Messengers of Allāh. As they struck him in anger, his concern was for his people and their salvation:

“I believe in your Lord, so listen to me.”<sup>115</sup>

“He was told, ‘Enter the Garden,’ so he said, ‘If only my people knew.’”<sup>116</sup>

“My people” therefore is a salient and repeated Qur’ānic motif which provides guidance for the way we should approach our listeners. Beginning from a point of connectedness, in sharing a thought reflective of a common basis can be a starting point. *Yā qowmī* is instructive since Prophet and common people shared a common: language, culture, ethnicity and history. Though we might not say “my people” today in our socio-cultural contexts, collectivising our experiences with pronouns “we” and “our” and “us” brings you and the invitee into that collectivised frame. You are of course distinct in your beliefs and what emerges from them, yet the common identity is something that should be utilised to bridge an understanding between you. This is not only about language, but about the culture transmitted in the way we understand the world.

In this context, as the *dā‘ī* learns to move and tread lightly through different spaces for the purpose of communicating the message of Islam

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112 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 7, verse 62.

113 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 7, verse 68.

114 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 7, verse 79.

115 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 36, verse 25.

116 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 36, verse 26.

and foster a better understanding and appreciation of other people, it is important to remain mindful of cultural codes in the different landscapes we pass through. Each “landscape” speaks volumes of tradition, art, religion, experiences, histories and languages. While ‘landscape’ of any land is made up of the same societal processes, ‘landscaping’ understood as a verb is about the way in which land is transformed by human agency, creating unique spaces upon which sites are located. For each individual, each moment can mean something different in relation to that space. New sites of meaning can emerge at any given time, and social meaning too can become contorted in relation to that space.

Sincerity is the essence of all we do. Without it, things are futile. An underlying premise of our testimony of faith is to testify with sincerity. Everything that follows, speech and action are performed with a conscious heart and mind. It is for Him that we do, and for Him too that we refrain from doing. Things need to be measured with a heart that is sincere. A sincere heart is like beautiful clothing. It looks good on the outside and is the most protective garment from the inside. How many people went on in life, even as *du‘āt*, without giving due attention to sincerity and its necessity. Great scholars of the past, like al-Mundhirī, who begins his magisterial *al-Targhīb wa al-Tarhīb*, a collection of more than 5,000 Prophetic narrations, with dozens of narrations on the meritorious seeking of sincerity, and then follows these up by a lengthier section on the dangers of pretention and insincerity (*riyā‘*).

## The man who came running

What strikingly reflects an urgency in the matter of *da<sup>ʿ</sup>wah*, is the approach towards sincerity and commitment to the truth one is exposed to, in the example of the man described in *Sūrah Yāsīn*; who came running from the furthest end of the city. The verses are cited in full here to allow for a richer appreciation of what happened to him:

“Then from the farthest end of the city a man came, rushing. He advised, “O my people! Follow the messengers.”<sup>117</sup>

“Follow those who ask no reward of you, and are rightly guided.”<sup>118</sup>

“And why should I not worship the One Who has originated me, and to Whom you will be returned.”<sup>119</sup>

“How could I take besides Him other gods whose intercession would not be of any benefit to me, nor could they save me if the Most Compassionate intended to harm me?”<sup>120</sup>

“Indeed, I would then be clearly astray.”<sup>121</sup>

“I do believe in your Lord, so listen to me.”<sup>122</sup>

“It was said, “Enter Paradise.” He said, “I wish my people could know.”<sup>123</sup>

“of how my Lord has forgiven me, and made me one of the honourable.”<sup>124</sup>

Al-Ṭabarī explains that the man’s home was at the furthest end of the city and that he had heard that the townspeople were plotting to kill the Messengers sent to warn them. He is described as a sick individual stricken by disease; but that “his sickness, nor his occupation, nor his weakness,

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117 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 36, verse 20.

118 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 36, verse 21.

119 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 36, verse 22.

120 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 36, verse 23.

121 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 36, verse 24.

122 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 36, verse 25.

123 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 36, verse 26.

124 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 36, verse 27.

prevented him from pursuing the work of his Lord.”<sup>125</sup> The individual, named Ḥabīb, reflects a profound sense of sincerity to the task. Ibn Kathīr describes how he was a generous, charitable individual and would regularly donate half his earnings to charitable causes.<sup>126</sup> We wonder if Allāh had selected him for the noble mission on account of his service to others. This ties in to our focus on the great place of righteousness as a general pursuit for the *dāʿī*. It is sometimes a consequence of other – sometimes seemingly smaller things, by which we are granted success; and this can be in relation to the sincerity behind one’s deeds. This should always be borne in mind. Righteous deeds have the effect of increasing success in our affairs; whereas sins can lead to harmful consequences. Once the Prophet ﷺ asked his companion Bilāl ibn Rabāḥ,

“Bilāl, tell me that action that you have done since entering Islam which gives you reason to have high hope for I heard the sound of your sandals ahead of me in Jannah.” Bilāl said, “I have not done any such action except that whenever I make wudu during the night or day I perform Ṣalāḥ, as much as is ordained for me with that wūḍū.”<sup>127</sup>

Likewise, the narration about three individuals who were trapped inside a cave and each relied on a righteous deed they had once done, sheds light on the place of virtuous acts as a means of divine pleasure and success. Each individual called upon Allāh by a good action they had sincerely done for His sake and it was on the merit of such actions that the trapped were able to find release:

“While three men were walking, they were overcome by rain and took refuge in a cave in a mountain. A boulder fell over the mouth of their cave, blocking them inside. One of them said to the others, ‘Look at the good deeds you have done for Allāh that you may call upon Allāh Almighty by them, for perhaps He will relieve you.’ One of them said, ‘O Allāh, I had two old parents with my wife and young child. I tended to a flock and when evening came, I milked them and served my parents first before my child. One day I went in search of fodder and I did not come back until it was evening. I found them both sleeping, so I milked as I had done before. I brought the milk and stood by their heads, for I hated to

125 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 22 (Cairo, Dār al-Tawfiqīyya: 2004), p. 164.

126 Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Lebanon, Dār al-Maʿrifā:2003), p. 1325.

127 Al-Bukhārī 1149.

disrupt their sleep or to serve my child before both of them. My child was crying at my feet, yet I continued standing over them until the approach of dawn. If You know I had done that seeking Your countenance, then relieve us of this distress that we might see the sky!' Allāh shifted the boulder until they could see the sky. Another man said, 'O Allāh, I had a cousin whom I loved more than any man could love women. I presented myself to her and she refused unless I could give her one hundred coins. I worked hard until I gathered one hundred coins and brought them to her. When I prepared myself between her legs, she said: O servant of Allāh, fear Allāh and do not break the hymen without right to do so! I stood and left her. If You know I had done that seeking your Face, then relieve us of this distress!' The boulder was again shifted for them. The last man said, 'O Allāh, I employed a worker for a portion of rice. When he finished his work, he said: Give me what I deserve! I offered his share to him but he did not accept it. I continued planting his share until I had amassed cows and flocks. Then he came to me and he said: Fear Allāh and do not violate my rights! I said: Go to this cow and its flocks and take them. He said: Fear Allāh and do not mock me! I said: I do not mock you, take that cow and its flocks. So he took them and he left. If You know I had done that seeking Your face, then relieve us of what remains!' Then Allāh relieved them of what remained."<sup>128</sup>

In Ḥabīb's example, he delivered unto his townspeople a clear word. He began his address by calling his people to follow the messengers sent unto them. In this way, he was a direct *dā'ī*, a messenger on behalf of the Messengers who saw it upon himself to communicate the message. One wonders about Ḥabīb in the context of the three Messengers already having been sent. Since he was not a *Rasūl* or *Nabī* like the others, he was not directly commissioned to speak with anyone, but saw upon himself the great urgency of being a conveyer nonetheless and, in blessed memory, the Qur'ān forever positions him as a paradigmatic character of sacrifice and fortitude. Twice he called on his people to 'follow' the messengers sent to them - "Follow the messengers. Follow those who ask no reward of you."<sup>129</sup>

The message denotes that people are in great need of guidance. Perhaps the townspeople felt comfortable in their own lifestyles and attention to earthly pursuits but the *dā'ī* reminded them that they were in need of guidance and only by following the messengers will they find such guidance.

128 Al-Bukhārī 3465.

129 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 36, verses 20-1.



The imperatives of *ittaba‘ū* (follow) are followed by an interrogative (*wa mā liya lā...*) and rhetorical question (a-atthakhidhu min dūnihi ālihan...) “And why should I not worship the One Who has originated me, and to Whom you will be returned.”<sup>130</sup> This reflects a multi-oral approach to communicating the message, each one effective in its own way. Again, we see how the Qur’ān stresses on Allāh as *al-Raḥmān* (Most-Compassionate/Merciful) in these kinds of encounters – wherein communicating a message about Allāh to an antagonist is so crucial, as reflected in Prophet Ibrāhīm’s admonition to his father, or in Maryam’s warning the seeming intruder into her private chamber, or in this case in Sūrah Yāsīn:

“How could I take besides Him other gods whose intercession would not be of any benefit to me, nor could they save me if the Most Compassionate intended to harm me?”<sup>131</sup>

Ḥabīb’s next words are simple and direct: “Indeed, I would then be clearly astray. I do believe in your Lord, so listen to me.”<sup>132</sup> Saying that he believes in “your Lord” is powerful since he affirms precisely what they rejected, and it is on account of these words that the mob gathered around him began to hurl stones at him. In one account, when he spoke those words “one individual jumped on him and killed him, and there was no one to prevent him.”<sup>133</sup> According to Qatādah, while he was being stoned and beaten his only words were: “Oh God, guide my people, for they do not know.”<sup>134</sup>

These words are of course cited in the subsequent verse: “But they killed him, then he was told by the angels, “Enter Paradise!” He said, “If only my people knew.”<sup>135</sup> Again, we have the phrase “my people” (*yā qawmī*) as opposed to ‘you people’ or ‘those people’. Certainly, the believer calling his people was distinct from the others, and the *dā‘ī* should be different in his belief and behaviour as a reflection of his faith – ‘for the truth stands out clearly from falsehood’<sup>136</sup> - but at the same time there is a shared landscape, culture, language, experiences that is found in any community and “my people” reflects on that. “If only my people knew” is uttered here by the Ḥabīb following his martyrdom and so his words reflect a profound sincerity of character; he truly feels a great loss for his people while at the

130 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 36, verse 22.

131 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 36, verse 23.

132 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 36, verses 24-25.

133 Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Lebanon, Dār al-Ma‘rifa:2003), p. 1325.

134 Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Lebanon, Dār al-Ma‘rifa:2003), p. 1325.

135 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 36, verse 26.

136 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 2, verse 256.

same time rejoicing in the splendour of his newfound heavenly splendour – that his people missed out on.

In this narrative there are many lessons for the *dāʿī* to benefit from. From these are:

1. A sincere desire to communicate the message of truth to a misguided people
2. Patience in what confronts one in life, and finding ways to navigate one's difficulty, time and commitment to partake in the great task of *daʿwah*
3. Using different types of communication; in Ḥabīb's address declarative, interrogative and rhetorical statements and questions were used, reflecting an employing of different types of speech so that his message could be well understood
4. Embodying a real, sincere concern for the people one is speaking to, which means to really desire guidance for them and consider them as fortunate if they accept the truth, and facing real loss in this life and the next if they stubbornly refuse
5. Emphasising that the Messengers sent to them were not interested in the things of this world, not reward, but that instead their morals, conduct and approach to what they called to was sincere and imbued transparency. They should be trusted and listened to on account of it. There are numerous narrations depicting the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ in such ways. Some should be known and learnt, for example,

“Umar ibn al-Khattab reported: “I entered the room of the Messenger of Allāh, peace and blessings be upon him, while he was lying on his side over a mat. I sat down as he drew up his lower garment and he was not wearing anything else. The mat had left marks on his side. I looked at the Prophet's cupboard and I saw a handful of barley in a small amount, the same of mimosa leaves in the corner, and a leather bag hanging to the side. My eyes started to tear up, and the Prophet ﷺ said, “What makes you weep, son of Khattab?” I said, “O Prophet of Allāh, why should I not cry that this mat has left marks on your side and I see little in this cupboard? Caesar and Khosrau live among fruits and springs, while you are the Messenger of Allāh and His chosen, yet this is

your cupboard.” The Prophet ﷺ said, “O son of Khattab, are you not pleased that they are for us in the Hereafter and for them in the world?” I said, “Of course.””<sup>137</sup>

6. Knowing that none of the efforts of the believers are ever wasted. There is a remarkable elliptical point in the verses since between saying, “I do believe in your Lord, so listen to me”<sup>138</sup> and “It was said, “Enter Paradise...”<sup>139</sup> the *dā‘ī* had been martyred, set upon by the mob around him. The verse positions beautifully the temporality of this earthly life and the immediacy of divine grace. Something for the believer to always remember, with whatever he or she faces in life
7. The man who came running from the furthest end of the city to convey the message of truth, to aid the messengers already sent by warning them of the plots of their people, was set upon by his townspeople and savagely killed yet his wish was for those people to have seen the divine bliss that now surrounds him – “I wish my people could know/of how my Lord has forgiven me, and made me one of the honourable.”<sup>140</sup> The Arabic work *mukramīn* (honorable) is from the triliteral root *kāf rā mīm* (ك ر م) and is set against the disgrace or dishonour of the townspeople who rejected the message and resorted to killing the caller to truth. The man who came running made his people aware that they should only worship Allāh, that each of us is bound by a temporality and will one day return to our Lord, that the things they worship cannot help them, and that they should listen to the Messengers sent to them.

## Steps towards sincerity

1. The Prophet ﷺ was concerned that his nation would neglect paying due attention to the dangers of *Riyā’*, (literally ‘to be seen’) and in turn would fall victim to it. It means to perform good deeds for the purpose of showing off before people, instead of performing them to earn the pleasure and reward of Allāh. It is in fact the hardest thing to remain sincere and at any one moment can the heart deviate and find that a good intention has changed. On one

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137 Muslim 1479

138 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 36, verse 25.

139 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 36, verse 26.

140 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 36, verses 26-27.

occasion the companions had gathered together and recounted information pertaining to the *Dajjāl* (False Messiah). Passing by them, the Prophet s enquired about their gathering to which they informed him of their purpose. He reminded them, “Shall I not tell you about my greater fear for you than the False Messiah?” We said, “Of course!” The Prophet ﷺ said, “It is hidden idolatry, that a man stands for prayer and beautifies his prayer when he sees another man looking at him.”<sup>141</sup> To ensure that the heart remains sincere in *da‘wah* (and all other acts of worship) one needs to make a regular checking of one’s intention, to remember that all reward is only from Allāh, to remember that *riyā’* can result in those deeds being rejected and to safeguard intentions through daily *adhkār*.

There are three stages to a person’s action: a stage of intention, a stage of performance and a stage of completion. At each of these states it is recommended that the caller to Islam renew his or her good intention which was to do the action solely for the sake of Allāh. The intention should be reaffirmed during the *da‘wah* itself and once completed it should be asked of Allāh that He, out of His divine mercy and grace, accept the action. The Prophet ﷺ described:

“Shirk among you is more subtle than the sound of the footsteps of an ant on a rock. Shall I not tell you of something which, if you do it, it will take that away from you, both minor and major forms of it. Say:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَعُوذُ بِكَ أَنْ أَشْرِكَ بِكَ وَأَنَا أَعْلَمُ وَأَسْتَغْفِرُكَ لِمَا لَا أَعْلَمُ

“O Allāh I seek refuge in You from knowingly associating partners with You, and I seek Your forgiveness for that which I do not know”<sup>142</sup>

The reading of this *duā’*, thrice morning and evening, should be a regular practice and a part of our daily *adhkār*.

2. The *da‘ī* thus needs to be sincere and committed. If motivations are for wealth and fame then the work can lose effectiveness and blessing, and he can run the risk of becoming corrupted by those motivations and in turn even distort the pure message because of

141 Ibn Mājah 4204

142 Al-Bukhari, Al-Adab Al-Mufrad 716

them. In several Qur'ānic verses Allāh draws attention to those who were corrupted in this way:

“Remember, O Prophet, when Allāh took the covenant of those who were given the Scripture to make it known to people and not hide it, yet they cast it behind their backs and traded it for a fleeting gain. What a miserable profit!”<sup>143</sup>

3. The *da‘ī* should remember examples of prophets mentioned in the Qur’ān and their attitudes to sincerity as they conveyed the message of Islam to their respected societies. When Prophet Mūsā reached Madyan he encountered two women held back from watering their sheep because the pond was over populated by men and their father, too elderly to be there himself, entrusted them instead. Prophet Mūsā, noticing their peculiar distance from the pond, watered their sheep for them. The verse is particularly reflective of the kind of approach a *da‘ī* should take when navigating through landscapes and presented with an opportunity to be in the service of others. The verse reads:

“So he watered [their flocks] for them; then he went back to the shade and said, “My Lord, indeed I am, for whatever good You would send down to me, in need.”<sup>144</sup>

“The he went back to the shade” suggests Mūsā’s desire to retreat into a place of unfamiliarity, a moving away from the scene. As if, not hanging around for too long to be thanked and praised for his assistance, Mūsā moves away from the scene. There is something telling here about the state of mind and heart a Muslim should adopt. Although Mūsā’s intent isn’t mentioned explicitly here, the sequence of verbs enables us to see something interesting about his demeanour and state of faith. He first “watered” then “went back” and then “said” (in prayer). Mūsā’s prayer is one that should be learnt and read at opportune moments. Feeling a sense of honour and gratitude at the chance to perform a sincere righteous action, Mūsā’s recourse is humble reflection and prayer. The syntax in the prayer is another example of the prophet’s attention to divine grace. Instead of saying “I am in need” of whatever good you send me, the Qur’ān mentions the prayer as suggesting Mūsā is indeed recipient of much goodness in his life and all the while desperately in need of goodness. The *da‘ī* must see himself

143 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 3, verse 187

144 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 28, verse 24.

therefore as privileged by divine grace that allowed him the opportunity to do something in remembrance of Allāh. It is only out of Allāh's love and grace that you found yourself in a position of doing something good and the Muslim is thus forever *faqīr* "in need".

4. Always try and do a deed(s) in private with no-one knowing. This will help to instil in you the importance of not being seen by people. Remember that sincerity is going to be harder for the *dā'ī* than for other people because he is likely to be more in the public eye than others. The act of fasting is a good way to appreciate the importance of sincerity since it is a hidden act. Ibn Qudāma draws on the secrets of fasting by noting this point, that since fasting is a concealed action it is unlikely that *riyā'c* will enter it.<sup>145</sup> There are a range of things a person can do – secret acts of worship in the darkness of the night; pious moments of quiet remembrance of Allāh; acts of charity and virtue done for others for example.

Whereas a Muslim must not perform deeds with an intention to show off displays of goodness in public, these can become a good means of *da'wah* to non-Muslims and can even inspire others who may be struggling in their faith. Public acts of generosity such as feeding the homeless, caring for the sick, wearing a hijab in a workplace, praying at school or work, volunteering for a good cause can each allow non-Muslims to see something of Islam and the way Muslims behave. These can each inspire interest in Islam and open a space of communication between the *dā'ī* and his audience. The rapid growth of Islam was influenced by many strands of interaction, including *da'wah*, trade, intermarriage, migration, influencers, Islam's emphasis on justice and unity, and the universality of Islam.<sup>146</sup>

5. The Qur'an enjoins on man the responsibility to act on what he preaches and censures him for not acting on his words. As the Qur'an highlights that there is nobody better in speech than he who calls to Allāh, and who performs righteous actions and identifies himself as one of the Muslims. Therefore, the call and accompanying actions are what befit the trueness of sincere faith. The Qur'an of course is replete with descriptions of those who believe and work

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145 Ibn Qudāma al-Maqdisī, *Mukhtaṣar Minhāj al-Qāṣidīn* (Damascus: Makatbat Dār al-Bayān, 1999), p. 45.

146 Hassam Munir, *How Islam Spread Throughout the World* - <https://yaqeen-institute.org/read/paper/how-islam-spread-throughout-the-world>

righteous deeds and it is they who are promised great provisions in this world and the next:

“Indeed, Allāh will admit those who believe and do good into Gardens, under which rivers flow. Surely Allāh does what He wills.”<sup>147</sup>

“As for those who believe and do good, the Most Compassionate will certainly bless them with genuine love.”<sup>148</sup>

It warns the faithful about hypocrisy and duplicity of character, about not being so keen to exemplify faith by words only to contradict them in action, to call others to goodness but be the least concerned to practice the same. In *Sūrah Al-Ṣaff* we find the following verse:

“O believers! Why do you say what you do not do? How despicable it is in the sight of Allāh that you say what you do not do!”<sup>149</sup>  
[61:2-3]

Al-Ṭabarī explains the clear meaning of the verse, “why do you say words that don’t match up with your actions; instead, your actions are contrary to your words.”<sup>150</sup> Al-Saḍī notes, “Why do you say and encourage good, and perhaps you were praised for it while you don’t even do it. And you forbade evil for others while you yourself became contaminated by it.” It is telling that Prophet Shu‘ayb said to his people, “...I do not intend to differ from you in that which I have forbidden to you; I only intend to reform as much as I am able...”<sup>151</sup> The verbalising of such a sincere approach can therefore be significant; for the *dā‘ī* to state for example, ‘Muslims are directed to pray 5 times a day, and that’s what I’ve been doing since...’ or ‘Muslims are directed to pay 2.5% of their excess wealth into charity and this year my money went to helping...’ or ‘Muslims are directed to repent of their sins continuously and so I make sure I...’

It is crucial for us to reflect therefore on the consequences of not having sincerity, and to internalise the fact that deeds are meaningless without sincerity. This then should be set against the knowledge of the consequence of having sincerity, and the bliss of divine pleasure towards the one who attempts to be sincere in what he does. Remember, that the underlying

147 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 22, verse 14.

148 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 19, verse 96.

149 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 61, verse 2-3.

150 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 28 (Cairo, Dār al-Tawfiqiyya: 2004), p. 87.

151 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 11, verse 88.

premise is to know and understand why Allāh is worthy of worship. One of the key steps to developing a state of sincerity is for the *dā‘ī* to develop a strong private life of worship. As the verse from 62:2-3 explains, one’s private state should be like one’s public state, one’s actions should be akin to one’s words. The Muslim must act on what he knows, and the *dā‘ī* should be a beautiful reflection of sincerity to the message and practice of Islam. This, is the essence of wisdom. According to one of the early Islamic scholars, Mujahid ibn Jabr, “wisdom is to know the truth and act according to it.”<sup>152</sup> What can help is to develop a regular practice of worship that is easy and manageable and then to stick to it. Much can be drawn from the following *ḥadīth*:

“Abū Hurayrah (may Allāh be pleased with him) reported that the Prophet ﷺ said “Your actions alone will not save any of you.” They asked, “Messenger of Allāh, not even you? He replied, “Not even me, unless Allāh were to envelop me in His mercy. Be firm; steadfast and balanced, and journey [to Allāh] in the beginning of the day, the end of the day, and a portion of the latter part of the night. Moderation, moderation! Through this you will attain your goal!”<sup>153</sup>

Also:

“...Seek help in this by journeying [to Allāh] at the beginning of the day, at the end of the day, and a portion of the latter part of the night.”<sup>154</sup>

“Be firm, steadfast, and balanced: know that your actions alone will not be a cause for your entry into Paradise and that the most beloved actions to Allāh are those that are done continuously and persistently, even if they be a few.”<sup>155</sup>

6. Try and stick to a routine of worship that is manageable and continuous even if it’s based on some daily additional acts of worship. An example is the following:

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152 Ibn Qayyim, *Madārij al-Sālikin*, vol. 2 (Beirut, Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya: 2004), p. 353.

153 Al-Bukhārī 6463

154 Al-Bukhārī 39

155 Al-Bukhārī 6464



Remember that your obligations are obligations and must be fulfilled. Never be negligent in delaying your five daily prayers, or in paying your zakat on time or in keeping your fasts in Ramadan (those who are ill or on a journey have an excuse to make up the fast at a later time). But outside of the domain of obligations try and commit yourself to private acts or voluntary acts of worship. Of these are the following:

- Try and pray your salah in the masjid. If it is difficult due to work try and pray at least one of your prayers a day in the masjid. As a *dā'ī* your connection with the masjid and the community of believers is paramount. As mentioned, the Qur'ān instructs, “and bow down with those who bow down”<sup>156</sup> One out of two verses in which the phrase “and bow down with those who bow down” is followed here by instructions to remain steadfast in personal piety, to remain conscious of social charity and to ensure that one remains connected with the body of the faithful. These are vital components of the faith and ones that act as a safeguarding against both hypocrisy in deed and laxness as well.

“Establish prayer, pay alms-tax, and bow down with those who bow down.”<sup>157</sup>

“Do you preach righteousness and fail to practice it yourselves, although you read the Scripture? Do you not understand?”<sup>158</sup>

Ibn 'Abbās explains the verse by saying, “you instruct people to enter into the religion of Muḥammad ﷺ and other things that you had been instructed to practice like the establishing of the prayer, but you forget yourselves.”<sup>159</sup> Being sincere thus means to devotedly practise what one preaches.

- Ensure you read your daily *adhkār*. Morning and evening supplications are readily found in many *du'ā* books including *Fortress of a Muslim*<sup>160</sup>, *I am Near*<sup>161</sup> and many others. They are also available on phone apps.

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156 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 2, verse 43.

157 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 2, verse 43.

158 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 2, verse 44.

159 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 1 (Cairo, Dār al-Tawfiqiyya: 2004), p. 329.

160 Sa'id bin Ali bin Wahaf Al-Qahtani, *Fortress of a Muslim* (Darussalam, 2009).

161 Ummah Welfare Trust, *I Am Near: A Guide to Du'ā': Supplications from the Qur'ān and Authentic Ḥadīth* (Life with Allāh, 2019).

- It is good to begin your day by performing ablution and praying at least 2 rak‘ats of the *ḍuḥa* prayer (not to be confused with *dhuhr*). This is a voluntary prayer and one encouraged upon the faithful. Abu Hurayrah (may Allāh be pleased with him) reported: My beloved (the Prophet ﷺ) advised me to do three things, which I will never abandon so long as I live: to fast three days of each month, to pray two rak‘āt of Ḍuḥa prayer, and not to sleep until I pray Witr.”<sup>162</sup> The time of Ḍuḥa begins after the sun fully rises and it ends approximately 15 minutes before Dhuhr prayer. The *ḍuḥa* prayer is the prayer of the *awwābīn* (oft-repentant) and has many benefits:

The Prophet ﷺ said:

“In the morning, every single joint of yours must pay a *ṣadaqah* (charity). Every *SubhanAllāh* is a *ṣadaqah*, every *Alhamdulillah* is a *sadaqah*, every *La Ilaha Illa Allāh* is a *sadaqah*, every *Allāhu Akbar* is a *ṣadaqah*, every commanding good is a *ṣadaqah*, and every forbidding evil is a *ṣadaqah*, and all this is accomplished through two rak‘āt one can pray in Ḍuḥa [prayer].

“Allāh the Exalted says: ‘O Son of Adam, pray to Me in the beginning of the day with four units and I shall thereby suffice you at the end (of it).’”<sup>163</sup>

The aforementioned narration is key in enabling us to understand how the way we begin our mornings will impact on the day we lead. The day will be more enriched with divine guidance and blessing. The believer should remember that it is not bodies but hearts that journey to Allāh: “Seek help in this by journeying [to Allāh] at the beginning of the day, at the end of the day, and a portion of the latter part of the night.”<sup>164</sup>

- Try and pray your *sunnah al-rawātib* prayers in the day. It is reported that the Prophet ﷺ said, “Allāh will build a house in heaven for whoever is diligent in observing twelve sunnah rak‘āt (as follows): four rak‘āt before and two after the Dhuhr (Midday) prayer, two after the Maghrib (Sunset Prayer), two after the ‘Ishā (Evening) prayer and two before the Fajr (Dawn) prayer.”<sup>165</sup>

162 Al-Bukhārī 1981

163 Al-Tirmidhi 475.

164 Al-Bukhārī 39/

165 Al-Tirmidhi No. 379 and by others. Ḥadīth No. 6183 in Sahih al-Jamī’

An effective way of engendering sincerity in a person is for one to not disclose one's good deeds. The Qur'an outlines the importance of being sincere as well as the practising of sincerity through the performing of good deeds in secret. Allāh describes in the Qur'an,

“To give charity publicly is good, but to give to the poor privately is better for you, and will absolve you of your sins. And Allāh is All-Aware of what you do.”<sup>166</sup>

Al-Ṭabarī explains that it means “giving money to the poor in secret”, and that “everything is accepted if it is founded on a sincere intention, and charity in secret is better.”<sup>167</sup> This is similar to Ibn Kathīr who comments that the secret charity is better than the open charity because it is further from showing off unless it is done openly for the benefit of causing others to imitate the good act of charity. The Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ described seven types of people who will be shaded on the Day of Judgement. One of them is a person “who spends in charity and hides it such that his right hand does not know what his left hand has given”<sup>168</sup> There are of course other righteous deeds one can perform in secret from night prayers to doing things in the service of others.

7. The *dā`ī* should never boast any successes in the *da`wah*. The information presented so far might have equipped the caller with necessary spiritual strategies to avoid insincerity when actions have come to an end. As recounted, this means that there should be an inner checking at three important points: before an action, during its undertaking and when it is complete. This point about not boasting is most relevant when the action is complete since one's happiness at someone accepting the message of Islam should not turn into exulting one's own efforts:

“So do not claim yourselves to be pure; He is most knowing of who fears Him.”<sup>169</sup>

8. Remember all guidance is from Allāh alone, and it should be a cause of gratitude and humbleness if one is afforded the opportunity to engage in this work in calling others to His way. Firstly, intertwined

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166 Al-Qur'an. Chapter 2, verse 271.

167 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 3 (Cairo, Dār al-Tawfiqiyya: 2004), p. 96.

168 Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Lebanon, Dār al-Ma'rifa: 2003), p. 248.

169 Al-Qur'an. Chapter 53, verse 32.

in all good work is self-reform. In calling others to be mindful of Allāh, one is called upon to be mindful of Allāh oneself. Any discussion about Allāh should affect the caller first; any call to *taqwa* should instil within the caller a greater yearning for *taqwa*; any reminder unto others of the purpose of life should make the caller more focused in his or her fulfilling of that very purpose. We are reminded,

“Do you preach righteousness and fail to practice it yourselves, although you read the Scripture? Do you not understand?”<sup>170</sup>

Al-Ṭabarī, in his commentary cites Ibn Abbās who explains, “you instruct others to enter the religion of Muḥammad” “and fail to practise it yourself.”<sup>171</sup> Another, Ibn Jurayj explained, “whoever calls to goodness should be the strongest person in observing that goodness.”<sup>172</sup>

Secondly, it is for the *dāʿī* to internalise the profound blessing of giving *daʿwah*. It is not for them to boast about one’s success; but instead to see: guidance, one’s adherence to practising Islam, repentance, fighting back against egos, as immense blessings:

“They regard their acceptance of Islam as a favour to you. Tell them, O Prophet, “Do not regard your Islam as a favour to me. Rather, it is Allāh Who has done you a favour by guiding you to the faith, if indeed you are faithful.”<sup>173</sup>

Commentators of the Qurʾān here emphasise that one should not think that they are doing a favour to Islam by upholding the faith.<sup>174</sup> The *dāʿī* must never think that Islam is in some way in need of him or her, and that its flourishing depends on him or her. Islam will flourish nonetheless and Allāh’s word will reach all corners of the globe. It is instead a blessing from Allāh, a favour from Him that a person was guided to the faith and then bestowed with the divine gift of being one of the callers to His way. As al-Saʿdī explains: “Just as Allāh bestowed favours upon them in terms of creating them, granting them provision and bestowing blessings upon them both visible and hidden, the divine favour of guidance to Islam and

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170 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 2, verse 44.

171 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 1 (Cairo, Dār al-Tawfiqiyya: 2004), p. 329.

172 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 1 (Cairo, Dār al-Tawfiqiyya: 2004), p. 329.

173 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 49, verse 17.

174 Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Lebanon, Dār al-Maʿrifa:2003), p 1495.

the bestowal of faith are greater than everything else.”<sup>175</sup> All favours require gratitude and the believer should practice conscious gratitude everyday:

“Work gratefully, O family of David!” Only a few of My servants are truly grateful.”<sup>176</sup>

The believer should hold firmly in his heart and even verbalise that success did not come from him; that he does not stand giving *da‘wah* because of who he or she is; that the success of *da‘wah* will not be determined by who he or she is; that the only reason one is in the performance of doing a good deed is because of the abiding generosity of Allāh who opens doors of goodness for His servants. The believer can say the prayer of Prophet Shu‘ayb who says,

وَمَا تَوْفِيقِي إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ تَوَكَّلْتُ وَإِلَيْهِ أُنِيبُ

“My success comes only through Allāh. In Him I trust and to Him I turn.”<sup>177</sup>

or the beautiful supplication of Prophet Mūsā when he arrived in Madyan and performed an act of kindness for those in need: “So he watered their herd for them, then withdrew to the shade and prayed,

رَبِّ إِنِّي لِمَا أَنْزَلْتَ إِلَيَّ مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَقِيرٌ

“My Lord! I am truly in desperate need of whatever provision You may have in store for me.”<sup>178</sup>

The point is to attribute all success to Allāh alone and thank Him for the opportunity He has afforded to us. This will also open more doors of goodness for the *dā‘ī*.

The caller to Islam should therefore have knowledge about Islam to dialogue with people. To present a clear case for Islam and to dispel negative stereotypes and propaganda about the faith. Literally meaning perception, *baṣīra* is defined as an inward eye, the eye of the heart. Perception is not only a matter of deep thinking but about spiritual awareness, emerging from

175 Al-Sa‘dī, *Tafseer al-Sa‘dī* (Juz’ 25-27) (Riyadh, International Islamic Publishing House: 2018), p. 263.

176 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 34, verse 13.

177 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 11, verse 88.

178 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 28, verse 24.

a heart that is reflective and enables one to discern the reality of things. In the life of the Prophet ﷺ the instruction to remain in the remembrance of Allāh found its place in time of both ease and hardship. It is in Him and for Him that all actions are intended, make sense and come to fruition. In the Prophet's early time in Makkah antagonistic disbelievers from the Prophet's own community who opted to remain in their paganistic traditions were primarily intended in the Qur'ānic verse: "We are well aware that your heart is weighed down by what they say. Celebrate the glory of your Lord and be among those who bow down to Him: worship your Lord until what is certain comes to you."<sup>179</sup> Such a verse revealed in the Prophet's early Makkan time draws on finding solace in the face of such derision. The Qur'ān calls on him to "Be patient O Prophet with what they say. And remember Our servant, David, the man of strength. Indeed, he constantly turned to Allāh."<sup>180</sup> We truly subjected the mountains to hymn Our praises along with him in the evening and after sunrise.<sup>181</sup> And We subjected the birds, flocking together. All turned to Him echoing His hymns.<sup>182</sup>

The focus on remaining in Allāh's remembrance is paramount for the one with *baṣīra*. His or her strength, both physical and spiritual, is a culmination of that spiritual attention. When Ibn al-Qayyim would see his teacher Ibn Taymiyya engaged committedly in his morning *adhkār* and ask him why. He would reply, 'This is my breakfast, without which I have no strength.' In success too, is the believer to turn his attention to celebrating the praises of Allāh. All goodly increase, profit, success, opening are reflections of divine grace "to test me whether I am grateful or ungrateful. And whoever is grateful, it is only for their own good. But whoever is ungrateful, surely my Lord is Self-Sufficient, Most Generous."<sup>183</sup> Instead of reflecting on self-achievement the *dā'ī* must turn his attention to Allāh in appreciation and remembrance. To offset feelings of self-importance it is edifying to remember that the Prophet was someone who engaged with all kinds of people and also used to render many domestic services in his home with his own hands. When the Prophet's wife 'Ā'isha was asked about how the Prophet was in his home, she described: "He used to do as anyone of you in his own home: He patched his garments and mended his own sandals."<sup>184</sup>

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179 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 15, verses 97-99.

180 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 38, verse 17.

181 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 38, verse 18

182 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 38, verse 19.

183 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 27, verse 40.

184 Al-Bukhārī, *Adab al-Mufrad* 539

## SINCERITY: CASE STUDIES

Imagine you are giving *da'wah* and whilst talking, you feel your ego becoming inflated. You might for a moment become pleased with yourself – your style of presentation, the positive reaction you receive.

On the one hand, a positive reaction is what you are seeking - that your audience becomes receptive to your call; that you provoke a positivity in the conversation can lead to a good outcome, but there should be a moment of introspection for the *dā'i* in thanking Allah for the success, in finding humility in the encounter. Remind yourself that every moment of goodness is a divine blessing from Him, and the more thankful and Allah-centric you make your work, the better results you will reap in both worlds. Don't become self-indulgent but instead be thankful for the opportunity and resort to increasing in remembrance of Allāh when you notice things improving around you. Chapter *al-Naṣr* (the Help) is very insightful here:

“When God’s help comes and He opens up your way, when you see people embracing God’s faith in crowds. Celebrate the praise of your Lord and ask His forgiveness: He is always ready to accept repentance.”<sup>185</sup>

Imagine you prepared yourself well by reciting your *adhkār* and making *du'ā* that Allah keep you sincere in your work, but during *da'wah* you feel yourself losing sincerity and becoming more concerned about how you are seen in the encounter.

There are a few things to remember, Firstly, the purpose of *shayṭān* is to demotivate you from giving *da'wah* in the first place. He will insinuate things to put you off your work, so you have to bear that in mind. Begin by asking Allāh to strengthen your heart with sincerity. Secondly, saying *a'ūdhu billahi mina-shayṭān al-rajīm* (I seek refuge with Allāh from *shayṭān* the accursed) is an effective strategy to deal with such a situation. Thirdly, if you feel a reduction in the sincere approach to your *da'wah* remind yourself about why you are there in the first place, re-read some important *adhkār*, like,

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185 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 110, verse 1-3.

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَعُوذُ بِكَ أَنْ أُشْرِكَ بِكَ وَأَنَا أَعْلَمُ وَأَسْتَغْفِرُكَ لِمَا لَا أَعْلَمُ

(O Allāh I seek refuge in You from knowingly associating partners with You, and I seek Your forgiveness for that which I do not know)<sup>186</sup> to set you back on track. Have a read through Qur’anic accounts of prophets delivering the message to their peoples. Think about the sincere man who came running, described in Surah Yāsīn and remember always that Allāh is concerned with the sincerity of a person’s heart and rewards for what was done sincerely seeking His pleasure: “Indeed, Allah only accepts from the righteous.”<sup>187</sup>

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186 Aḥmad 4/403

187 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 5, verse 27.



## Wisdom

*Say, "This is my way; I invite to Allāh with insight, I and those who follow me. And exalted is Allāh; and I am not of those who associate others with Him."*<sup>188</sup>

Wisdom (*ḥikmah*) is one of the most important of the *dāʿī*'s characteristics. The believer should remember that revelation is the only source of true wisdom, and that the "pinnacle of wisdom is to fear Allāh"<sup>189</sup> as the Prophet's companion Ibn Masʿūd said. It is to bear much in mind when communicating a message. One needs to know who he or she is speaking with, to be better prepared for conveying an effective message. Someone's gender, age, social environment, religion are all factors that can influence what we choose to say and how we say it. It is, as Ibn Qayyim explains, to "put things in their right places."<sup>190</sup> It is therefore to do the correct thing in the correct manner at the correct time. The word *ḥikmah* has been used in the Quran many times in a multi-faceted way, in different contexts. Ibn Qayyim furthers his explanation about wisdom by describing it "as knowing the truth and acting according to it, and correctness in speech and action. And this is not possible except through understanding of the Qurʾān, jurisprudence, the *sharīʿah* of Islam and the realities of *Imān*."<sup>191</sup>

One of the most prominent verses in relation to *daʿwah* and the ultimate characteristic of wisdom is the following:

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188 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 12, verse 108.

189 Ibn abī Shayba 49653.

190 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Madārij al-Sālikīn*, vol. 2 (Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, Beirut: 2004), p. 354.

191 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Madārij al-Sālikīn*, vol. 2 (Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, Beirut: 2004), p. 353.

“Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best.”<sup>192</sup>

Al-Sa‘dī explains that it means to “let your call be to all people, Muslims and disbelievers, inviting them to the straight path of your Lord, which includes beneficial knowledge and righteous deeds, be “on the basis of wisdom”, addressing each according to his situation and ability to understand, and the level of his acceptance and submission. Therefore, the call to Islam should be based on knowledge, not ignorance, starting with the most important matters, then the next most important, issues that are clearer in the mind and easier to understand, and are more likely to be fully accepted, presenting the call with kindness and gentleness.”<sup>193</sup>

Wisdom, as al-Sa‘dī explains, is not to overburden others and place unnecessary stress on them. It is essential for the *da‘ī* to have an empathic awareness of his surroundings. For some it can be tedious to hear a long, drawn-out invitation to the faith and for others being too minimalistic with one’s words can be uninspiring. Wisdom is to be able to discern one’s situation and react accordingly. It is, as Ibn Qayyim explains, “to give, everything its right, not to overstep limits and nor to hasten things from their appropriate time and nor to delay things from their time; it is therefore to do what you should, the way that is required, and at the appropriate time.”<sup>194</sup>

### The Story of Prophet Yūsuf ﷺ

A beautiful illustration of wisdom is shown at multiple levels with Prophet Yūsuf in prison. Of course, Prophet Yūsuf’s life thus far had been one of many a test, from the deceit of his brothers, separation from his father and homeland, being seduced by the minister’s wife and now facing lengthy time in prison for a crime he did not commit; yet Yūsuf was nonetheless sure to use an unexpected opportunity with his fellow inmates to speak about Allāh and the religion of truth. The inmates had come to learn that Prophet Yūsuf was acquainted with dream interpretation and so petitioned him to decipher for them some meaning behind their own dreams. The dreams are relayed to him in verse 36 of Sūrah Yūsuf and yet interpreted in verse 41; the verses in between describe Prophet Yūsuf’s *da‘wah* to the inmates. If they trust him as a dream interpreter then they should trust him as a sincere counsellor. Prophet Yūsuf explains:

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192 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 16, verse 125.

193 Al-Sa‘dī, *Tafseer al-Sa‘dī* (Juz’ 13-15) (Riyadh, International Islamic Publishing House: 2018), p. 256.

194 Ibn Qayyim, *Madārij al-Sālikin*, vol. 2 (Beirut, Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya: 2004), p. 354.

“And two other servants went to jail with Joseph. One of them said, “I dreamt I was pressing wine.” The other said, “I dreamt I was carrying some bread on my head, from which birds were eating.” Then both said, “Tell us their interpretation, for we surely see you as one of the good-doers.”<sup>195</sup>

“...This knowledge is from what my Lord has taught me. I have shunned the faith of a people who disbelieve in Allāh and deny the Hereafter.”<sup>196</sup>

“I follow the faith of my fathers: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is not right for us to associate anything with Allāh in worship. This is part of Allāh’s grace upon us and humanity, but most people are not grateful.”<sup>197</sup>

“O my fellow-prisoners! Which is far better: many different lords or Allāh—the One, the Supreme?”<sup>198</sup>

“Whatever idols you worship instead of Him are mere names which you and your forefathers have made up—a practice Allāh has never authorised. It is only Allāh Who decides. He has commanded that you worship none but Him. That is the upright faith, but most people do not know.”<sup>199</sup>

“[And now,] O my companions in imprisonment, [I shall tell you the meaning of your dreams:] as for one of you two...”<sup>200</sup>

One sees the climax in the final verse above as Prophet Yūsuf proceeds to explain what the dreams mean. It is the verses which lie in-between, that are of the most importance here, since we can learn about the message communicated by Prophet Yūsuf.

We can note the following:

1. The first illustrious point in the interaction between Prophet Yūsuf and the inmates is the high regard he receives as a righteous individual. He is described as being of the *Muḥsinīn* (doers of good),

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195 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 12, verse 36.

196 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 12, verse 37.

197 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 12, verse 38.

198 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 12, verse 39.

199 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 12, verse 40.

200 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 12, verse 41.

meaning, as Ra'fat Muḥammad Rā'if al-Miṣrī notes that Prophet Yūsuf had previous engagements with them in goodness and they had seen him in the service of people.<sup>201</sup> Prophet Yūsuf's good reputation as a caller to Allāh was crucial and even though they came to ask him concerning their own needs he was in a good position to set the scene on his own terms. Good character goes a long way.

2. Prophet Yūsuf attributed goodness to Allāh. This in fact is very effective on many fronts. Individual achievement and success and self-pride are oftentimes encouraged in our societies and less attention is paid to learning to be grateful for such achievements. The lesson in gratitude is in itself a powerful *da'wah* discussion. Prophet Yūsuf begins by explaining that the dream interpretation knowledge he has is something gifted to him by God alone. This would of course draw out a tone of humility in Prophet Yūsuf. His words resemble those of Prophet Sulayman: "This is by the grace of my Lord..."<sup>202</sup> Attributing grace to God is a resplendent feature of a Muslim's character. It offsets a culture of envy that might pervade from a situation and helps to position the discussion as a God-centric one. It could emerge from a simple replying to a 'How are you?' with 'thanks to God for His blessings' for example.
3. Prophet Yūsuf then negates all false deities before he affirms his belief in Allāh. It is of great consequence that his rejection is of a people who deny God and the Hereafter. He connects his tradition with those who came before him. This is important in *da'wah* – to show that Islam is not something new but a continuation of previous dispensations. The incorporating of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob denotes a broader frame of familiarity and lays credibility to his message. Prophet Yūsuf's message of calling others to the Oneness of Allāh is not unique to him but a concern and work of all prophets that preceded him. The message is here explicated in his teaching the inmates that one should never associate anyone with Allāh in worship.
4. Again, the point of Allāh's divine grace and favour comes through in prophet Yūsuf's words: "This is part of Allāh's grace upon us"<sup>203</sup> It is in fact something that we must emphasise in our *da'wah*. At least

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201 Al-Miṣrī, Ra'fat Muḥammad Rā'if, *Shakhṣīyat al-ḥākim fī daw' al-qasas al-Qur'ānī* (Dar al-Faarooq, 2003), p. 78.

202 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 27, verse 40.

203 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 12, verse 38.

seven times in the Qurʾān it is repeated that everything is completely dependent on the maximally perfect grace and mercy of Allāh:

“Had it not been for Allāh’s grace and mercy upon you, none of you would have ever been purified. But Allāh purifies whoever He wills. And Allāh is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.”<sup>204</sup>

“If it were not for God’s bounty and mercy and the fact that He is compassionate and merciful.”<sup>205</sup>

“Had it not been for Allāh’s grace and mercy upon you in this world and the Hereafter, you would have certainly been touched with a tremendous punishment for what you plunged into.”<sup>206</sup>

“And if it was not for the favour of Allāh upon you, and His mercy, a group of them would have determined to mislead you. But they do not mislead except themselves, and they will not harm you at all. And Allāh has revealed to you the Book and wisdom and has taught you that which you did not know. And ever has the favour of Allāh upon you been great.”<sup>207</sup>

“And if not for the favour of Allāh upon you and His mercy, you would have been among the losers.”<sup>208</sup>

“If it were not for God’s bounty and mercy towards you, if it were not that God accepts repentance and is wise.”<sup>209</sup>

In his explanation of this last verse al-Ṭabarī explains: “Were it not for the grace of Allāh upon you, O people, and his mercy on you, and that He favoured His creation with his kindness and with His wisdom over them, He would hasten to punish you for your sins and expose the sinful among you, but instead He covers your sins and not disgrace you with them.”<sup>210</sup> As Zaraboso explains, “It is by His grace and mercy that He guides people to the Straight Path, while He does not benefit at all from that... He is the real

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204 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 24, verse 21.

205 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 24, verse 20.

206 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 24, verse 14.

207 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 4, verse 113.

208 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 2, verse 64.

209 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 24, verse 10.

210 Al-Ṭabarī. (2004). *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī (Jamiʿ al-bayān fi taʾwīl al-Qurʾān)* vol. 18. Al-Maktaba al-Tawfiqiya, p. 91

“king” and “owner” of all of creation. He has power over all things. Nothing escapes His rule. He is not in need of anything to assist Him in His rule. He is perfect and complete in and of Himself. In fact, He has no need to drive people to His worship, as that does not benefit Him at all. Similarly, He has no need to force people not to disobey Him, as such disobedience does not harm Him.”<sup>211</sup>

Al-Rāzī highlights the purposefulness of including the well-known names of the family of prophets to which he belonged - Ibrahim, Ishaq and Yaʿqub. “The status of these personalities was well known in the world. By making clear that he was one of their sons they exalted him and looked upon him with an eye of veneration and his words could better penetrate their hearts.”<sup>212</sup> The most important thing for Yūsuf was to communicate the importance of worshipping God alone and he therefore positioned himself as a voice of credibility. Taking from the example, the *dāʿī* can draw attention to the clear examples of monotheism in previous Abrahamic dispensations, can mention that all of God’s Prophets and Messengers carried that same universal call of *Tawḥīd*; he or she can emphasise that Islam is a monotheistic faith and the only path to salvation.

5. Prophet Yūsuf directed everything in his conversation to the glory of God’s majesty and the greatness of his authority. He used rational proofs with the prisoners, asking them to think if believing in multiple gods was better, or believing in One supreme being? Prophet Yūsuf negated any authority the false belief of polytheism had, and instead pointed to their blind adopting of tradition, as something inherited by people. God, he informed them, had never instructed anyone to worship other than Him alone. Prophet Yūsuf exhibits courage in declaring that “it is only Allāh who decides”, meaning judgement of right and wrong rests with God alone. In making such a declaration Prophet Yūsuf undermines the false teaching of any false claimant who teaches anything opposed to the way of monotheism Prophet Yūsuf was teaching them.

Wisdom, as reflected in the example of Yūsuf, for example, is the soundness of judgement in the choice of means and ends. It is to apportion right words to their right places, in their right contexts and seeking the right ends, and also to judge between what is good and better, what is bad and worse. It is

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211 Zarabozo, J.M. (1999). Commentary on the Forty Ḥadīth of al-Nawawī, Volume 2. Al-Basheer publications and translations, p. 783.

212 Al-Razī, *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* vol. 17 (Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya: 2004), p. 110.

to be insightful in *daʿwah*, to decide when and how to adopt a particular approach and in so doing, always to seek the best end. Allāh informs us in the Qurʾān that wisdom is a tremendous blessing,

“He gives wisdom to whom He wills, and whoever has been given wisdom has certainly been given much good. And none will remember except those of understanding.”<sup>213</sup>

Al-Saʿdī in his commentary explains, “it is granted only to the one whom Allāh has blessed with wisdom, which is beneficial knowledge, righteous deeds and knowledge of the reasons behind the laws. The one to whom Allāh has granted wisdom has been given a great deal of good. What can be better than goodness which leads to happiness in this world and the next, and salvation from misery in both realms?<sup>214</sup> In the hadith, the one whom Allāh has blessed with wisdom and he acts on it and teaches with it, is a cause for legitimate envy.<sup>215</sup>

### Steps towards wisdom

To this end, wisdom is to consult other *duʿāt* about their experiences and for advice about ways to move forward. Whereas the process of self-accountability (*muḥāsaba*) should be a regular practice for the believer, self-accountability in *daʿwah* can mean to be regular in making *duʿā* whereby you seek His forgiveness, ask Allāh to aid you in His remembrance, to keep you sincere, to keep you able; to thank Him for the blessing of calling to His way, and self-accountability can also involve consolidating one’s work with other *duʿāt*, to revise one’s notes and think about how to improve one’s approach and argument. Across the globe there are teams of *duʿāt* who have been involved in calling others to Allāh for a long time. There is also a wide range of resources and published material that one can access. Projects run by IERA (Islamic Education Research Academy) including *Know God, Know Good, Mercy To Mankind, Jesus: Man, Messenger, Messiah, Mission Dawah, Muslim Now, One Reason and The Big Debates* and other value-based campaigns have been launched in numerous countries and received much attention. In order for *daʿwah* work not to be needlessly replicated, it is vital for the *daʿī* to access learning and training platforms of others involved in grass-root *daʿwah*. A beautiful, short supplication the *daʿī* can learn is the prayer of Prophet Ibrāhīm, mentioned in the Qurʾān:

213 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 2, verse 269.

214 Al-Saʿdī, *Tafseer al-Saʿdī* (Juz’ 1-3) (Riyadh, International Islamic Publishing House: 2018), p. 347.

215 Al-Bukhārī 73.

رَبِّ هَبْ لِي حُكْمًا وَأَلْحِقْنِي بِالصَّالِحِينَ

My Lord, grant me wisdom; join me with the righteous<sup>216</sup>

Prophet Nūḥ in the chapter named after him is a striking example of disseminating the message with remarkable wisdom, persistence and perseverance. It is crucial for the *dā'ī* to draw inspiration from the example of Prophet Nūḥ since, oftentimes, a called might lose heart if people do not show interest, or are slow at doing so. Quick results are not a real measure of success as the Qur'ān shows. In the example of Prophet Nūḥ his work spanned nearly a millennium yet his townspeople were slow in responding to his words. In the case of Prophet Yūnus he, frustrated with his people for their unresponsiveness, left to find another village he could try with, only for his original audience in Naynawa (Nineveh) in Mosul (modern day Northern Iraq) accepting the truth *en masse* – and in his absence. Prophet Yūnus had despaired of his people, and feared that Allāh's punishment was soon to descend. Back home however, the people of Nineveh began to notice changes in the sky and turned to Allāh in sincere repentance. Punishment was halted and they turned collectively in faith.

“If only there had been a society which believed before seeing the torment and, therefore, benefited from its belief, like the people of Jonah. When they believed, We lifted from them the torment of disgrace in this world and allowed them enjoyment for a while.”<sup>217</sup>

1. The success of one's *da'wah* is measured by one's sincerity and effort, and not by people's acceptance of it. It might well be that your efforts come to fruition long after, but it is not for you to feel despondent at any lack of reciprocation since it is not us the hearts of people are guided to. It is to Allāh alone, and by Allāh alone, that guidance is given. In the Prophet's ﷺ life it was his hope that his uncle Abū Ṭālib would have embraced Islam at the end of his life after having been a defender of the Prophet ﷺ even when his tribe went against him. It is reported,

“When the time of the death of Abu Ṭālib approached, Allāh's Messenger (ﷺ) went to him and found Abu Jahl bin Hisham and `Abdullah bin Abi Umaiya bin Al-Mughira by his side. Allāh's Messenger (ﷺ) said to Abu Ṭālib, “O uncle! Say: None has the right

216 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 26, verse 83.

217 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 10, verse 98.



to be worshipped but Allāh, a sentence with which I shall be a witness (i.e., argue) for you before Allāh. Abu Jahl and `Abdullah bin Abi Umaiya said, “O Abu Ṭālib! Are you going to denounce the religion of `Abdul Muttalib?” Allāh’s Messenger (ﷺ) kept on inviting Abu Ṭālib to say it (i.e., ‘None has the right to be worshipped but Allāh’) while they (Abu Jahl and `Abdullah) kept on repeating their statement till Abu Ṭālib said as his last statement that he was on the religion of `Abdul Muttalib and refused to say, ‘None has the right to be worshipped but Allāh.’”<sup>218</sup>

In another narration we learn that when Abū Ṭālib was advised to declare the testimony of faith, he instead said,

“Were it not the fear of the Quraysh blaming me (and) saying that it was the fear of (approaching death) that induced me to do so, I would have certainly delighted your eyes. It was then that Allāh revealed: “You surely cannot guide whoever you like O Prophet, but it is Allāh Who guides whoever He wills, and He knows best who are fit to be guided. (28:56)”<sup>219</sup>

2. The *dā`ī* should not lose heart. The Prophet ﷺ did not lose heart or hope when people did not listen to him. Imān is created in the heart and that is entirely in the hands of Allāh. Guidance, of course, is not based on one’s kinship but a matter of *tawfiq* (the ability from God to achieve success) in believing in Allāh and His Messenger. In doing the act of *da`wah* therefore one’s purpose is to convey, to provide another person with an insight, an opening into the way of Islam. Whether the heart of another person is ready at that point to accept the message is known only to Allāh and the Prophet’s own example of Abū Ṭālib is important for us to think over so as to ensure we do not lose heart in the course of conveying the message.

We should be sure at the same time that the truth, well communicated, will leave an impression on the heart of the one spoken to, can also, in time, resurface. The *dā`ī* should see his role as a communicator and representative of the message. He or she should not be concerned about false metrics of success but remember instead that, while it should be hoped that the message is delivered far and wide, this should not be seen as a scale of how well and how effective a person’s *da`wah* is. The Prophet ﷺ informed us that some prophets had very few followers,

218 Al-Bukhārī 1360.

219 Muslim 25b.

“Nations were displayed before me; one or two prophets would pass by along with a few followers. A prophet would pass by accompanied by nobody”.<sup>220</sup>

Imagine the prophet who comes, as described, with no followers. Chosen by Allāh for the great undertaking of conveying the message to his people, his people chose, in their entirety to reject him. This does not indicate any failing on his part to convey the message but instead points to a failing in his people to accept and receive that message. Guidance is with Allāh alone.

The Prophet ﷺ spoke with all types of people yet each encounter was unique as per the individual and situation they were in. Once the Prophet ﷺ passed by a woman who was weeping beside a grave. What imbues with wisdom here is that he chose not to correct or rebuke her when she retorted to his advice for her to show patience. In the narration,

“He told her to fear Allāh and be patient. She said to him, “Go away, for you have not been afflicted with a calamity like mine.” And she did not recognise him. Then she was informed that he was the Prophet ﷺ. So, she went to the house of the Prophet ﷺ and there she did not find any guard. Then she said to him, “I did not recognise you.” He said, “Verily, the patience is at the first stroke of a calamity.”<sup>221</sup>

The Prophet ﷺ was considerate of her psychological state as a grieving mother at that moment, and since she did not know it was the Prophet and the Prophet ﷺ knew that she didn't know, he left her alone. Only when she came to know it was the Prophet ﷺ did he give her further advice on patience. The *dā'i* should read the situation around him, should be able to discern in a basic way the temperaments of those he is engaging with. If there are outbursts of anger or sadness the *dā'i* should know when to push back and steer the conversation into a better place so that the individual does not feel put off from engaging again.

Furthermore, in the Prophet's ﷺ time in Makkah a woman named Arwā b. Ḥarb (also known as Um Jamīl, the wife of Abu Lahab) would follow the Prophet ﷺ around to hurt and humiliate him and used to taunt him, “Mudhammam (the dispraised) we have denied, and his religion we have loathed, and his command we have defied!” Instead of responding to her, he would simply find solace in saying to his Companions, ‘Don't you see how Allāh diverts from me the curses and insults of Quraysh? They insult

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220 Al-Bukhārī 5705.

221 Al-Bukhārī 1283.

Mudhammam, and they curse Mudhammam, while I am Muḥammad (the Praised One)!”<sup>222</sup> The Prophet’s ﷺ name was of course ‘Muḥammad’ (the praised one) and the wife of Abu Lahab hoped that by inverting his name to ‘Mudhammam’ (the dispraised one), the Prophet ﷺ would fall into disrepute among the townsfolk. Yet the Prophet ﷺ showed magnanimity in his ignoring the woman’s words, knowing that his words and character would far deeper penetrate the fabric of his society and our global world, as well as knowing that the name ‘Muḥammad’ would forever invite praise and salutations.<sup>223</sup> The followers of the Prophet ﷺ were in turn called to remain faithful to the God-centric focus and moral paradigm of his teachings. Allāh instructs in the Qur’ān:

“The servants of the Lord of Mercy are those who walk humbly on the earth, and who, when the foolish address them, reply, ‘Peace’;

“those who spend the night bowed down or standing, worshipping their Lord,”

“who plead, ‘Our Lord, turn away from us the suffering of Hell, for it is a dreadful torment to suffer!’”

“It is an evil home, a foul resting place!”

“They are those who are neither wasteful nor niggardly when they spend, but keep to a just balance;”

“those who never invoke any other deity beside God, nor take a life, which God has made sacred, except in the pursuit of justice, nor commit adultery. Whoever does these things will face the penalties:”<sup>224</sup>

Let us remember that situations like these when Islam and its symbols are brought into public scrutiny are situations wherein lies great reward for Muslims to share the message of Islam with others. The same way that any defence of the caricatures of the Prophet ﷺ are a defence of the Islamophobia that produced them, the defence of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ and his message is a reflection of one’s Imān (faith), and inspire a calling to intellectually defend and share Islam with others. Oftentimes our compas-

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222 Al-Nasā’i 3438.

223 Osman Latiff, *On Being Human: how Islam addresses othering, dehumanisation and empathy* (Sapience Institute, 2020), p. 113.

224 Al-Qur’ān, Chapter 25, Verses 63 to 68.

sionate engagement with non-Muslims and sharing with them the beautiful life and message of the Prophet ﷺ does much to reverse stereotypes at this grassroots level. Makkans of Quraysh were the most relentless in smearing the Prophet's reputation while his companions were the most eager to share his message. Let us further remember that these situations are a test for us all, and in reacting the right way – with knowledge and wisdom, we can use the opportunity to show the truth of Islam and brilliance in the character of the Prophet ﷺ – reassured here by God and called upon to continue his prophetic mission:

“We are well aware that your heart is weighed down by what they say. Celebrate the glory of your Lord and be among those who bow down to Him: worship your Lord until what is certain comes to you.”<sup>225</sup>

3. A Muslim should be wise in his responses and be able to discern when and when not to engage with, and accommodate an antagonistic interlocutor. The *da'ī* will learn with practice who one should not focus on discussing the faith with; such individuals (often Islamophobes) are the kind described in the Qur'an whose purpose is to present the faith in a distorted way. A letter from the caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb advised Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ: “beware of facing them if they are all together. Let them not trick you, for they are wily plotters and their ways are not your ways.”<sup>226</sup> Such personalities might be known and have an internet presence. In recent years there has been an amplifying of open displays of Islam rejection, Qur'an desecration and insult on the internet.<sup>227</sup> If such an individual is known then the *da'ī* should choose carefully whether to engage or not. Such individuals are unlikely to speak to you without the creating of a spectacle around the engagement – of amassing followers and cameras. The Qur'an informs its readers that such arrogant denial, stage-setting and flamboyancy is not a new phenomenon. It was instead well anticipated. Seventy-eight times is the verb *tawalla* (to turn away) used in the Qur'an with its

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225 Al-Qur'an, Chapter 15, Verse 97 to 99.

226 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārikh-ul-Umam wal-Mulūk* vol. 3 (Cairo, 1939), p. 10-11; A.I Akram, *The Muslim Conquest of Persia* (Birmingham, Maktaba Booksellers and Publishers: 2009), p. 59.

227 Jonas Svensson, 'Hurting the Qur'an – Suggestions Concerning the Psychological Infrastructure of Desecration', *The Finnish Society for the Study of Religion, Temenos* Vol. 53 No. 2 (2017), p. 252.

derivatives *‘ataw* (exceeding all bounds), *‘utuwwan* (with insolence) and *‘itiyyan* (extreme rebellion). The Qur’an declares,

“The disbelievers say, ‘Do not listen to this Quran; drown it in frivolous talk: you may gain the upper hand.’”<sup>228</sup>

Qur’anic commentators al-Baghawī and al-Sa‘dī explain this verse by commenting that it means “To speak with words that have no benefit or purpose, to make noise to throw people off.”<sup>229</sup> It was the habit of Abū Lahab for example to follow the Prophet ﷺ around and interfere negatively in the *da‘wah* by contorting the message of Islam. Rabī‘a bin ‘Ibād narrates that he saw the Prophet ﷺ in the marketplace of Dhul Majāz saying to those gathered around him, “O people! Say ‘Laa Ilāha IllAllāh’ and you will be successful.” The Prophet ﷺ was being trailed by a squint albeit handsome man whose hair was divided into two locks. He followed the Prophet ﷺ wherever he went and would say to the people, “He (the Prophet) is an irreligious man and a liar.” Rabī‘a bin ‘Ibād was informed that the man was Abū Lahab, the uncle of the Messenger of Allāh.<sup>230</sup>

Such side-attractions are what create the noise and fanfare around a highly important discourse. The way a staged spectacle of suffering gave rise to a culture of by-standing and indifference, as in the cases of Black lynchings, throwing an audience off by introducing distractions, of “frivolous talk”, was one of the methods of the disbelievers to circumvent the most pressing of concerns. Furthermore, the Qur’an describes “and whenever they pass by them, they wink at one another [derisively].”<sup>231</sup> Al-Sa‘dī describes that “in this world the evildoers used to mock the believers, making fun of them, laughing at them and winking in derision at one another when they passed by them, out of scorn and contempt towards them, yet despite that they felt secure, and no fear ever crossed their minds.”<sup>232</sup> The Qur’an further exposes, “Time and time again My messages were recited to you, but you turned arrogantly on your heels, [and,] impelled by your arrogance, you would talk senselessly far into the night.”<sup>233</sup> God had long anticipated the behaviours of the antagonistic.

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228 The Qur’an, Chapter 41, Verse 26.

229 Al-Sa‘dī, *Tafseer al-Sa‘dī* (Juz’ 22-24) (Riyadh, International Islamic Publishing House: 2018), pp. 412-413.

230 Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Lebanon, Dār al-Ma‘rifa:2003), p. 1752.

231 The Qur’an, Chapter 83, Verse 30.

232 Al-Sa‘dī, *Tafseer al-Sa‘dī* (Juz’ 28-30) (Riyadh, International Islamic Publishing House: 2018), p. 356.

233 The Qur’an, Chapter 23, Verses 66 to 67.

4. One strategy that should be taken into consideration is to set the terms of your dialogue, to define your own narrative rather having one pre-defined for you by your interlocutor. The *da'ī* should know when and when not to speak and not feel obliged to answer every question. He or she should set the terms, and not allow others to define a narrative for him and unto which he becomes thereafter bound. The following example from the Prophet's life is a good example. Al-Barā' narrates:

“We faced the pagans on that day (of the battle of Uḥud) and the Prophet ﷺ placed a batch of archers (at a special place) and appointed `Abdullah (bin Jubair) as their commander and said, “Do not leave this place; if you should see us conquering the enemy, do not leave this place, and if you should see them conquering us, do not (come to) help us,” So, when we faced the enemy, they took to their heels till I saw their women running towards the mountain, lifting up their clothes from their legs, revealing their leg-bangles. The Muslims started saying, “The booty, the booty!” `Abdullah bin Jubair said, “The Prophet ﷺ had taken a firm promise from me not to leave this place.” But his companions refused (to stay). So when they refused (to stay there), (Allāh) confused them so that they could not know where to go, and they suffered seventy casualties. Abū Sufyān ascended a high place and said, “Is Muḥammad present amongst the people?” The Prophet ﷺ said, “Do not answer him.” Abū Sufyān said, “Is the son of Abū Quḥāfa present amongst the people?” The Prophet ﷺ said, “Do not answer him.” `Abū Sufyān said, “Is the son of Al-Khattab amongst the people?” He then added, “All these people have been killed, for, were they alive, they would have replied.” On that, `Umar could not help saying, “You are a liar, O enemy of Allāh! Allāh has kept what will make you unhappy.” Abū Sufyān said, “Superior may be Hubal!” On that the Prophet said (to his companions), “Reply to him.” They asked, “What may we say?” He said, “Say: Allāh is More Elevated and More Majestic!” Abū Sufyān said, “We have (the idol) Al-`Uzza, whereas you have no `Uzza!” The Prophet ﷺ said (to his companions), “Reply to him.” They said, “What may we say?” The Prophet ﷺ said, “Say: Allāh is our Helper and you have no helper.”<sup>234</sup>

At three points did Abū Sufyān shout out if the Prophet, Abū Bakr and ‘Umar were present, and at each of these points the Prophet told his companions to not reply to Abū Sufyān. However, at the point when Abū Sufyān shouted “Superior may be Hubal!” the Prophet told his companions, “reply to him.”

There is a point that can be made about one’s commitment to *tawhīd*, to ensure that the focus on *da`wah* is to always ensure that it is Allāh who is glorified, as in the words of prophet Mūsā covered earlier “so that we may glorify You much and remember You much,”<sup>235</sup> Certainly, Abū Sufyān was gloating in his words when he called out the Prophet ﷺ, Abu Bakr and ‘Umar. But the Prophet was sure to correct and challenge him on his false proclamation that “Superior may be Hubal!” with words the Prophet ﷺ himself told his companions to reply back to him, “Say: Allāh is More Elevated and More Majestic!”. This helps the *dā`ī* to place his efforts in the most productive place, and not be side-tracked by the less important and less consequential. The Prophetic message was centred on showing that Allāh is most supreme and deserving of full worship. The situation in fact provides an excellent opening for the *dā`ī* since the contrast between a false and true deity can be easily shown.

5. I will illustrate an important way this paradigm can be contextualised in our current situation.

Too often our Christian friends have drawn our attention to the Christian narrative of the transformative role of Jesus Christ as a salvific figure for mankind. This is perhaps the central theme of the Christian missionary work – to try and convince the world that Jesus Christ died for their sins. At this junction it is common for Christians to begin comparing Jesus with Prophet Muḥammad s in an attempt to suggest that Jesus is better since he emerges as a figure of atonement and thus plays a crucial role in human redemption. Christians will, from this false premise, open up a range of other tangents to which the *dā`ī* will think he needs to provide a response.

Contrary to the Christian outlook which positions man as inherently sinful and unable to draw close to God hence necessitating God Himself to become incarnate to sacrifice Himself for our forgiveness; in the Islamic narrative God is loving and merciful from the outset – “Tell My servants that I – I alone – am truly forgiving, a true dispenser of grace.”<sup>236</sup> Contrary to the Christian story, the Qur’ān explains that though Adam lost his footing and the splendour of a heavenly realm, he was never denied spiritual

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235 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 20, verse 34.

236 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 5, verse 118.

closeness to a maximally loving and pure God who created Him – fully aware of the weaknesses inherent in his very being. The perfect God did not create a perfect being and nor expected perfection from him, but in that creation’s dependence, remembrance and longing for God – would Adam and his wife – find God’s unceasing pleasure. The theological anthropology of Islam thus resonates with a profound bearing on the paradigm of hope.<sup>237</sup> Therefore, rather than being drawn into a pre-defined narrative from our Christian friends, set the premise yourself.

Whilst we have thus far, in this section, covered two important points: to be cautious about engaging with antagonists and to set the narrative of your discussions, we should remember that even those who might initially be antagonistic, they may not remain that way – that in the course of a person’s life they can undergo changes in approach and belief. Everything, including the human heart, is in flux. One could not have imagined that somebody like Waḥshī who murdered the prophet’s uncle Ḥamza would one day embrace Islam, or more surprisingly the woman who mutilated Ḥamza’s body, Hind bint ‘Utba, or someone like Balbir Singh (now Muhammad Aamir), a chief architect in the destruction of Babri mosque (Ayodhya, India) in December 1992 who thereafter vowed to build a hundred mosques as a type of penance for his role in the destruction of that one mosque, or perhaps Joram van Klaverenm, a far-right Dutch lawmaker who sought to eradicate Islam from the Netherlands, embraced Islam and wrote a book seeking to clear up the many misconceptions about Islam. Each of these examples, and countless others, should reinforce for us that Allāh alone is the guide: “so that [in time] God might admit to His grace whomever He wills.”<sup>238</sup>

The first example of this concerns the Prophet Ibrāhīm at the point wherein he, as a young boy, smashed the idols his people were worshipping. When the townsfolk left for the day, Ibrāhīm tore down the statues and placed an axe around the neck of the most prominent of the idols. As the townspeople returned and saw the shattered remnants of their carvings, they pointed blame at Ibrāhīm (upon him be peace), and so he was called. The Qur’ān describes in Sūrah al-Anbiyā’ (27):

“By God I shall certainly plot against your idols as soon as you have turned your backs!”<sup>239</sup>

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237 To learn more, see: *Osman Latiff, Divine Perfection: Christianity and Islam on Sin and Salvation (Sapience Institute, 2021).*

238 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 48, verses 25 and 26.

239 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 27, verse 57.



“He broke them all into pieces, but left the biggest one for them to return to.”<sup>240</sup>

“They said, ‘Who has done this to our gods? How wicked he must be!’”<sup>241</sup>

“Some said, ‘We heard a youth called Abraham talking about them.’”<sup>242</sup>

“They said, ‘Bring him before the eyes of the people, so that they may witness [his trial].’”<sup>243</sup>

“They asked, ‘Was it you, Abraham, who did this to our gods?’”<sup>244</sup>

“He said, ‘No, it was done by the biggest of them– this one. Ask them, if they can talk.’”<sup>245</sup>

“They turned to one another, saying, ‘It is you who are in the wrong’”<sup>246</sup>

“but then they lapsed again and said, ‘You know very well these gods cannot speak.’”<sup>247</sup>

“Abraham said, ‘How can you worship what can neither benefit nor harm you, instead of God?’”<sup>248</sup>

“Shame on you and on the things you worship instead of God. Have you no sense?”<sup>249</sup>

Verses 64 and 65 are of particular interest ,as they highlight that the people with whom Ibrāhīm was contending had a sudden lapse .Turning against their own people ,they exclaimed” ,Behold ,it is you who are doing wrong“. The argument put forward by Ibrāhīm – to question the surviving idol– was overwhelming and aroused within them some reasoning.

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240 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 27, verse 58.

241 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 27, verse 59.

242 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 27, verse 60.

243 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 27, verse 61.

244 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 27, verse 62

245 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 27, verse 63.

246 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 27, verse 64.

247 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 27, verse 65.

248 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 27, verse 66.

249 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 27, verse 67

The question was to ask the shattered idols if they might have seen who caused them such harm and whether it was the surviving largest idol. Confounded, they turned on one another, comprehending for that small moment the error of their ways. The brief moment of clarity was short-lived as “they relapsed into their former way of thinking” and confronted Ibrāhīm for suggesting what they too knew, about the futility of idol-worship. This moment is an interesting one, as it reveals an agitated self that momentarily recognises a previously disregarded truth. The implications of this narrative demonstrate the power of facilitating a reawakening and then holding onto the reawakening to trigger a deeper understanding than before.

This is crucial in the Muslim’s role since it reminds him that the self can at any moment be re-awakened. Hence, the Muslim must never lose hope and remember that all conviction is a matter of the heart and mind, which are susceptible to the subtlest and greatest of changes.

The second example concerns the Prophet Mūsā (upon him be peace) and the people to whom he was sent. The focal verse here is verse 14 from Sūrah al-Naml (27):

“Put your hand inside your cloak and it will come out white, but unharmed. These are among the nine signs that you will show Pharaoh and his people; they have really gone too far.”<sup>250</sup>

“But when Our enlightening signs came to them, they said, ‘This is clearly [just] sorcery!’”<sup>251</sup>

“They denied them, in their wickedness and their pride, even though their souls acknowledged them as true. See how those who spread corruption met their end!”<sup>252</sup>

We are told that the clansmen of Pharaoh to whom Prophet Mūsā was sent, rejected the signs given unto Mūsā, though “in their minds were convinced of their truth.”<sup>253</sup> Ibn ‘Abbas said it means they had “certainty in their hearts.”<sup>254</sup> Al-Sa’di says that “their rejection was not based on doubt or uncertainty; rather they rejected them despite their certain knowledge that they were true.”<sup>255</sup> This reflects that in certain instances

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250 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 27, verse 12.

251 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 27, verse 13.

252 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 27, verse 14.

253 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 27, verse 14.

254 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 19 (Cairo, Dār al-Tawfiqiyya: 2004), p. 138.

255 Al-Sa’di, *Tafseer al-Sa’di* (Juz’ 19-20) (Riyadh, International Islamic Publishing House: 2018), p. 128.

what is expressed outwardly in speech and actions is not what is truly and fully felt and understood in the heart and mind of the one being addressed.

The dynamics of confrontation can oftentimes obscure what is happening at the inner level of each person, such as inner feelings of guilt, sympathy, and remorse. They might be contained for hours, or even 8 years, or expressed immediately. Once, some of the Makkan leaders stood outside of the Prophet's home in the night and listened to the Prophet ﷺ reciting the Qur'an. Unaware of one another's presence, they were absorbed in the recitation and remained until dawn. When the men noticed one another, they castigated each other for listening to the Qur'an and promised not to repeat their action. The next day and the third day, the men made their clandestine way back to the Prophet's house. The example reveals how even the Prophet's enemies were moved by the Qur'an; although personal vengeance, tribal loyalties, jealousy and hatred prevented their acceptance of the Prophet's message.

In 2016 IERA's campaign 'Don't Hate, Debate!' set out to push back against the uproar over freedom of speech which spills over into freedom to insult and degrade religious personalities. Of course, in Islam it is not permitted to abuse the deities of other peoples. The Qur'an here instructs, "O believers! Do not insult what they invoke besides Allāh or they will insult Allāh spitefully out of ignorance."<sup>256</sup>

There were many things IERA's campaign drew attention to, including the negative consequences of insulting and degrading, and the mechanisms of othering and dehumanisation in the Holocaust and other genocides. It was language of hate which culminated in the persecution meted out against minorities. Further to this is the duplicity in heralding such mantras. One of their articles explains,

"Political cartoonist Maurice Sinet, who worked for the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo for 20 years was fired in 2009 for his cartoons mocking the relationship of former French President Sarkozy's son with a wealthy Jewish woman.

A French court injunction banned a Jesus based clothing advert mimicking Da Vinci's Last Supper. A French judge ruled that the display was ruled "a gratuitous and aggressive act of intrusion on people's innermost beliefs".

In 2005, Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten published caricatures of the Prophet Muḥammad but rejected the publication of cartoons mocking Jesus because they would provoke an uproar!"<sup>257</sup>

Drawing attention to double standards can be useful in *da'wah* at times. It should not be the main focus but can be purposeful in highlighting the

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256 Al-Qur'an. Chapter 6, verse 108.

257 Don't hate, debate! - <https://onereason.ie/islam/dont-hate-debate/>

hypocrisy of detractors and to set the point of veracity of one's message with the untruths in opposing arguments. Prophets of Allāh, while calling their peoples to Allāh had to focus their call on asserting the correct belief and contending the false beliefs of their opponents. In this, *tawhīd* is set against all forms of polytheism, and honesty and good disposition set against all types of deceit and corruption.

In the aforementioned example in *Sūrah al-Ghāfir* of the believer who hid his faith during the reign of *Fir'own* he contrasted the goodness in the caller towards Allāh, who comes "with clear proofs from your Lord";<sup>258</sup> with their propensity to exhibit violence to avoid such truth - "Will you kill a man only for saying: 'My Lord is Allāh,'"<sup>259</sup> A dialogue between Prophet Mūsā and *Fir'own* is also reflective of this. When *Fir'own* begins to chastise Mūsā for what he saw as his previous misdemeanours, Mūsā's reply was immense. It is unto Allāh that Prophet Mūsā attributes all goodness that has come to him. His call is not to his own personality, but a call focused on beseeching of the divine, since it is Him alone who "bestowed wisdom on me" or "gifted me with wisdom" – reflection of His divine name *al-Wahhāb*. The root of this word is *hiba*, which means a gift. And because Allāh is *al-Wahhāb*, it means that He gives gifts constantly to people in life. *Hiba* is not a gift conditional on one's effort but a bestowal of divine favour on an individual:

And then you committed that crime of yours: you were so ungrateful.<sup>260</sup>

Moses replied, 'I was misguided when I did it'<sup>261</sup>

and I fled from you in fear; later my Lord gave me wisdom and made me one of His messengers.<sup>262</sup>

"And is this- that you have enslaved the Children of Israel- the favour with which you reproach me?"<sup>263</sup>

6. There is a beautiful point here about the kind of words a *dā'ī* should use and why he or she should use them. Remember that in a conversation about religion it is possible that emotions can become

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258 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 40, verse 28.

259 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 40, verse 28.

260 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 26, verse 19

261 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 26, verse 20

262 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 26, verse 21

263 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 26, verse 22

stoked and egotism to defend a position can become the mainstay of that conversation. Prophet Mūsā, though a recipient of such divine favour acknowledges Allāh, and not his own achievements, through the paradigm of success. It is Allāh who is the doer (*faʿāl*) and the Bestower (*al-Wahhāb*) and it is important this message is communicated clearly. One does not, for example, say he or she is somewhere in life because of having done such and such thing. Such an approach will instil a negative current of pride and self-importance in the conversation. Remember that every moment of existence is a breath-taking experience of sensory perception, of conscience, of simultaneous working of mind, heart, body and soul. All together. To recognise a blessing is to first pay tribute to the inspiration which produced the recognition, and every single day at every single moment such overwhelming gratitude needs to be felt and expressed. Prophet Mūsā therefore, attributes wisdom and messengership as a bestowal and gift from God.

Notice that ,in the aforementioned verse from *Sūrah al-Shuʿarā* ,verse 22 Prophet Mūsā recalls a much greater injustice about which *Firʿown* chooses to be wilfully oblivious about ,that he has enslaved the Children of Israel .Mūsā’s response is sharp and rhetorical” – And is this -that you have enslaved the Children of Israel -the favour with which you reproach me <sup>264</sup>“?Meaning ,he retorted with words that undercut *Firʿown*’s assertion by drawing attention to his greater crime .This can be quite meaningful when your audience might allege Muslims are violent and bring examples of politically motivated violence in contemporary times .It is key of course to defend Islam from such allegations by highlighting justice in precepts like *jihād* ,but the *dāʿī* should know a little about the politics of his society, to make better defence if such issues are raised .The key focus however is not to allow the discussion to become derailed through an opinionated argument over political matters but to steer any conversation to speaking about Allāh – his existence ,the need for messengers and scripture and the right way of life for all peoples .This should be the main objective of the *dāʿī* .It should nonetheless be noted that addressing social wrongs and clarifying matters with Islamic guidance is also a Prophetic strategy and one that comes through in many places in the Qurʿān ,including:

“Woe to the defrauders!”<sup>265</sup>

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264 Al-Qurʿān. Chapter 26, verse 22

265 Al-Qurʿān. Chapter 83, verse 1.

“Those who take full measure when they buy from people,”<sup>266</sup>

“but give less when they measure or weigh for buyers.”<sup>267</sup>

“Do such people not think that they will be resurrected”<sup>268</sup>

And,

“and when baby girls, buried alive, are asked”<sup>269</sup>

“for what crime they were put to death.”<sup>270</sup>

Also, in the example of Prophet Shu‘ayb we find a clear example of a primary *da‘wah* focused on calling his people to worship Allāh alone and then to be mindful of their social responsibilities towards their fellow men: “And to the people of Midian We sent their brother Shu‘ayb. He said, “O my people! Worship Allāh. You have no god other than Him. And do not give short measure and weight. I do see you in prosperity now, but I truly fear for you the torment of an overwhelming Day.”<sup>271</sup>

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266 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 83, verse 2.

267 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 83, verse 3.

268 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 83, verse 4.

269 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 81, verse 8.

270 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 81, verse 9.

271 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 11, verse 84.

## WISDOM: CASE STUDIES

Imagine that a conversation you are having with someone becomes heated and has the risk of turning physical, what should you do?

Remember that *da'wah* is not about confrontation, but about opening a space so that a message can be delivered. Delivering that message is the most important of all communications, and a *dā'i* needs to be wise in terms of how he or she is delivering that message and in control of the happenings around that deliverance.

Any situation is accompanied sometimes by unpredictable happenings. These could range from someone losing their temper or from a discussion becoming derailed. The *dā'i* should be wise in terms of bringing the conversation back to where it should be, or at least allow another person to see something of the goodness of Islam in that conversation, even if it is to part with a smile. Let the word and look accompany the gift of the invitation, even if the fullness of the intended message could not be delivered.

Sometimes it is difficult to talk about a particular issue if it is raised, though one might know how to answer it. There might be people listening. How do you approach this in a wise way?

Firstly, all communications are a test for the believer in one way or another – a test of his patience, of his gratitude and also of his sincerity. To communicate the message of Islam, one needs to be courageous and maintain confidence in the truth value of Islam. Undoubtedly, the *dā'i* should navigate all discussions to the main parameters of belief but one should not shy away from explaining topics, with knowledge, that might be sensationalised in the media for example.

It is crucial for the *dā'i* to remember that it is only Allah who guides people's hearts and we might wrongly assume that the one asking such a question might become put off if time is spent talking about it, without realising that maybe that one thing is what the individual finds most fascinating about Islam.

Therefore, be authentic in your approach. Sometimes people might have already researched Islam and find, for example, Islam's social and cultural codes appealing and so by withholding what could be vital information, it could have the opposite effect of what one assumes. Wisdom must therefore be considered holistically.





# Knowledge

*We have brought people a Scripture- We have explained it on the basis of true knowledge- as guidance and mercy for those who believe.*<sup>272</sup>

The most impactful component of a person's presence in the space he will inhabit and traverse through in life is the knowledge he carries about any topic. It is that knowledge that helps him make sense of his world. Knowledge is an ascription; it is something made possible by the sensory faculties we have. Our experiences, backgrounds, upbringing, social circles, education each have an important bearing on a person's knowledge. Humans are invited to reflect on the signs of Allāh around them, and through those signs to make meaning out of creation, out of their own states and find their purpose in life. The most important realisation is to know that Allāh is the source of all knowledge. He is *al-Alīm* (the All-Knowing) and the servant of Allāh begins his journey on the path by acknowledging his own epistemic limitations.

## The Creation of Ādam ﷺ

When Allāh informed the angels that He will be placing His creation Ādam on earth, they asked,

“Will You place in it someone who will spread corruption there and shed blood while we glorify Your praises and proclaim Your holiness?”<sup>273</sup>

Allāh responded to the angels by reminding them of the limitations they have in knowledge,

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272 Al-Qur'ān, Chapter 7, Verse 52.

273 Al-Qur'ān, Chapter 2, Verse 30.

“Allāh responded, “I know what you do not know.”<sup>274</sup>

Allāh then taught Ādam the names of all things and questioned the angels if they were able to recount them. They replied,

“Glory be to You! We have no knowledge except what You have taught us. You are truly the All-Knowing, All-Wise.”<sup>275</sup>

This prayer and declaration by the angels is profound in underscoring, as Ibn Kathīr explains, that it is Allāh alone who knows the matters of the unseen. He alone knows the outcomes of all affairs and nobody knows anything except what Allāh has taught them. That Allāh is all-Knowing in all things, the Most-Wise in His creation and commands and His wisdom and justice is perfect.<sup>276</sup> Al-Ṭabarī notes that the angels negated knowledge from themselves, from any knowledge except what Allāh had taught them, and affirmed Allāh’s perfect knowledge and wisdom.<sup>277</sup> This is the beginning point for the *dā‘ī* – to associate all knowledge to Allāh, and to humble oneself through the same paradigm as the angels who attributed all goodness to Allāh, and recognised their own limitations.

The Prophet’s message is fundamentally associated with knowledge, that he is described “as a witness, and a deliverer of good news, and a warner<sup>278</sup> and a caller to the Way of Allāh by His command, and a beacon of light.”<sup>279</sup> His witnessing, delivering the message, verbalising and actualising the message that Allāh had endowed him with sets a beautiful example of learning from him, teaching his example and conveying the call for his companions and all who follow them in truth. It is this that the *dā‘ī* is entrusted with today, to equip himself with sacred knowledge and be part of the tremendous legacy of *da‘wah*.

The most important of all types of knowledge is to know that Allāh alone deserves worship,<sup>280</sup> and the greatest of all violations is to associate anything with him in worship.<sup>281</sup> What should accompany knowledge is a deep-seated reverence for Allāh. These two, *‘ilm* (knowledge) and *khushū‘* (submissiveness) are often paired together and such pairing demonstrates the necessity of spiritual growth from all acts of worship, including the

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274 Al-Qur’ān, Chapter 2, Verse 30.

275 Al-Qur’ān, Chapter 2, Verse 32.

276 Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Lebanon, Dār al-Ma‘rifa:2003), p. 62.

277 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 1 (Cairo, Dār al-Tawfiqiyya: 2004), p. 290.

278 Al-Qur’ān, Chapter 33, Verse 45.

279 Al-Qur’ān, Chapter 33, Verse 46.

280 Al-Qur’ān, Chapter 47, Verse 19.

281 Al-Qur’ān, Chapter 31, Verse 13.

seeking of knowledge. Allāh informs us in the Qurʾān that true knowledge should produce a greater sense of awe for its seeker:

“From among His servants, it is only those who know that fear Allāh.”<sup>282</sup>

The studying of Islam, therefore, is unlike studying any other subject since it requires both cognition and a sense of awareness - the active maintaining of a spiritual disposition. This symbiotic relationship between studying Islam and a seeking from that study a heightened sense of awe of Allāh - about one's relationship with Him, and about feeling a greater degree of responsibility on account of that knowledge - is key to attaining truth and certainty. As the 14<sup>th</sup> century theologian Ibn Taymiyya explains, “the *khushū*<sup>c</sup> of one's heart includes servitude to Allāh.”<sup>283</sup> His student Ibn Qayyim notes that the highest form of knowledge is perception of truth, highlighting the interplay between *ilm* (knowledge), serenity (*khushū*<sup>c</sup>) and *basīra* (perception).<sup>284</sup>

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282 Al-Qurʾān, Chapter 35, Verse 28.

283 Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Imān* (Beirut, Maktaba al-Islami), p. 26

284 Ibn Qayyim, *Madārij al-Sālikīn*, vol. 2 (Beirut, Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya: 2004), p. 356.

## Steps towards knowledge

1. Ask Allāh sincerely for knowledge that is beneficial. Duā' is always the starting point for the servant of Allāh. The Prophet ﷺ said, "Ask Allāh for beneficial knowledge and seek refuge in Allāh from knowledge without benefit."<sup>285</sup> And, "O Allāh, benefit me with what you have taught me, teach me what will benefit me, and increase my knowledge."<sup>286</sup>

The caller should equip himself with knowledge he might need, to be able to call others to Islam. He would need to primarily learn about Allāh, His names and attributes and how He has delivered messages to prophets and messengers throughout time with a single, unified message – that there is no deity worthy of worship besides Him. To know that the worst of all matters is *shirk* (polytheism) – i.e., when all of man's ability, strength, love, hope, admiration instead of being directed to the provider of these remarkable human faculties and abilities; is instead directed to someone or something else.

Though "Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim"<sup>287</sup> as the Prophet ﷺ taught, one should see the opportunity and capacity to learn as a divine favour conferred on mankind. The Prophet ﷺ said, "Whoever travels a path in search of knowledge, Allāh will make easy for him a path to Paradise."<sup>288</sup> Knowledge has immense benefits and blessings. Those who know and act upon their knowledge and transform their lives from it are not the same as those who do not, as Allāh asks in the Qur'an:

"Is one who is devoutly obedient during periods of the night, prostrating and standing [in prayer], fearing the Hereafter and hoping for the mercy of his Lord, [like one who does not]? Say, "Are those who know equal to those who do not know?" Only they will remember [who are] people of understanding."<sup>289</sup>

The verse draws together a range of important considerations for the Muslim and specifically here for the *dā'ī*. The verse begins by describing the positive effect and consequence of a person's pursuit of knowledge materialising in heartfelt devotion in worship. Ibn Kathīr describes how the verse underscores the great importance of worship in a state of *khushū'*

285 Ibn Mājah 3843

286 Al-Tirmidhī 3599

287 Ibn Mājah 224.

288 Muslim 2699.

289 Al-Qur'an, Chapter 39, Verse 9.

(stillness and reverence); how hope and fear are stimuli for the servant; the way that knowledge which leads to correct belief and action is not the same as those who, in ignorance, ascribe partners with Allāh and who are misguided and misguide others from His way.<sup>290</sup>

2. The most essential requirement for the seeker of knowledge is to act on what he knows. This is reflected at length in the previous section on Sincerity – about accompanying good words with righteous actions. The Qurʾān is replete with verses that stress on belief and accompanying belief with good actions; it also reprimands those who act contrary to what they advocate.<sup>291</sup> The Prophet ﷺ reminded us that upon us all is divine accountability for how we spent our lives, and that this includes a person’s acting on what he knew: “The feet of a servant will not move on the Day of Resurrection until he is asked about his lifetime and how he used it, his knowledge and how he acted upon it, his wealth and from where he acquired it and how he spent it, and his body and how he exhausted it.”<sup>292</sup>
3. The *dāʿī* should take the matter of acquiring knowledge seriously. This can be done through attending classes in one’s masjid for example, by sitting with and engaging with scholars and learned people. Every expertise requires specialised attention. If the *dāʿī* finds himself engaged with our Christian friends then he should read books around that field, listen to talks and debates wherein some of the core topics are discussed. It is likely that one will encounter atheists when giving *daʿwah*. Remember the lessons from this book – it is not always scientific reasoning that leads people away from belief but matters of the heart and a range of things that can cloud one’s *fiṭra* including becoming accustomed to sin, negative environments, social circles and one’s epistemology. There are conversely things that can uncloud a person’s internal state including accessing revelation, making sense of one’s purpose through experiences, rational arguments, reflection and introspection. Through experience, knowledge and wisdom the *dāʿī* will learn how best to communicate a message to them and pick up on things that might require a steering of the conversation away from what was once presumed. Remember that humans are not automated machines, but a complex creation. An example of

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290 Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Lebanon, Dār al-Maʿrifah:2003), p. 1369-1370.

291 Al-Qurʾān, Chapter 61, Verses 2-3.

292 Al-Tirmidhī 2417

how these contrasting approaches can be appreciated is by reflecting on the following verses.

“Or were they created by nothing, or are they their own creators?”<sup>293</sup>

“Or did they create the heavens and the earth? Rather, they are not certain.”<sup>294</sup>

Explaining these verses can be effective when speaking with atheists for example, but the Qur’ānic approach to an atheist can be just as effective when reminding him or her about Allāh’s divine blessings or the road to forgiveness in Islam, or the importance of living life with an objective moral compass – speaking about the beautiful name of Allāh, *al-Barr* (the source of all goodness) for example, or about the role of human conscience in Islam, or about the inevitability of death and the weight of our sayings and doings.

“So, know that there is no god worthy of worship except Allāh. And seek forgiveness for your shortcomings and for the sins of the believing men and women. For Allāh fully knows your movements and places of rest O people.”<sup>295</sup>

Sometimes, the humbling knowledge that whatever someone might profess to know is not equivalent to the vast amounts he will never come to know. This can awaken a conscience. Allāh informs us that many who disbelieve, express a haughtiness in their disbelief and opposition. Al-Ṭanṭāwī comments in light of the verse “The creation of the heavens and earth is greater than the creation of mankind, but most of the people do not know”<sup>296</sup> that there needs to be a humbling effect of knowledge through a realisation of the smallness in human beings.

4. Knowledge in *da‘wah* pertains to other things as well. Though one should be clear, with knowledge, in his expressions and words the *dā‘ī* must remember that an argument won or lost does not in itself determine the success of *da‘wah*. One’s objective is to deliver the message in the best way. It might be that one’s interlocutor is more eloquent and assertive in speech, but there are a few things to bear in mind.

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293 Al-Qur’ān, Chapter 52, Verse 35.

294 Al-Qur’ān, Chapter 52, Verse 36.

295 Al-Qur’ān, Chapter 47, Verse 19.

296 Al-Qur’ān, Chapter 40, Verse 57.

Firstly, one should know about the person(s) one is delivering the message to. He or she might be assertive and experienced in relaying the message of their own faith and may know particular lines of reasoning one is not familiar with. Remember that in order to engage in *da`wah*, knowledge is a requirement, as well as being familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of one's interlocutor. This might not always be possible, for example when standing at a *da`wah* table. In the event one is asked a question, or an issue is raised that you don't have the answer for, never feel compelled to answer. This can be problematic in many ways. Firstly, it is not permissible to speak without knowledge. This is severely warned against:

“Do not mix truth with falsehood or hide the truth knowingly.”<sup>297</sup>

“Do not tell a lie against me for whoever tells a lie against me (intentionally) then he will surely enter the Hell-fire.”<sup>298</sup>

Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd (may Allāh be pleased with him) said to us: ‘O people, he who knows about something, let him say it. And he who does not know should say: ‘Allāh knows best.’ It is part and parcel of knowledge that a man who does not know something should say: ‘Allāh knows best.’ Allāh said to His Prophet: {Say: ‘I do not ask you for it any payment, and I am not of the pretentious.’} [Sūrat Sād: 86]”<sup>299</sup>

One should not misrepresent the faith therefore, when feeling pressured to respond. It is far better to say something like, “I don't know the answer to that question but will surely investigate it. Why don't you meet me here next time (or leave an email address or phone number) and we can discuss it together.” This will also give you the opportunity to research more and become better acquainted for future encounters.

Secondly, the calls in the Qur'ān, ‘O my people’ denote a familiarity with one's people. A community is a complex mesh of all kinds of people, and just as there were shepherds in the Prophet's time there were also learned men of religious, poetry and other sciences. When the Prophet ﷺ instructed Mu`ādh ibn Jabal to go to Yemen he made him aware of who he would be coming across:

“Verily, you are coming to a people among the people of the Book, so call them to testify there is no God but Allāh and I am the Messenger of Allāh. If they accept that, then teach them that Allāh has obligated five prayers in each day and night. If they accept

297 Al-Qur'ān, Chapter 2, Verse 42.

298 Al-Bukhārī 106.

299 Al-Bukhārī ; Mishkāt al-Masābiḥ 272.

that, then teach them that Allāh has obligated charity to be taken from the rich and given to the poor. If they accept that, beware not to take from the best of their wealth. Be on guard from the supplication of the oppressed, for there is no barrier between it and Allāh.”<sup>300</sup>

Knowing that the people of Yemen are from the People of the Book makes a striking difference for Mu‘adh ibn Jabal to the approach he was reminded to take in communicating the message of Islam. Mu‘adh was not speaking with Makkan polytheists but with a people who share something of the universal message of Islam. It is the same divine voice speaking in both religious dispensations, though the Qur‘ān explains that Christians left much of what they had been commanded with: “We also took a pledge from those who say, ‘We are Christians,’ but they too forgot some of what they were told to remember...”<sup>301</sup>

Jesus and Muḥammad were God’s prophets. There is much that we share, our ontological and teleological and even eschatological premises are rooted in similar discourses. The Qur‘ān addresses our Christian friends primarily as fellow humans on this journey of life together with the rest of all of us, and specifically holds them to consider their own place in the historical legacies that precede them. In their worldview and our worldview is the great place of Jesus Christ, the Messiah. In Arabic it is ‘Isa ibn Maryam (Jesus, son of Mary) who is also identified as the Messiah in the Qur‘ān. Intertwined in his remarkable life are other important personages, namely his mother Maryam (Mary), her mother too, identified as the wife of ‘Imran; Zakariyya, John the Baptist (Yahya) and the *ḥawāriyyūn* (disciples) of Jesus. The Qur‘ān underlines a connectedness between all of the Prophets of God. One seamless message spelt out in the annals of differing demographics, nations and cultures. The Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ showed that closeness in his words: “Both in this world and in the Hereafter, I am the nearest of all the people to Jesus, the son of Mary. The prophets are paternal brothers; their mothers are different, but their religion is one.”<sup>302</sup>

At this junction we ought to remember that since the time of the Prophet ﷺ until today there are many misconceptions peddled about Islam by Christian missionaries. There are also areas of Islamic theology from the Qur‘ān and Prophetic tradition that counter such misconstructions that the *da‘i* should be familiar with in this regard.<sup>303</sup>

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300 Sahih Muslim, 19

301 Al-Qur‘ān. Chapter 5, verse 14.

302 Al-Bukhārī 3443

303 An earlier book I have written detailing popular misconstructions can be



In al-Nawawī's explanation of this tradition

“In this tradition is the command to give glad tidings of the favor of Allāh, his great reward, his plentiful gifts, and his vast mercy. And in this is the prohibition of alienating people by mentioning the fear of Allāh and types of warning alone without including glad tidings. And in this is bringing hearts together of those who are close to Islam and to avoid harshness with them, likewise with whoever among children near or at the age of maturity and who has repented from sin. All of them should be treated with kindness and gradually encouraged to perform acts of obedience little by little. Responsibility for the affairs of Islam should be done gradually.”<sup>304</sup>

One of the things Prophet Mūsā asked Allāh for was to give him clarity in his speech so that his message could be understood. The message directed to people should be clear and unambiguous. The Prophet ﷺ used to speak to people in a way they could understand his message, and was considerate of who they were and what their information points were. The Prophet ﷺ was the most eloquent of people. His speech was concise, yet comprehensive and full of meaning, impactful and insightful. He was gifted with *jawāmi' al-kalam*, “I have been sent with *Jawāmi' al-Kalam* – to use short expressions which carry wide meanings.”<sup>305</sup>

Imbuing the sentiments of affinity and fellow-feeling find an important place in the Islamic tradition, which are intrinsically linked to adopting a comprehensive empathy for others and this is crucial in *da'wah*. Empathy is a very important Islamic attribute. Understanding the life experiences and thus motivations of another can provide us with much clarity about another's way of thinking, insecurities, fears and joys.

Sometimes, the greatest cause of anxiety in a person's life can be related to a lack of company in life – family or friends, or just simply someone to talk with. Sometimes, a hug can be more meaningful than a word and an invitation to share pizza together more meaningful than a lengthy conversation. The *dā'ī* should always remember that it is more than a person's

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consulted since it is likely, when speaking with Christians, that one will encounter similar questions or contentions. See: Osman Latiff, *Divine Perfection: Christianity and Islam on Sin and Salvation* (Sapience Institute, 2022).

304 Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 1732.

305 Al-Tirmidhī 1553.

mind that is processing information but his or her heart that is also communicating a message. When the Prophet ﷺ arrived back into Makkah after years of estrangement and hostility between him and the Makkans, Abū Bakr went to bring his father to finally embrace Islam at the hands of the Prophet. Upon seeing Abū Bakr bringing his elderly father out, the Prophet said, “If only you left the elderly man in his home so I could have gone to see him instead.” When he was brought, the Prophet ﷺ “sat him down, wiped over his chest (to calm him) and invited him to accept Islam.” He thereafter accepted.<sup>306</sup>

Abū al-Tufayl reported: ‘Ali ibn Abī Tālib, may Allāh be pleased with him, said, “Speak to people only according to their level of knowledge. Would you like for Allāh and His Messenger to be denied?”<sup>307</sup>

Prophet Ibrahīm challenged his people by drawing attention to celestial objects that others had turned to for worship. He was using something familiar to his people and using ‘his’ knowledge of Allāh being *al-Hayy*, the One who has perfect life and gives life, and who is not in need of anything and nor tires, is Self-Subsisting *and al-Qayyūm*, the One who provides His creation with all they need, the Self-Sustaining. Since Allāh is *al-Hayy* and *al-Qayyūm* it would mean that nothing else could be. To Him is due the primal origin of all things and He is the Originator without a previous example. Allāh describes in the Qur’ān:

“And remember when Abraham said to his father, Āzar, “Do you take idols as gods? It is clear to me that you and your people are entirely misguided.”<sup>308</sup>

“We also showed Abraham the wonders of the heavens and the earth, so he would be sure in faith.”<sup>309</sup>

“When the night grew dark upon him, he saw a star and said, “This is my Lord!” But when it set, he said, “I do not love things that set.”<sup>310</sup>

“Then when he saw the moon rising, he said, “This one is my Lord!” But when it disappeared, he said, “If my Lord does not guide me, I will certainly be one of the misguided people.”<sup>311</sup>

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306 Ibn Hishām, *Sīra al-Nabawiyya* vol. 5, p. 405.

307 Al-Bukhārī 127.

308 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 6, verse 74.

309 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 6, verse 75.

310 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 6, verse 76.

311 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 6, verse 77.

“Then when he saw the sun shining, he said, “This must be my Lord—it is the greatest!” But again when it set, he declared, “O my people! I totally reject whatever you associate with Allāh in worship.”<sup>312</sup>

“I have turned my face towards the One Who has originated the heavens and the earth—being upright—and I am not one of the polytheists.”<sup>313</sup>

Al-Ṭabarī explains that some considered Prophet Ibrāhīm’s words as a rhetorical questioning, meaning he was not declaring a belief in those entities but instead asking ‘how can the star, moon and sun be our gods?’<sup>314</sup> Prophet Ibrāhīm juxtaposes his drawing attention to the temporalities of each of those celestial objects with a declarative centred on Allāh as the only true God, the Originator and Sustainer of all. Here it is edifying for the *dā‘ī* to appreciate the element of contrasting motifs in dialogue. By highlighting what is not worthy of worship first is in line with the Qur’ānic outline; the *kalima* is an illustration of first negating all that runs counter to the universal truth of monotheism. The *dā‘ī* can consequently speak about what is worshipped other than Allāh in our world – persons, idols, ideas - and then highlight the fallacy of worshipping anything other than God alone - to emphasise that all of man’s potential is purposed to revere and worship only Him. In the example of Prophet Ibrāhīm we see how he first drew attention to the deviation before asserting that his father and people were in error. Had he begun by declaring how astray his people were, and then explained why, perhaps it would not have had the same effect.

5. People today believe in and follow all sorts of things, and so for the *dā‘ī* to outline the inherent problem in such false beliefs is more effective than criticising a person for his or her belief. Whenever a person feels personally affronted the *nafs* is quick to react and defend itself. This is natural instinct. A good example is seen in Sūrah Yūsuf at the point of reconciliation between him and his brothers. Prophet Yūsuf had of course faced years in a new land and away from his father; his brothers had committed great injustice against him and had consecutively lied to their father about their brother Yūsuf; he faced many tests during his life from the point of being abandoned in a well by his envious brothers.

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312 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 6, verse 78.

313 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 6, verse 78.

314 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 7 (Cairo, Dār al-Tawfiqiyya: 2004), p. 263.

Rather than pronounce to them his patience and strength during those years which could very easily instil in them a further envy and grudge for their brother, Prophet Yūsuf instead kept things neutral between himself and his brothers. The Qur’ānic verse is a beautiful illustration of how that was done:

“They replied in shock, “Are you really Joseph?” He said, “I am Joseph, and here is my brother Benjamin! Allāh has truly been gracious to us. Surely whoever is mindful of Allāh and patient, then certainly Allāh never discounts the reward of the good-doers.”<sup>315</sup>

The key word here is ‘whoever’. This keeps things neutral. The *dā‘ī* should incorporate this. It opens a space of possibility which incorporates the one you are communicating with. Of course, it was Yusuf who exhibited the best of piety and patience in his ordeal and the verse in its generality encompasses any of the believers who has *taqwa* and patience, “avoids doing what Allāh has prohibited and is patient in bearing pain and calamity and in complying with the commands.”<sup>316</sup> This is a good point for the *dā‘ī* to reflect on and use in his or her *da‘wah*, to open a space of understanding that reflects the all-encompassing approach of calling others to Allāh. For example, there are obvious things we can verbalise like “Whoever says La ilaha illAllāh...” or “Whoever turns back to God and sincerely repents...” The idea is to show that Islam is for all people, regardless of their current states. Everyone is in need of guidance and of Allāh’s divine mercy and grace.

Another example of clarity in the message is that set by the companion Rabī‘ ibn ‘Āmir in his *da‘wah* to the commander of the army of Persia, Rustum Farrokhzād, which is instructive for what it reveals of clarity of message and courage. In the encounter there is a representation of wealth and pomp set against simplicity of person; yet offset by profundity of message. Rabī‘ ibn ‘Āmir was sent by Sa‘d ibn abī Waqqāṣ, the leader of the Muslim army. When Rustum permitted Rabī‘ to enter his court, Rabī‘ chose to sit on the floor and not on the pillows laced with gold that adorned Rustum’s court. When questioned why Rabī‘ chose to sit on the floor, his replied “We do not like to sit on your adornment.” The words and behaviour of Rabī‘ are edifying in offsetting a culture towards which the Prophet ﷺ showed aversion. The Prophet always used to sit at the same level of his companions and also dress the same. While this may not indicate a generic response applicable to every situation, there is wisdom in Rabī‘’s mannerism in the face

315 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 12, verse 90.

316 Al-Sa‘dī, *Tafseer al-Sa‘dī* (Juz’ 13-15) (Riyadh, International Islamic Publishing House: 2018), p. 54.

of a haughty enemy. The *dā'i* does not need to show an equivocation with wealth and power to demonstrate the excellence of Islam. Rabī's character and message demonstrated a more potent point about the temporality of earthly kingdoms. Rabī's opening words were the following,

لله ابتعثنا لنخرج من شاء من عبادة العباد إلى عبادة الله، ومن ضيق الدنيا إلى سعتها، ومن جور الأديان إلى عدل الإسلام

“Allāh has sent us to take the servants out from the worship of the servants to the worship of the Lord of the servants, and from the injustice of religions to the justice of Islam, and from the narrowness of the world to the spaciousness of this world and the Hereafter.”

Rabī ibn 'Āmir's juxtaposing of “servants” and “Lord”; “injustice” with “justice”; “narrowness” with “spaciousness”, and “world” with “hereafter” presents a clear, articulate message with rhetorical skill. His purpose was to draw on the disparity with the way of life of a Muslim, the reality of true wealth and the way Islam takes people out from error and restriction – both in this life and the next. What thereafter transpires is for Rustum to question Rabī ibn 'Āmir, “Are you their master?” Rabī replied, “No, I am a man from the army, but our lower rank can vouch for our higher one.”

The words of Rabī are very pertinent here and we can extract many lessons as *du'āt*. The first is how the *dā'i* must strive to overcome his or her ego. Rabī was not of the position of his leaders but that did not prevent him from being successful in delivering the message. He was keen to assert that the restrictions that might exist in the strata of Persian socio-cultural society do not exist with Muslims. Rabī attempted to couch in his words a feeling of equalness in the frame of Muslim brotherhood. Moreover, his words suggest that if the least among them says a word he must fulfil it as anyone from a higher rank would.<sup>317</sup>

The delegation sent by Sa'd ibn abī Waqqāṣ was headed by Mughīra bin Shu'ba, and he too communicated effective words to Rustum. Taken aback by the great pomp and lavishness on display, Mughīra said:

“We heard that you were a sagacious people but now I see that none is more block-headed than you. We Arabs do not treat one another as slaves. There is no difference among us. We are equal. I presumed that you did not treat one another as slaves. However,

317 Al-Ṭabarī, *History of al-Ṭabarī* vol. 3, pp. 33-40.

I have understood now that your domination will not continue and that you will be defeated in the end. For, a nation that is based on such an unjust foundation cannot live.”<sup>318</sup>

Rabīʿ Ibnʿ Amir and Mughira bin Shuʿba both, through their *daʿwah*, left a strong impression on the lower classes among the Persians that were present. On hearing that Islam teaches good treatment of all and that in the eyes of God all are equal except by the scale of one’s piety, it allowed the Muslims to make their call relevant to the socio-cultural context of their peoples.

In the Prophet Muḥammad’s ﷺ last sermon during his Hajj in the tenth year of Hijra, he made clear that all people are equal irrespective of ethnicity or colour and that the only thing that differentiates them is their acknowledgement, belief, fear, trust and love of Him (*taqwa*). It is this that would motivate them to good actions and make them cognisant of their personal and social responsibilities. The Prophet ﷺ declared “There is no superiority for an Arab over a non-Arab and for a non-Arab over an Arab; or for white over the black or for the black over the white except in piety. Verily the noblest among you is he/she who is the most pious.”<sup>319</sup>

Important verses for the *dāʿī* to learn and relay in this context are the following:

“People, We created you all from a single man and a single woman, and made you into races and tribes so that you should recognise one another. In God’s eyes, the most honoured of you are the ones most mindful of Him: God is all knowing, all aware.”<sup>320</sup>

As well as,

“Another of His signs is the creation of the heavens and earth, and the diversity of your languages and colours. There truly are signs in this for those who know.”<sup>321</sup>

Once the Prophet’s companion Abu Dharr insulted Bilāl with reference to his mother, saying, “O son of a black woman!” Bilāl went to the Prophet ﷺ, and he told him what he said. The Prophet became angry by what he heard. Later, Abu Dharr came to visit the Prophet, but he was unaware of what Bilāl told him. The Prophet ﷺ turned away from him and Abu Dharr asked, “O Messenger of Allāh, have you turned away because of something you have

318 Al-Ṭabarī, *History of al-Ṭabarī* vol. 2, pp. 108-109.

319 Aḥmad 22978.

320 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 49, verse 13.

321 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 39, verse 22.

been told?” The Prophet ﷺ said, “Have you insulted Bilāl by his mother? By the One who revealed the Book to Muḥammad, no one is better than another except by righteous deeds.”<sup>322</sup>

The incident of Rabīʿ ibn ʿĀmir and Mughīrah bin Shuʿba with Rustum provides the *dāʿī* with insightful examples relating to clarity of message, understanding one’s interlocutor, understanding the way social conventions in a place opens up spaces for dialogue about the way Islam responds and reacts to those conventions; *daʿwah* related to the core beliefs of Islam as well as to matters of social justice.

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322 Shuʿab al-Imān 4760; see Osman Latiff, *On Being Human: How Islam addresses othering, dehumanisation and empathy* (Sapience Institute, 2020), pp. 83-84.

## KNOWLEDGE: CASE STUDIES

What if somebody presents a specific point from the Qurʾān that you do not know about. How do you respond?

The role of the *dāʿī* is to communicate an effective message to people so that their minds and hearts are awakened. Sometimes this can become difficult if the one you are communicated with is insisting on a small detail whilst ignoring the broader context and point. The *dāʿī* should try and redirect the conversation to some main parameters – belief in God, proof of the prophethood of Muḥammad ﷺ, authenticity of the Qurʾān as the word of Allah, the need for Islam. These are the main areas around which conversation should centre. There are of course many points which emerge from them and they can be discussed with knowledge such as Islamic history or Islam’s social, political, economic codes, but even these should be framed around reflecting the correctness and truth of the Islamic position vis-à-vis the main parameters mentioned above.

*Is it a sign of weakness to admit to not knowing something in a conversation?*

The Muslim needs to always remember that it is Allah alone who knows all things, that “above everyone who is endowed with knowledge there is One who knows all.”<sup>323</sup> The Prophet’s cousin and son-in-law ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib said, “When you are asked about what you do not know...you say: Allah knows best.”<sup>324</sup> This, he also said, is from knowledge, i.e. to admit what you don’t know and to know that Allah truly knows. There is therefore nothing wrong in saying you do not know about something if unsure. It is a sign of a believer’s honesty and integrity, rather than making false claims and speaking about Allah without knowledge:

“Say, “My Lord has only forbidden immoralities - what is apparent of them and what is concealed - and sin, and oppression without right, and that you associate with Allah that for which He has not sent down authority, and that you say about Allah that which you do not know.”<sup>325</sup>

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323 Al-Qurʾān, Chapter 12, Verse 76.

324 Al-Dārimī 183

325 Al-Qurʾān, Chapter 7, Verse 33.



The *dāʿī* should therefore be careful in this regard. At the same time, however, one should not conceal what one does know. Another statement of the Prophet's companion, 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib reads, "There is no good in silence when it comes to knowledge, just as there is no good in speaking when it comes to ignorance."<sup>326</sup>

The most important point to remember is to focus on conveying what you do know, and this is ultimately more significant in the context of *daʿwah*. The principal knowledge for mankind to receive is that none has the right to be worshipped besides Allah: "Know, therefore, that there is no god but Allah..."<sup>327</sup> The essential role of the *dāʿī* is to focus on this knowledge.

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326 Al-Razi, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* 2:30

327 Al-Qur'ān, Chapter 47, Verse 19.



## Courage

*“When Moses came to them, Pharaoh said to him, “I really think that you, O Moses, are bewitched.”<sup>328</sup>*

*“Moses replied, “You know well that none has sent these signs down except the Lord of the heavens and the earth as insights. And I really think that you, O Pharaoh, are doomed.”<sup>329</sup>*

Every point of *da‘wah* involves some courage. Courage is the fortitude of the heart, and not to become demoralised in fight, or in the presence of violence and danger. Speaking with others about Islam requires some strength of heart and it is required for the *da‘i* to always present Islam with confidence, and to place his trust in Allah. Courage is the strength of one’s heart in difficulty, and it is a moderate way between the negative traits of rage at one extreme and cowardice at the other.

The interplay between the Pharaoh’s words cited above, “I really think that you, O Moses, are bewitched”<sup>330</sup> and Prophet Mūsā’s words, “And I really think that you, O Pharaoh, are doomed”<sup>331</sup> is an example of fortitude in Prophet Mūsā’s character. Even though Allāh had set the paradigm to speak with the pharaoh with softness – “And speak to him with gentle speech that perhaps he may be reminded or fear [Allāh]”<sup>332</sup> – the situation at that point demanded that Mūsā show a firmer approach with his antagonist.

The encounter between Prophet Mūsā and the Pharaoh is the most repeated narrative in the Qur’an, mentioned largely in surahs revealed in Makkah but also in some revealed in Madina. The early community of

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328 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 17, verse 101.

329 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 17, verse 102.

330 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 17, verse 101.

331 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 17, verse 102.

332 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 20, verse 44.

Muslims were faced with conveying the message to a people mostly hostile to their presence and the message and details of the struggle between Prophet Mūsā and the Pharaoh were very instructive and empowering for the small community of believers. Examples like that of Bilāl ibn Rabāḥ who insisted on conveying his belief in the Oneness of God even under the severity of persecution or of Ibn Mas‘ūd who too proclaimed the message openly to be met with harsh opposition or of Nuṣaybah bint Ka‘b who showed immense courage in the Battle of Uḥud, or other persons in the Qur‘ān who declared their faith openly only to be met with hostility. Each reflects a remarkable spirit of fortitude. Remember, that when such individuals relied upon Allāh, their courage took on an even greater form, which enabled them to take on bigger tasks.

A very significant narration that draws on themes of courage and patience, and future expectations is found in the narration of Khabbāb ibn al-Aratt, who reported: “We complained to the Messenger of Allāh (may Allāh’s peace and blessings be upon him) while he was lying in the shade of the Ka‘bah, placing his cloak under his head. We said: “Will you not supplicate for our victory (over our opponents)? Will you not invoke Allāh for us?” He replied: “Among those who came before you, a man would be seized and held in a pit dug for him in the ground, and he would be sawed into two halves from his head, and his flesh would be torn away from his bones with iron combs, and none of this would turn him away from his religion. By Allāh, Allāh will bring this matter (Islam) to its completion until the traveller will walk from Sana‘a to Hadramaut fearing none except Allāh and the wolf for his sheep, but you are rushing things.” In another narration: “Having made a pillow from his cloak, and we had faced much persecution from the polytheists.”<sup>333</sup> The believers were tested to such a point that they questioned the Prophet about his supplications for them. The prophetic reply was focused on informing them of a pre-narrative, of a circumstance that pre-dated them but linked them in the struggle of faith, of belief, of sacrifice and of future promises. The Prophet informed his companions that others too have struggled on account of their faith and the struggle was intense but “none of this would turn him away from his religion.”<sup>334</sup> The Prophet taught his companions to be assertive and strong in the face of adversity, challenges and obstacles, and by being reminded about others who suffered it engrained in the companions a stronger sense of patience in dealing with what faced them.

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333 Bukhārī, 3612

334 Bukhārī, 3612

## The Courage of the Messengers

The most courageous person in their company was the Prophet ﷺ and he was the inspiration behind the companions' bravery. The most remarkable spirit of courage was exhibited by the Prophet himself. A protecting shepherd unto his community his leadership was one of fortitude and great hope, bearing an unflinching trust in the promise of Allāh. The Prophet's companion Anas, may Allāh be pleased with him, confirmed the bravery of the Prophet ﷺ with an incident that happened to the people of Madina. One night, he describes, they were terrified when they heard a loud noise, so they set out to know the cause of it. On their way, they were met by the Prophet ﷺ, who was riding a horse, carrying his sword, ready to defend the people against any intruders. He comforted the people of Madina, saying: "Don't be afraid, don't be afraid."<sup>335</sup>

Allāh describes the believers in terms that denote their Imān based realisation that all activity needs to be based on their belief and conviction in Allāh alone. It is for Him that they are called upon to deliver His message and for whose sake they face what might confront them in the world:

"[Allāh praises] those who convey the messages of Allāh and fear Him and do not fear anyone but Allāh. And sufficient is Allāh as Accountant."<sup>336</sup>

The Prophet's cousin 'Alī narrates,

"I remember the day of Badr, when we were seeking shelter with the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ and he was the closest of us to the enemy and the most courageous of the people on that day."<sup>337</sup>

Sometimes, a caller to Islam can be rebuked by others for what they might detect as a noticeable change in him or her that goes against their own social expectations of what goodness or success is. The *da'ī* can be, in some contexts and circumstances, othered and stereotyped. Social paradigms can sometimes mean that others adapt and conform to such paradigms as a matter of habit and all that is set against the *da'ī* instead is ridiculed or criticised in various media outlets. A call to monotheism, or belief in and following of the last Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ can appear odd to some who position that as a choice over and above the good they believe society has to offer. In some cases, like a Muslim woman donning a *hijab* or a

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335 Bukhārī, Adab, 39

336 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 33, verse 39.

337 Aḥmad 654

Muslim man growing a beard, some acts can seem abnormal to the social expectations people might expect of others around them. In the Qur'anic example of Prophet Ṣāliḥ, we find the following:

“They argued, “O Ṣāliḥ! We truly had high hopes in you before this. How dare you forbid us to worship what our forefathers had worshipped? We are certainly in alarming doubt about what you are inviting us to.”<sup>338</sup>

Al-Ṭabarī explains, “we thought you would be a leader among us before all of this.”<sup>339</sup> Ibn Kathīr relates how they would condescendingly remark, “We had hope in your intelligence before you began to say these things.”<sup>340</sup> The *da‘ī* should be prepared for such criticism. Islam challenges the complex social, economic, political, and psychological problems mankind is faced with. It is only normal that there will be opposition at some level. We should remember what Warāqah Ibn Nawfal said to the Prophet ﷺ when he visited him with his wife Khadijah (may Allāh be pleased with her) to inform him about what happened to him in the Cave of Hira with the Angel Jibrīl:

“No one has ever come with the like of that which you came with except that he is made an enemy of”<sup>341</sup>

Prophet Ṣāliḥ’s response to his people was clear and unapologetic. Rather than challenging their words – “we truly had high hopes in you before this” – Ṣāliḥ puts forward a stronger case for them to consider, one that juxtaposes the ambiguous “high hopes in you” declarative with the clear and specific:

“O my people, have you considered: if I should be upon clear evidence from my Lord and He has given me mercy from Himself, who would protect me from Allāh if I disobeyed Him? So you would not increase me except in loss.”<sup>342</sup>

Ṣāliḥ calls on his people to consider the proofs. The *da‘ī* should be prepared to present evidences for his belief and be assertive in demonstrating the truth of his position. The words of Prophet Ibrāhīm were similar,

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338 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 11, verse 62.

339 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 12 (Cairo, Dār al-Tawfiqiyya: 2004), p. 67.

340 Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Lebanon, Dār al-Ma‘rifa:2003), p. 793.

341 Al-Bukhārī 4953.

342 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 11, verse 63.

“O dear father! I have certainly received some knowledge which you have not received, so follow me and I will guide you to the Straight Path.”<sup>343</sup>

Al-Ṭabarī explains that Ṣāliḥ’s words “He has given me (*raḥma*) mercy from Himself” means “prophethood, wisdom and submission to His will.”<sup>344</sup> The *da‘ī* can use *raḥma* in a broader context, and it is important to identify one’s belief and adoption of faith like that. If God is the most loving, and His love is greater than the greatest worldly love we have experienced, this should instil in us a deeper love for God. The heartfelt advice Prophet Ibrahim imparted unto his father underscores the love and mercy focus in his efforts to try and persuade his father to leave off idol-worshipping and turn his reverence and devotion to the One God, the Most Merciful - emphasised through repetition in Prophet Ibrahim’s directives:

“O dear father! Do not worship Satan. Surely Satan is ever rebellious against the Most Compassionate.”<sup>345</sup>

“O dear father! I truly fear that you will be touched by a torment from the Most Compassionate, and become Satan’s companion in Hell”<sup>346</sup>

Similarly, Maryam, the mother of Jesus, when she was alone in her chamber and visited by the angel who brought her the good news that she would come to give birth to Jesus, was alarmed by what she assumed was an intruder. “She said, ‘I seek the Lord of Mercy’s protection against you: if you have any fear of Him.’”<sup>347</sup> The specific seeking refuge in the “Most Merciful” is very relevant here in light of God’s love, resonating with hope even for the supposed ‘intruder’.

## Steps towards courage

1. One step is to acknowledge one’s apprehension and turn to Allāh for aid. Prophet Mūsā’s supplication is a good reflection of seeking of strength and assistance in the delivering of his message. Duā’ therefore is a vital part of a Muslim’s life and the *dā‘ī* should learn

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343 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 19, verse 43.

344 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 12 (Cairo, Dār al-Tawfiqiyya: 2004), p. 68.

345 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 19, verse 44.

346 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 19, verse 45.

347 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 19, verse 18.

and recite his morning and evening *adhkār*, supplicate to Allāh especially whilst in prostration and ask for strength, will-power and courage to be used in the best of ways, at the right times.

2. Lacking courage when needed can result in stagnation, a failure to achieve one's goals and a becoming accustomed to indifference when truth should be spoken or when someone should be engaged with. The Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ said, "Indeed, fear of people should not prevent a man from speaking the truth, if he knows it." Then Abu Sa'eed wept and said: "By Allāh, we have seen things that made us scared (and we did not speak up)."<sup>348</sup>
3. Courage is having *tawakkul*, trust in Allāh. The Qur'ānic focus is on remembering that the believer is not alone in his or her noble pursuits of carrying the message forward to others. Allāh is in the aid and support of those who support His religion: "O believers! If you stand up for Allāh, He will help you and make your steps firm."<sup>349</sup> This should give the believer a great sense of confidence knowing that he is not alone but that his affairs are guided and even if there are setbacks the end result is always for the people of belief and piety,

"Moses reassured his people, "Seek Allāh's help and be patient. Indeed, the earth belongs to Allāh alone. He grants it to whoever He chooses of His servants. The ultimate outcome belongs only to the righteous."<sup>350</sup>

For the *dā'ī* therefore to be courageous, he or she must place their full trust in Allāh. Remember the prophets in their difficult moments. Remember the Prophet ﷺ at Tā'if, or Prophet Nūḥ when people mocked and rejected him. By trusting in Allāh and by depending upon Him and trusting in His promise, and by thinking favourably of Him, the believer will experience contentment and strength in his heart. This was the crucial component of success for all the prophets of Allāh and all those who followed them in truth. Prophet Mūsā's people, when faced by the sea ahead of them and the legions of the Pharaoh behind them, cried out: "When the two groups came face to face, the companions of Moses cried out, "We are overtaken for sure."<sup>351</sup> Prophet Mūsā's reply however set forth a new paradigm of success –

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348 Ibn Mājah 4007

349 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 47, verse 7.

350 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 7, verse 128.

351 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 25, verse 61.



of having full trust in Allāh despite the odds. “He replied: Moses reassured them, “Absolutely not! My Lord is certainly with me—He will guide me.”<sup>352</sup>

4. In light of the prophetic example of Prophet Mūsā above, the *dā'ī* should remember his supplication at another testing time - when his townsfolk were preparing to throw him in a fire. Al-Bukhārī reports, that (حَسْبُنَا اللَّهُ وَنِعْمَ الْوَكِيلُ) (Allāh is Sufficient for us and He Is the Best Disposer of affairs) was said by Prophet Ibrāhīm when he was thrown into the fire; and it was said by the Prophet ﷺ when they (i.e. hypocrites) said, “A great army is gathering against you, therefore, fear them,” but it only increased their faith and they said: “Allāh is Sufficient for us, and He is the Best Disposer (of affairs, for us).” (3.173)<sup>353</sup>
5. Courage is developed through courageous acts, even small ones. These acts can differ person to person. Perhaps there is something one has always been reluctant to do, like trying something new such as swimming or working out. Maybe you have been hesitant to contact a person you have had a falling out with and can now use the occasion to make amends with that person. It takes a strong heart to subdue one's ego and take the first step. By overcoming these kinds of things in life we develop a greater confidence bearing. Sometimes it is from wisdom to display strength, even symbolically, in the face of unrelenting and antagonistic detractors. The *dā'ī* should not be afraid in the face of such people but address his arguments confidently. He should confidently assert the truth and if he is confronted with something he is not sure about, he should not be afraid of simply saying something like, ‘there is an answer to your question but I am not fully aware, so please return next week and I can talk to you about it’. In the face of antagonists sometimes even symbolic displays of strength can be meaningful. On his return to Makkah to perform the pilgrimage, the Prophet ﷺ “observed Sā'ī and walked quickly round the House (Ka'ba) with a view to showing his strength to the polytheists.”<sup>354</sup> Another example that illustrates this point is reflected in the Prophet's character in his encounter with the polytheists following the Battle of Uḥud. He called his companion Bilāl to summon the believers to prepare themselves but “none who had not taken part in the fighting of the preceding

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352 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 25, verse 62.

353 Al-Bukhārī 4563

354 Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 1266b

days, should come out.”<sup>355</sup> This display of strength even though the Muslims had suffered great losses in the Battle of Uhud – the Prophet himself being injured, the martyrdom of the prophet’s uncle Ḥamza, of his companion Muṣ‘ab ibn ‘Umayr, and many other – not only galvanised their spirit but also reflected greater strength in the Muslim camp even though they had suffered such losses.

6. Focus on the cause you are representing. The matter is not one of health or sickness, or of life and death, but of eternal salvation and eternal damnation. The love, empathy and care you show to this cause, in ensuring that a message is well delivered is of the utmost consequence. The believer who had initially hidden his faith and then spoke openly in fact iterated that: “And, O my people, how is it that I summon you to salvation, while you summon me to the fire.”<sup>356</sup>
7. In adopting a quality of courage in *da‘wah* it is vital to face one’s fears. Remember that delivering a message unto others in many ways upsets the status quo – this could be with regards to someone’s living habits, becoming accustomed to sin and bad practices, and worst of all, to a life without God – thinking and feeling as though life with Islam is too much of a burden, and simply living a life without the rules is an easier route. Of course, none of this is actually true and people will only sink further into misery and self-alienation the more distant they are from fulfilling their real purpose in life. Everything else is a temporary side attraction. But facing one’s fears to communicate a message should not mean that one is bound to face resistance. Most often this is not the case. Remember, you do not have to tell people how troubled their life will become without Islam but instead how enriched, complete and satisfying it will become with Islam.

This approach can be more effective because it avoids the presuppositions about another person for which one’s interlocutor might become defensive. Instead, to describe the logical and spiritually uplifting belief in One God as opposed to numerous deities, or the spiritual satisfaction one finds in the daily prayers or in fasting can be a better way of communicating the message. In this vein, remember that you do not need to present yourself as perfect. Not only because you are not, but because if one falls down a slippery slope of ‘I am better than you...because’ we can end up in a needless

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355 Ibn Sa‘d, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr*, vol. 2, pp. 57-59.

356 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 40, verse 41.

descent away from what matters most in the discussion. Showing courage does not mean showing yourself to be physically stronger or louder than an interlocutor. Physical strength can have its place – sometimes even showing physical strength can communicate a strong message – “Allāh’s Messenger observed *Sā‘ī* and walked quickly round the House with a view to showing his strength to the polytheists.”<sup>357</sup> – at other times courage can mean desisting and pulling back from a situation. The Prophet ﷺ is reported to have said.

“The strong are not the best wrestlers. Verily, the strong are only those who control themselves when they are angry”<sup>358</sup>

Controlling one’s anger is therefore a sign of a person’s strength and discipline. It is better to sometimes move away from a conversation turning negative than to pursue for the sake of engaging. It is better to leave on equitable terms in such a situation so that a future discussion can be had.

Our life as Muslims is closely intertwined with the great struggles of so many archetypal individuals, from Prophets, their followers, men and women, young and old, scholars and farmers – each of whom exhibited a remarkable patience and courage in their disseminating of the true message of Allāh. Remembering the journeys and struggles of such pioneers of faith is a good way of reminding the *dā‘ī* of the legacy to which he or she belongs and this imbues a sense of inner strength and courage. One marvels for example at the courage of the woman, the hairdresser of his daughter, who declared brazenly to Fir‘own: ‘Yes, my Lord and your Lord is Allāh’<sup>359</sup> or by the man who came running, described in Sūrah Yāsīn: “I believe in your Lord, so listen to me”<sup>360</sup> or by the Prophet’s companion Bilāl ibn Rabāḥ when “then they gave him to the children, who took him around in the streets of Makkah whilst he was saying, *Aḥad, Aḥad* (One, One).”<sup>361</sup>

Patience and courage are strongly intertwined. In the examples mentioned above about the man in Sūrah Yāsīn or of any of the others, the requirement to hold one’s ground is what exemplifies courage in those examples. Courage is to fortify oneself with the strength of Imān and *tawakkul* and to realise that the forgoing of ease for that moment will result in a greater good. But courage is also staying in control. Like the Prophet said, it is to control oneself when angry.<sup>362</sup> This is crucial in *da‘wah* when

357 Muslim 1266b

358 Al-Bukhārī 6114

359 Aḥmad 1/309

360 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 36, verse 25.

361 Ibn Mājah 150

362 Al-Bukhārī 6114

faced with negative feedback or disagreements. Not acting impulsively and weighing up one's response in such a situation is crucial so as not to say or do something that runs counter to the message you are intending to convey.

Remember that the most that can ever happen is that a person loses his life in the pursuit of conveying the message. The example here of the man who came running in Sūrah Yāsīn reflects that, and the verses here remind believers that if that ever were to happen, in spite of safeguarding and preventative measures, to meet one's death as a martyr is the pinnacle of courage and the heavenly honour afforded such a person is a tremendous reward. The *dā'ī* should thus remember that the work he or she is engaged in is a work of the greatest of people who went through different types of tests – enduring ridicule, insults, othering, physical violence which were all mechanisms utilised by those who opposed the message. The advice Luqmān gave to his son is fitting here since he reminded him to “encourage what is good and forbid what is evil, and endure patiently whatever befalls you.”<sup>363</sup> Al-Qurṭubī presses on the advice Luqmān imparts to his son as stressing on the need to ensure one is diligently performing the deeds one might call others to – to abide by a sincerity in belief and conduct. Also, that in changing evil one would expect some difficulty in the process since recipients can be stubborn or prone to responding with insult and violence. Al-Qurṭubī explains that in the changing of an evil one is required to be patient over what might befall, that such a person might have to endure hurt sometimes. He cites Ibn Abbas: “from the truth of Imān is patience in adversity.”<sup>364</sup>

Patience (*ṣabr*) mentioned over seventy times in the Qur'ān in different contexts and in relation to different situations, is the hallmark of the believer. The Qur'ān asserts that believers will face tests in life, some as a consequence of their faith and others in relation to the ongoings of life. It reminds the faithful that through patience there is hope. The various Qur'ānic narratives of prophets each describe situations of hardship which they were able to overcome, and one of the essential components of their success was to abide by patience, i.e., in knowing that life is purposed to be a test, that with every difficulty Allāh expiates and strengthens and in knowing that with patience there would soon enough be a deliverance.

Holding back, restraint, is how patience is understood - as a holding back of sin and negative traits for the sake of Allāh, and at other times to endure difficulties without resorting to transgressions in word or action.

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363 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 31, verse 17.

364 Al-Qurtubī, *Mukhtaṣar Tafṣīr al-Qurṭubī*, vol. 3 (Beirut, Dār al-kutub al-‘ilmiyya: 2001), p. 432.

The Prophet is reported to have said, “There is no gift that is better and more comprehensive than patience.”<sup>365</sup> Patience in in three main types: Patience in continuing to worship Allāh and adhere to His commands; patience in avoiding sins, and patience with the decree of Allāh and in facing calamities. The most testing of these is to hold back against sins but the other two also require a fortitude of character and righteousness. At four places in the Qur’ān, in surahs Ṭāha, Ṣād, Qāf and al-Muzammil, the Prophet is instructed to “bear with patience whatever they may say.”<sup>366</sup> These surahs were all revealed in Makkah when the hostility against Islam and the believers was at its highest. The instruction to abide by patience in the face of Makkan aggression enabled the believers to strengthen through belief and worship. The complementing instructions in each of the verses is also very telling:

“...and exalt [Allāh] with praise of your Lord before the rising of the sun and before its setting; and during periods of the night [exalt Him] and at the ends of the day, that you may be satisfied.”<sup>367</sup>

“...and remember Our servant, David, the possessor of strength; indeed, he was one who repeatedly turned back [to Allāh].”<sup>368</sup>

“...and exalt [Allāh] with praise of your Lord before the rising of the sun and before its setting.”<sup>369</sup>

“...and avoid them with gracious avoidance.”<sup>370</sup>

Much of this book has incorporated the great role of patience in the Qur’ānic examples presented. From patience in courage, forbearance and in obedience to Allāh, patience is a key character trait of the caller to Islam.

Believers are not to be fazed by the fear-mongering of antagonists, but rather should place their trust in Allāh at all times. The following verse is particularly pertinent since it was revealed after the Battle of Uḥud when the polytheists had challenged the Muslims to resume fighting the following day, in light of the aforementioned point. The verse reads:

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365 Al-Bukhārī 6470

366 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 20, verse 130; Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 38, verse 17; Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 50, verse 39; Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 73, verse 10.

367 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 20, verse 130

368 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 38, verse 17

369 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 50, verse 39

370 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 73, verse 10.

“Those to whom hypocrites said, “Indeed, the people have gathered against you, so fear them.” But it [merely] increased them in faith, and they said, “Sufficient for us is Allāh, and [He is] the best Disposer of affairs.”<sup>371</sup>

The hypocrites had gathered around the believers and pronounced that they should fear the polytheists. Al-Qurṭubī explains that it means to “fear them because you have no power against them.”<sup>372</sup> The declarative recited at that moment, “Sufficient for us is Allāh, and [He is] the best Disposer of affairs” was crucial in instilling in the believers a deep-seated trust in Allāh. The *dā‘ī* should draw inspiration from this event in the Prophet’s life, should recite the supplication and remember that fear evoking is a ploy of *shayṭān* to dissuade good work. The Qur’ān described,

“That is only Satan who frightens [you] of his supporters. So fear them not, but fear Me, if you are [indeed] believers.”<sup>373</sup>

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371 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 3, verse 173.

372 Al-Qurṭubī, *Mukhtaṣar Tafṣīr al-Qurṭubī*, vol. 1 (Beirut, Dār al-kutub al-‘ilmiyya: 2001), p. 437.

373 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 59, verse 18.

## COURAGE: CASE STUDIES

What do you do if a question about something political comes up in the conversation? Sometimes a view about a war, or the situation in Palestine can come up, or a contemporary social injustice can be on people's minds.

It is important for the *dā'ī* to always adopt a morally courageous stance in all matters. The primary focus of *da'wah* is to call mankind to belief in Allāh and this in itself requires moral courage, but being morally courageous is also about standing for matters of truth and justice, and there are key Qur'ānic verses revealed early in Makkah that respond to social injustices in society:

“And when the girl-child that was buried alive is made to ask. For what crime she had been slain.”<sup>374</sup>

The rhetorical questioning is purposed to underscore the monstrosity of the crime, that is to emphasise that all injustices will be requited. The one without power, voice, or support to repel an oppressor in this life will have Allāh vouching for them on that Day; those who targeted the weak and innocent will be brought forth to answer for their crimes. Other verses include the following: “Woe to those who give short measure, who demand of other people full measure for themselves,”<sup>375</sup> The Muslim should not cower from speaking the word of truth, for this in reality is what *da'wah* is about. In all circumstances, Allāh wanted his servants to be advocates of truth who do not allow impediments of love or hatred to avert them from upholding justice. This is reflected in these two verses:

“You who believe, uphold justice and bear witness to God, even if it is against yourselves, your parents, or your close relatives. Whether the person is rich or poor, God can best take care of both. Refrain from following your own desire, so that you can act justly- if you distort or neglect justice, God is fully aware of what you do.”<sup>376</sup>

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374 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 81, Verses 8-9.

375 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 83, Verses 1-2.

376 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 4, Verse 135.

“You who believe, be steadfast in your devotion to God and bear witness impartially: do not let hatred of others lead you away from justice, but adhere to justice, for that is closer to awareness of God. Be mindful of God: God is well aware of all that you do.”<sup>377</sup>

How do you reflect true strength in the context of Islam and of giving *da‘wah* when the person you are communicating with begins to poke fun at Islam or Muslims?

It is essential to strike a balance between remaining calm and being assertive in such situations. Remember that the Prophet of Islam was mocked by people, and so too were other prophets. In carrying forth the message there are bound to be times when you will communicate with those with bad intentions or who are not really interested in hearing the message. Remember that your remaining calm is itself a message of strength and character. As the Prophet ﷺ said, “The strongest are not the best wrestlers. Indeed, the strongest are those who control themselves when angry.”<sup>378</sup> Therefore remain calm and patient in such situations. We forget sometimes that the one poking fun has his own things going on in life; his aversion can be a reflection of the effects of disbelief. A change of heart can, and sometimes does, transpire whereby such individuals can introspect and reconsider former dispositions. Showing forbearance is always the better option. Remember the verses: “Repel evil with what is better and your enemy will become as close as an old and valued friend. But this cannot be attained except by those who are patient and who are truly fortunate.”<sup>379</sup>

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377 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 5, Verse 8.

378 Al-Bukhārī 6114

379 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 41, Verses 34-35.



## Empathy and Compassion

*It was only as a mercy that We sent you [Prophet] to all people.*<sup>380</sup>

Empathy, as this section will show, is the building block of relationships. It is the determinant that enables one to see something of himself in another, or something of his expected self, or something expected in another. In Islam, no human being is seen to be part of an entirely homogenous entity. It means, in conversations you have, to listen to someone authentically. The Qur'an makes clear that human beings ascribe to different nations and tribes and have differing behaviours. The Prophet ﷺ, in his interactions and dealings underwent a range of experiences with those who had not initially embraced Islam. Many of them were not hostile to him and his companions and he reciprocated with an exemplary compassion and empathy. He saw in each person, a potential for the acceptance of Islam - a potential for change.

One of the most revealing verses in this regard is the instruction Allāh gave to Prophet Mūsā in relation to how he is to engage with the pharaoh. The verse reads:

“Speak to him gently so that he may take heed, or show respect.”<sup>381</sup>

The Andalusian exegete al-Qurṭubī explains that this verse implies that if Mūsā was commanded to speak softly and mildly to Pharaoh, who was an oppressor, then imagine how we must speak to others: “If Mūsā was commanded to speak mildly to Pharaoh then it is even more appropriate for others to follow this command when speaking to others and when commanding the good and forbidding the evil.”<sup>382</sup> The verse puts forward

380 Al-Qur'an. Chapter 21, verse 107.

381 Al-Qur'an. Chapter 20, verse 44.

382 Al-Qurtubi, *al-Jāmi' al-aḥkām al-Qur'an* (Mu'assasāt al-risāla, Beirut: 2006), p. 65.

a crucial paradigm, that speaking with gentleness is a mainstay of effective *da'wah*, and also that words and their mannerism affect the heart in different ways. Prophet Mūsā was taught that in order for the words to impact pharaoh's heart there need be a consideration of how those words should be delivered. Remembering the objective of *da'wah* is very crucial since undermining or forgetting the objective will compromise the entire undertaking. Allāh reminded the prophet that by speaking kindly perhaps the pharaoh would become more open to the divine call - one of the key objectives behind the mission of prophet Mūsā. Islamic scholar Jabir al-Jaza'iri drew on similar points in his commentary on the verse:

“[What is intended are] words free from harshness, dryness and bad language, so that he reflects on the meaning of your words and what you are calling him to, so he will review his condition and believe and find guidance, or fear the punishment if he were to remain on disbelief and as an oppressor.”<sup>383</sup>

Empathy is imagining what another person is in relation to the shifting of his or her time between the past and present, between considering what once was and what can or might transpire in the life of that person, between drawing together of the strands of one's own human existence and considering another person as vulnerable to the same temporalities and thus bound in the same 'frame' of time. This is crucial as we consider who and what a person was, and can thereafter become through belief in and practice of Islam. One's approach through kindness, mercy and empathy towards people, each of whom have such a propensity for change, is essential and a remarkable characteristic of the prophetic approach.

The Qur'ān instructs man to behave in the manner of integrity and compassion:

“Allāh forbids you not, with regards to those who fight you not for (your) faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: for Allāh loves those who are just.”<sup>384</sup>

“O you who believe! Stand out firmly for Allāh, as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to piety: and fear Allāh. For Allāh is well-acquainted with all that you do.”<sup>385</sup>

383 Abi Bakr Jabir al-Jaza'iri, *Aysar al-Tafāsīr li Kalām al-'Aliyyi-l Kabīr* (Madina, Maktaba Adwa' al-Manar, 1999), p. 750

384 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 60, verse 8.

385 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 5, verse 8.

“Indeed, Allāh commands justice, grace, as well as courtesy to close relatives. He forbids indecency, wickedness, and aggression. He instructs you so perhaps you will be mindful.”<sup>386</sup>

“Good and evil cannot be equal. Repel evil with what is better and your enemy will become as close as an old and valued friend.”<sup>387</sup>

People are not all the same, and nor is one single person the same throughout. The Muslim must therefore bear in mind the complex nature of a person. Perceptions of another at one given time is not the complete picture of anything. Similarly, a negative idea about another community which proliferates on the media should not require a Muslim to change his outlook on others nor radically change his method of calling others to Allāh. Remember that everyone is born with an innate disposition in being able to recognise Allāh and it is in realigning the human spirit with one’s real human potential that lies at the root of the Islamic call. Sometimes people tire of hearing the same negative stories about others; other times they navigate from mainstream to forms of new media; other times their relationship with that community member inhibits the formulating of negative opinions.<sup>388</sup>

In our engagement with others, we should remember that we as humans are mostly comforted by similar things – displays of kindness and mercy. Allāh describes the Prophet ﷺ as an embodiment of merciful character: “And We have not sent you (O Muḥammad) except as a mercy to the worlds.”<sup>389</sup> Mercy, compassion and empathy are interlinked features of the best of what all people seek. The Prophet ﷺ taught,

“O, Aisha: Verily Allāh is Compassionate, and He loves compassion. He gives based on compassion that which is not given based on force, and is not given based on any other cause.”<sup>390</sup>

People prefer mercy over harshness, forbearance over rage, kindness over cruelty. The Prophet ﷺ instructed that kindness be applied in every situation, once teaching his wife ‘Ā’isha: “Kindness is not found in something except that it makes it beautiful, and it is not removed from something except that

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386 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 16, verse 90.

387 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 41, verse 34.

388 Osman Latiff, *On Being Human: How Islam addresses othering, dehumanisation and empathy* (Sapience Institute, 2020), p. 16

389 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 21, verse 107.

390 Al-Bukhārī, *Al-Adab Al-Mufrad* 472

it makes it tarnished.”<sup>391</sup> Allāh describes Himself with the most beautiful names of Al-Raḥmān, Al-Raḥīm - the Merciful, Gracious, Bestower of Mercy. Allāh commands mercy in every situation and will deal with us in relation to our dealings with others. The Prophet ﷺ explained, “The merciful will be shown mercy by the Most Merciful. Be merciful to those on the earth and the One in the heavens will have mercy upon you.”<sup>392</sup>

Ibn al-Qayyim explained the Prophet’s words:

“And Allāh is merciful, and He loves the merciful ones, and He veils the sins of people and He loves those who veil the sins of others, “Whoever pardons others, Allāh will pardon him; whoever forgives others, Allāh will forgive him; whoever excuses others, Allāh will excuse him; whoever shows excellence unto others, Allāh will deal excellently towards him. As you do so shall be done unto you, so be how you choose for indeed Allāh will be unto you as you are unto His servants.”<sup>393</sup>

## Steps towards empathy & compassion

1. The *dā‘ī* must be aware of the conditions of his people; to know the kind of language they understand – their idioms and figurative expressions. There are many things we can do to foster communication based on paradigms of empathy. The task is to try and see the world from another’s point of view. The Prophet ﷺ once said that when he leads the prayer, he intends to pray a lengthy prayer, “and then I hear a child crying so I shorten my prayer as I know his crying will distress his mother.”<sup>394</sup> The *dā‘ī* should be well informed by a narration like this. A similar scenario can exist when a mother is being spoken to but her child is with her, or an elderly person with visible needs has stopped by, or a busy health worker. Being mindful of the needs of others is beautifully demonstrated in the Prophetic character. The Prophet ﷺ was rigorous with his companions to ensure that they do not overburden others even in leading people in lengthy prayers and in not overloading and causing distress to their animals. He wept upon seeing a camel that was heavily weakened, he put his hand on its head and then told his companion:

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391 Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 2594

392 Sunan al-Tirmidhī 1924

393 Ibn al-Qayyim, Al-Wābil al-Ṭayyib, pp. 53-56. s

394 Al-Bukhārī 678

“Do you not fear Allāh about this beast that Allāh has given in your possession? It has complained to me that you keep it hungry and load it heavily which fatigues it.”<sup>395</sup>

The Prophet ﷺ was therefore cognisant of the needs of others and could understand the world of mother and child in relation to what could distress them at that point. The audible distress of another person actualised a kind of witness empathy in the Prophet seeking to alleviate both the mother and child’s distress. Even buying someone a hot drink on a cold day, or feeding someone who is hungry conveys a beautiful message of reaching out. It is in noticing those signals which convey the neediness of others that the Muslim should be alert, and then seek to alleviate those needs.

As recipients of another’s kindness, we are not always alert to the motivations and intentions behind another person’s goodness, but we do feel a sense of his action corroborating with something we had been feeling at that precise moment. What another person sees of us is not always known to us, but the interchange of unspoken emotions at that point can be transformative.

2. To be empathic, one is required to be non-judgemental and look at the ‘human being’ before him or her. Remember that each person is valuable in their own right and to afford people this recognition is crucial. Sometimes, based on a person’s life experience they might have been victims of discrimination whereby their humanness was questioned or denied. If a person is judgemental and considers the other as a stereotyped ‘Other’, it is unlikely he or she will be able to feel for that person and attempt to understand things from that person’s point of view or life experience. The Prophet ﷺ gave to each person an individual consideration, to such an extent that his companions would say that they felt the most important in the Prophet’s company. Even though the Prophet ﷺ may be around others, he made the one he communicated with feel as though he was acknowledged the most. The *dā‘ī* should not assume a person’s inclination or mindset from his or her look. He should not stereotype people as atheists, Islamophobes or as far-right political advocates because stereotyping erects walls of distrust and suspicion. The *dā‘ī* can quite quickly become embroiled into ruthless displays of argument, name calling, abuse, and sarcasm — taking precedence over conveying the call in a kind and compassionate manner.

Anas Bin Malik narrated: “While we were in the masjid with the Messenger of Allāh, a Bedouin came; he then urinated in the masjid. The Companions of the Messenger of Allāh said, “*Mah Mah* (An expression used to severely scold someone, to indicate the graveness of a matter).” The Messenger of Allāh said, “Do not put a halt to his urinating, but instead leave him.” They left him alone until he finished urinating. The Messenger of Allāh called him over and said to him, “Any kind of urine or filth is not suitable for these masjids. Instead, they are only [appropriate] for the remembrance of Allāh, the Prayer, and the recitation of the Qur’ān,” or this is near to what the Messenger of Allāh said. He then issued an order to a man from the people, who then came with a bucket of water, which he poured over the [effected] area [of the masjid].<sup>396</sup>

In another narration the Bedouin, after completing his prayer said, “O Allāh, have mercy on me and on Muḥammad, and do not have mercy on anyone other than us.” The Prophet ﷺ turned to him and said, “You have indeed constricted that which is vast.”<sup>397</sup>

In one narration, the Prophets companions were angered upon seeing the man urinate in the masjid. The Prophet ﷺ instructed them, “Pour a bucketful of water on it (i.e., on the affected area).” He then said, “Indeed, you were sent only to make matters easy, and you were not sent to make matters difficult.”<sup>398</sup> In a further narration, when the man joined the row he said, “The Prophet stood before me – may my mother and father be ransom for him – and he neither cursed nor scolded nor hit me”<sup>399</sup>

How do you show this kind of empathy? Remember that connected to the masjid’s sacredness in its space of prayer is also a kind of social inclusivity wherein the poor were fed, homeless were provided for and ignorant were taught. The Prophet ﷺ was showing that mercy should be an overriding principle in our social dealings, and in this context, we see the Bedouin as someone geographically distant from the others and thus ill-informed. The man’s social condition with all its varying strands is considered in the Prophetic dealing - his age, background, lack of knowledge and familiarity, being predisposed to cultural habits.

The making of matters easy as an outlook and practice is crucial for the *dā‘ī*, allowing him to navigate the fields of *da‘wah* both verbalising and actualising the right character of Islam. Islam is not a burden and the Qur’ān was not revealed for that purpose: “We have not revealed the Quran to you O Prophet to cause you distress.”<sup>400</sup> Ibn Kathīr cites Qatāda

396 Muslim, 285.

397 Aḥmad 2/239

398 Tirmidhi, 147, Aḥmad 2/239.

399 Aḥmad 2/503.

400 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 20, verse 2.

who comments: “No, Allāh did not reveal the Qur’ān to cause distress. He revealed it instead as a mercy and light and a guide to Jannah.”<sup>401</sup> Instead of bringing distress, the religion of Islam brings peace in the attainment of every victory, and the reason for the realisation of every happiness. The adopting of this attitude that reflects the nourishing spirit of Islam should therefore be reflected in *da‘wah*. It was the Prophet’s nature to make people feel relaxed and special in his company, so much so that each attendee in his gatherings would think he was the most important person in that gathering. Speaking to people with respect and dignity, addressing them with politeness can make much difference to a conversation and its outcome.

We need to remember that everyone has come from somewhere. The individual who meets you has come from somewhere. Perhaps his or her mind upon encountering you is thinking about a myriad of things, an illness, a stress, a heartache, a fear and/or a genuine concern. The words the Muslim uses and his demeanour, should reflect an air of positivity, genuine care and concern for the individual’s welfare.

3. Empathy is the ability to share in the emotions of another person, in his or her happiness or sadness. This can be done through perspective taking, recalling a time wherein we had been in the same or similar situation. We knew how such an experience felt and can appreciate how that other person is feeling. Such cognitive processing can produce strong emotions of compassion, of sympathy and so many other connections between people. We might even associate with another’s feelings due to what we know of them and due to the degree of closeness to them. This is shown beautifully in the following narration:

“The Prophet ﷺ said, ‘A man felt very thirsty while he was on the way, there he came across a well. He went down the well, quenched his thirst and came out. Meanwhile he saw a dog panting and licking mud because of excessive thirst. He said to himself, ‘This dog is suffering from thirst as I did.’ So, he went down the well again and filled his shoe with water and watered it. Allāh thanked him for that deed and forgave him.

The people said, ‘O Allāh’s Messenger! Is there a reward for us in serving the animals?’ He replied: ‘Yes, there is a reward for serving any living being.’”<sup>402</sup>

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401 Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Lebanon, Dār al-Ma‘rifa:2003), p. 1007

402 Al-Bukhārī 2466.

The Prophet ﷺ was concerned about people learning to have empathy for others. That is, we are able to perspective-take, to note how others feel in different situations. The tradition is edifying in so many ways. It teaches us to consider human emotions, sensitivities and boundaries in our relationship with others. It reminds us that in our human instincts and tendencies, we are similar at many levels and in particular with respect to feelings for 'our' selves. Absolute binaries of Self and Otherness are challenged in this tradition in that it places the self and others, 'people', and 'their mothers/daughters/sisters...' in a frame of togetherness. The frame of togetherness and the perspective taking is illustrative in the following narration:

“Abu Umāma reported: A young man came to the Prophet ﷺ and he said, “O Messenger of Allāh, give me permission to commit adultery.” The people turned to rebuke him, saying,

“Quiet! Quiet!” The Prophet said, “Come here.” The young man came close and he told him to sit down. The Prophet said, “Would you like that for your mother?” The man said, “No, by Allāh, may I be sacrificed for you.”

The Prophet said, “Neither would people like it for their mothers. Would you like that for your daughter?” The man said, “No, by Allāh, may I be sacrificed for you.” The Prophet said,

“Neither would people like it for their daughters. Would you like that for your sister?” The man said, “No, by Allāh, may I be sacrificed for you.” The Prophet ﷺ said, “Neither would people like it for their sisters. Would you like that for your aunts?” The man said, “No, by Allāh, may I be sacrificed for you.” The Prophet ﷺ said, “Neither would people like it for their aunts.” Then, the Prophet placed his hand on him and he said, “O Allāh, forgive his sins, purify his heart, and guard his chastity.” After that, the young man never again inclined to anything sinful.” In another narration, the Prophet ﷺ said to him,

“Then hate what Allāh has hated, and love for your brother what you love for yourself.”<sup>403</sup>

When we refuse the points of connectedness among us, we are in the process of denying our own humanity and the humanity of others. Arriving at such a place makes any violation against another all the more possible.

403 Musnad Aḥmad 21708.



There are other narrations which espouse the same message, communicating the importance and the empathic practice. The Prophet ﷺ is reported to have said,

“None of you has faith until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.”<sup>404</sup>

And,

“The servant does not attain the reality of faith until he loves for people what he loves for himself of goodness.”<sup>405</sup>

In the aforementioned narration, the Prophet ﷺ mentioned ‘people’ in place of ‘brother’ and there are other narrations that also read like this. Many scholars in fact interpreted “brother” in such traditions to indicate a universal type of brotherhood, including all of humanity. Imam al-Nawawī for example comments on this tradition, highlighting the greater religious love a Muslim would have to share Islam with everyone in the human brotherhood - both Muslims and non-Muslims:

“This is interpreted as brotherhood in general, such that it includes the disbeliever and the Muslim. So, he should love for his brother, the disbeliever, what he loves for himself which is his entering Islam, just as he should love for his brother Muslim that he remains in Islam.”<sup>406</sup>

We also note in the tradition how the Prophet ﷺ actualised his concern for the young man by placing his hand on him and praying. The man’s internal problem was remedied. The Muslim must always remember that in every interaction one has with another person, the heart can either find a replenishing of belief or the insidious risk of a corrupted intention and pride. It is not the purpose of the Muslim to throw out quotes, facts, verses and traditions and speak them as if it is an exercise in rhetoric or eloquence. The purpose is not to feel armed with a set of mentally prepared responses to be regurgitated under pressure. The Muslim is not a participant in a battle of wits, nor are they in a contest, or competitor for ‘hits’, ‘views’ and ‘likes’. The Muslim is not to be judged for oratory prowess. The Muslim is to remember that he or she does not stand before an automated machine, but a human being, just like him.

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404 Al-Bukhārī 13.

405 Ibn Hībbān 238.

406 Sharḥ al-Arbaʿīn 13.

Every human is made up of a myriad of emotions, senses, life experiences, hopes, dreams, interests, anticipations, responsibilities and beliefs as anyone else. No human exists in an empty space, void of important details but has, like the Muslim, traversed many paths, transitioned in age, landscape and experience and by the decree of Allāh now stands before the Muslim on what is another meaningful life encounter. If the Muslim genuinely hopes their interaction with the person will be transformative, it must begin with the Muslim seeing the individual as a complex person made up of many parts, a human, just like you.

4. The Muslim therefore needs to convey the message of Islam with close consideration of how complex the human being is. It is the communication between the inner core of the Muslim and their addressee which is most fundamental.

Allāh commanded Prophet Mūsā to deliver a message unto Firʿown to call him to the worship of the One true God and to humble himself out of egotistic self-worship and proclamations of self-grandeur. In so doing, Allāh told Mūsā to speak gently to him so that he could be impacted positively:

“And speak to him with gentle speech that perhaps he may be reminded or fear [Allāh].”<sup>407</sup>

There is an instructive lesson for the *dāʿī* here in thinking about the outcome of one’s encounter with an addressee. What is the end-result that one envisions from a dialogue and what is the approach one should take to try his or her best to ensure that such a message is conveyed.

Ibn Kathīr explains, “This verse carries a great lesson in showing that even though Pharaoh was extremely arrogant and Mūsā was the elite of God’s creation at that time, and in this reality, Allāh commanded that he should not address Pharaoh except with kindness and gentleness. Wahb bin Munabbih said it is like God saying: “Say to him that I am closer to pardon and forgiveness than I am to anger and punishment.” Communicating the message to him should be with gentle, soft and easy words.”<sup>408</sup> As-Saʿdī comments: “that is, kindly and politely, with nice words, without being coarse or harsh in speech, or behaving in a rough manner... For gentle speech calls to that, whereas harsh speech puts people off... In such talk there is gentleness, ease and avoidance of harsh and ugly language.”<sup>409</sup>

407 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 20, verse 44.

408 Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Lebanon, Dār al-Maʿrifah:2003), p. 1016.

409 Al-Saʿdī, *Tafseer al-Saʿdī* (Juz’ 16-18) (Riyadh, International Islamic Publishing House: 2018), p. 129

The reasoning provided in the verse is “so perhaps he may be mindful of Me”<sup>410</sup> This is extremely powerful for the *dā‘ī* since he should not presume that every encounter needs to be a battle of verbal prowess. Where that can have its place, if the approach it to speak in a soft manner “so perhaps he may be mindful”<sup>411</sup> and mindful of God, then one’s approach becomes instead rooted on God and not on oneself. An approach we can take to help with this is to verbalise or increase in *dhikr* during an engagement. If it isn’t possible or feasible then a spiritual reminding oneself can suffice. The purpose is to internalise and externalise, to reinforce in oneself that it is Allāh who is to be remembered and worshipped.

We reflect on Mūsā and Hārūn in their mission to call Pharaoh to Allāh. The information Allāh provides us is astonishing for how it describes that the initial theatre of struggle between the tyrant and the Prophet, actually is first, an internal one. Though the apparatus of propagation in Mūsā’s case is staged with spectacle since Pharaoh had assembled his people, “gathering his people, proclaiming”<sup>412</sup> with the presence of magicians on a day of festival, the objective and preparation was entirely intended for spiritual renewal and reformation. It is in the overcoming of one’s inner self that sincerity can take root. The latter can be seen when Allāh first instructs Mūsā to go unto Pharaoh who had transgressed. Allāh directed Mūsā to say:

“Go to Pharaoh, for he has exceeded all bounds,”<sup>413</sup>

“and ask him, “Do you want to purify yourself [of sin]?”<sup>414</sup>

“Do you want me to guide you to your Lord, so that you may hold Him in awe?”<sup>415</sup>

These verses emphasise the great need for spiritual purification as a remedy for humans. Pharaoh of course had been active in the murder and persecution of a great multitude of people but Allāh’s instruction to Mūsā was to allow Pharaoh to consider his own human disposition and his need to believe and revere the One who created and sustains all beings. The fact that the call was presentation in the form of a question is also revealing, as al-Sa‘dī explains, “The fact that this is presented in the form of a question is suggestive of making an offer and discussing the matter in such a way that no one would be offended by it. It is inviting a person to purify

410 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 20, verse 44.

411 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 20, verse 44.

412 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 79, verse 23.

413 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 79, verse 17.

414 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 79, verse 18.

415 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 79, verse 19.

himself and cleanse himself from impurity, which means ridding oneself of the ascription of partners to Allāh, which anyone who is of sound mind would willingly accept. It does not say “I will purify you”; rather it says “Are you willing to be purified?”<sup>416</sup>

5. The Muslim is not aloof, but is understanding of his social environment and realities. He does not erect walls of superiority, but can instead connect with the common man. He does not seek out only the influential so as to create a spectacle around his presence and communication, but sees in everyone a potential and purpose. We are reminded as our Prophet ﷺ was reminded in Sūrah ‘Abasa that all men, of all ranking, need spiritual purification. We should reflect deeply in this light that the same word (*zakkā* – to grow in purity) is used to describe Mūsā’s mission to Pharaoh and furthermore used in the opening verse of Sūrah ‘Abasa (80) for a blind man, Ibn Umm Maktūm. Both tyrants and the socially vulnerable are in need of Allāh.

“for all you know, he might have grown in spirit”<sup>417</sup>

“or taken note of something useful to him.”<sup>418</sup>

Another approach is to try and empathise with one’s interlocutor. Though it might be easier to show compassion and care to one that we are acquainted with, the pathways towards genuine care can be accessed quite easily when we internalise the great task of *da‘wah* – as a calling of Allāh’s creation back to their Creator, and secondly, consider our human codes of recognisability wherein much of ourselves is observable and felt in others. The Qur’ān informs us that at the base level that we are similar in so many ways:

“People, We created you all from a single man and a single woman, and made you into races and tribes so that you should recognise one another. In God’s eyes, the most honoured of you are the ones most mindful of Him: God is all knowing, all aware.”<sup>419</sup>

In *da‘wah* using words such as “sir”, “madam” or “ma’am” or “brother” and “sister”, or to politely ask the addressee their name, and to call them by their

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416 Al-Sa‘dī, *Tafseer al-Sa‘dī* (Juz’ 16-18) (Riyadh, International Islamic Publishing House: 2018), p. 129.

417 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 80, verse 3.

418 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 80, verse 4.

419 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 49, verse 13.

name opens up an air of politeness and respect between you. This allows us to personalise our interaction in some way. Names confer meaning about a person, his or her ethnicity, a social role as ‘husband of’ or ‘mother of’ and in death that name and identification remains, “many nations commemorate their war dead by constructing war memorials wherein names, titles and images continue to provide meaning and importance on the lives lost.”<sup>420</sup>

6. Perception of human codes of recognisability in one’s addressee mitigates the distance that might exist between you and another. Even if perceptions of that ‘other’ are influenced by regular media portrayals which ossify otherness, such as stereotypes. Human encounters can bridge the otherness that can exist between peoples. Many who embraced Islam early on in Makkah were subject to an intense campaign of propaganda against Islam and the Prophet ﷺ, but meeting and listening to the Prophet ﷺ bridged the distance between them and accessing the truth.

The Prophet ﷺ himself was concerned about names and their connotations. There are many examples of him deciding to change people’s names if their names were associated with negativity. This reflects a beautiful, divinely-inspired far-sightedness in the Prophet’s disposition. The way we might incorporate such sentiments in our *da‘wah* is through asking about people’s names, commending the goodness in a name if the meaning resonates with a positive attribute; allowing the name itself to open up a conversation about self-identity, culture or religion if the name carries religious significance. An example of the way the Prophet ﷺ engaged with individuals through their names is found in the following tradition. The context relates to the Prophet ﷺ and Abū Bakr on their migration to Madīna. Their guide Sa‘d al-Aslamī said:

“There is a road along the valley of Rakūbah but there are two thieves from the Aslam tribe there who are called “Muhānān”. If you wish, you could use the road past them.” The Prophet ﷺ replied, “Lead us to the road past them.” Consequently, they took the road and when they drew close to the thieves, one of them said to the other, “Look at this person from Yemen!” The Prophet ﷺ then gave them *da‘wah* and invited them to accept Islam. They both in turn accepted. When the Prophet asked them their names, they said that they were called “Muhānān” (The two despicable

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420 Osman Latiff, *Navigating War, Dissent and Empathy in Arab/U.S Relations: Seeing our Others in Darkened Spaces* (Springer, 2021), p. 241.

ones). The Prophet ﷺ said to them, “No. You two are ‘Mukramān’ (The two honoured ones).”<sup>421</sup>

Other examples include the Prophet changing the name of a land termed *Afrah* (barren) to *Khadrah* (green) and *Shi‘b ad-Dalālah* (the valley of error) to *Shi‘b al-Hudā* (the valley of guidance) *Banū al-Zīna* (children of fornication) to *Banū al-Rushda* (children of correct guidance)<sup>422</sup>

Smiling is something we can easily incorporate into *da‘wah*. The Prophet ﷺ smiled at a man who pulled on his cloak, leaving marks around his blessed neck and followed through by ordering for him a gift of provision.”<sup>423</sup> In her presentation on empathy, Rossbacher explains that “although empathy can be a way of sharing someone else’s joy or happiness, the empathy that connects difficulties is the one that’s most likely to move us to action. Understanding the troubles of others can bring a focused response, a focused kind of help by trying to right a wrong, by trying to fix a problem, or simply by sharing an understanding. These actions can be as simple as a smile or as complex as an international relief effort in Haiti.”<sup>424</sup> A smile therefore can be extremely effective and can be employed even when one disagrees with something. It costs nothing to smile, and engenders a positive energy during discussions. The Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ said,

“Indeed, you cannot afford to make people happy with your wealth, but you can make them happy with you, by means of a cheerful face and good attitude.”<sup>425</sup>

7. A remarkable example of *da‘wah* that reflects different characteristics of the *dā‘ī* including compassion and courage, is found in Sūrah al-Ghāfir and deals with an individual who saw fit to hide his faith out of fear of being killed. The background reason for the revelation of this Sūrah is a good indicator for the kinds of happenings described in the verses. The Qur’ān informs us that such events concerning previous prophets was purposed to draw attention to events contemporaneous with the Prophet’s own experiences: “And each [story] We relate to you from the news of the messengers is that by which We make firm your heart.”<sup>426</sup> At the time of the

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421 Ahmad, vol.4, p.74.

422 Abū Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-Adab* 70.

423 Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 1057a.

424 Lisa Rossbacher, ‘Empathy: Walking in Another’s Shoes’: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VPSFWIYoBTE> - (04:03-05:19)

425 Al-Bazzār 9319

426 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 11, verse 120.

chapter's revelation, the Prophet ﷺ was undergoing an intense period of persecution from the Makkans of Quraysh who were keen to assassinate the Prophet ﷺ himself. The secrecy of *da'wah* had become a public affair and the faithful were met with much opposition. The example of the believer who hid his faith at the time of prophet Mūsā is a salient reminder of faith, patience and courage in the domain of propagation.

As cited by Ibn Kathīr according to Ibn 'Abbās it was only him and the Pharaoh's wife who had believed from Pharaoh's family, and he had been the individual who hurried to inform Mūsā about the Pharaoh's intent to murder him. The believer's words "Would you slay a man because he says, 'God is my Sustainer?'"<sup>427</sup> denote a genuine care and loyalty for the message he was preaching. Ibn Kathīr explains that these words represented his first openness about his belief that emanated from a genuine anger and loyalty to his belief, that the best words spoken were these words and are in line with the narration that "the best of *jihād* is to speak a word of truth to an oppressive ruler."<sup>428</sup> Such anger at injustice is a positive trait for the Muslim and so too the spirit of fraternity between the faithful. The *dā'ī* here was emboldened by his spirit of resistance and love for the truth. His argument is rationally sound since he questions why they need to resort to physical violence instead of listening to the caller. If what he brings is unsound to them then it would be better for them to leave him since the lie would be against him. In *da'wah* it is key to always abide by such a genuine voice and character of transparency. The verse continues, "If he is a liar, it will be to his own loss. But if he is truthful, then you will be afflicted with some of what he is threatening you with. Surely Allāh does not guide whoever is a transgressor, a total liar."<sup>429</sup> The believer's words here are similar to the approach adopted by the Prophet's first emissary to Yathrib (later 'Madīna') when threatened to leave the city. Muṣ'ab maintained a smile and invited them to listen to him. If a person did not like what he had to say he would leave him and not bother him again. It was a highly effective strategy.

The believer who had hidden his faith comes forth as a witness. His words are akin to those of the individual described in Sūrah Yūsuf who testified on behalf of Prophet Yūsuf when he was seduced by the minister's wife.

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427 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 40, verse 28.

428 Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Lebanon, Dār al-Ma'rifa:2003), p. 1391; Aḥmad 18449

429 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 40, verse 28.

“Joseph responded, “It was she who tried to seduce me.” And a witness from her own family testified: “If his shirt is torn from the front, then she has told the truth and he is a liar.”<sup>430</sup>

“But if it is torn from the back, then she has lied and he is truthful.”<sup>431</sup>

Scholars differ about whether the witness was a child or whether he was a wise man.<sup>432</sup> In any case his reasoning was impactful since the minister notices that Yūsuf’s shirt was torn from the back and that his own wife was therefore lying. What stands out in both examples is the use of good reason to settle a situation. The believer in the time of Prophet Mūsā uses a brilliant line of argument by appealing to his audience to consider the role of divine fate in human events. He opens up a space of consideration that sets the divine message in the context of God’s divine work. If the Prophet ﷺ was a liar, he too would be afflicted by what he was warning others about and nor will goodness come from a “transgressor” and “total liar”. Ibn Kathīr explains, “had he been one of the extravagant liars, Allāh would not have guided him to what you see of the orderliness of his command and action.”<sup>433</sup>

In light of this, the *dā‘ī* can recount various examples of the positive effects of Islam and its growth. Such growth itself was alluded to in Sūrah al-Ḍuḥā and it is a beautiful Sūrah that encapsulates much and serves as a good talking point in a *da‘wah* conversation. Its themes are timeless and can resonate with people at a very personal level. Sometimes people’s primary focus in life can relate merely to the pressures of simply surviving. This could be in the form of paying the rent, bills, financial burdens, family and/or work stresses. The Muslim should understand that this can take its toll on any person and may affect their perspective when engaging in ideas around God, life and purpose.

Sūrah al-Ḍuḥā, revealed during a time when the Makkans mocked the Prophet ﷺ for the revelation that was given to him, reminds the Prophet of Allāh’s favours upon him of succour, shelter and provision in his previous days, and indicates a promise of a better future as well. The verses follow with instructions about how others should now be treated:

“Did He not find you an orphan and shelter you?”<sup>434</sup>

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430 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 12, verse 26.

431 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 12, verse 27.

432 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 12 (Cairo, Dār al-Tawfiqiyya: 2004), pp. 204-207.

433 Ibn Kathīr

434 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 93, verse 6.



“Did He not find you lost and guide you?”<sup>435</sup>

“Did He not find you in need and make you self-sufficient?”<sup>436</sup>

“So do not be harsh with the orphan.”<sup>437</sup>

“and do not chide the one who asks for help;”<sup>438</sup>

“talk about the blessings of your Lord.”<sup>439</sup>

Ibn Kathīr explains the injunctions to the Prophet ﷺ as an instruction to treat others in relation to a recalling of the Prophet’s own life experiences as a young man. He explains: “So do not be harsh with the orphan” by commenting “remember when you were an orphan”! “And do not chide the one who asks for help” by commenting “remember when you were poor” and “to be unto the orphan like a merciful father.” Qatada said that it means “to treat the poor with mercy and softness.”<sup>440</sup>

8. There are many things we can do to foster communication based on paradigms of empathy. The task is to try and see the world from another’s point of view. The Prophet ﷺ once said that when he leads the prayer, he intends to pray a lengthy prayer, “and then I hear a child crying so I shorten my prayer as I know his crying will distress his mother.”<sup>441</sup>

And so, Sūrah al-Ḍuḥā is one example of a way of illustrating the promise of God fulfilled in the life of the Prophet ﷺ through such events as military victories, the event of Ḥudaybiyya, the conquest of Makkah and the growth of Islam. Such growth was furthered immediately after the death of the Prophet ﷺ. The *da‘ī* can further point to celebrated examples from the history of Islam such as the favourable treatment Muslims granted Christians in Jerusalem and granted Jews in the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>442</sup>

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435 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 93, verse 7.

436 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 93, verse 8.

437 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 93, verse 9.

438 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 93, verse 10.

439 Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 93, verse 11.

440 Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Lebanon, Dār al-Ma‘rifa:2003), p. 1721.

441 Al-Bukhārī 678

442 See for example Maria Rosa Menocal, *Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* (New York, Little Brown and Company: 2002).

The believer who hid his faith continues to call his people. He states,

“O my people, sovereignty is yours today, [your being] dominant in the land. But who would protect us from the punishment of Allāh if it came to us?” Pharaoh said, “I do not show you except what I see, and I do not guide you except to the way of right conduct.”<sup>443</sup>

The believer called on his audience to consider their strength and security in the land as a blessing from God, as something granted to them, and that if they fail to heed the words of the Messenger, they run the risk of losing it all. He didn't want them to relish in the knowledge that they are “dominant in the land” without paying more considerable attention to the fact that their fate might change immediately. It is interesting that the believer does not discount the earthly kingdom that the Pharaoh enjoyed but uses it as a way of hitting home the more critical message. Ibn Kathīr explains that the believer explained that they were required to be grateful for such blessing, to believe in the messenger and to be warned of the punishment of God.<sup>444</sup>

Al-Saʿdī here explains that for the *dāʿi*, “Part of calling people to Allāh is endearing Him to His slaves by mentioning in detail His blessings, vast generosity and perfect mercy, and mentioning His perfect and majestic attributes. Another aspect of calling people to Allāh is encouraging people to acquire knowledge and learn guidance from the Book of Allāh and the Sunnah of His Messenger, and urging them to do that by all possible means, which includes encouraging them to attain noble characteristics, treating people kindly, responding to those who behave offensively with kindness, and enjoining upholding of ties of kinship and honouring parents.”<sup>445</sup>

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443 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 40, verse 29.

444 Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Lebanon, Dār al-Maʿrifah:2003), p. 1392.

445 Al-Saʿdī, *Tafseer al-Saʿdī* (Juz' 22-24) (Riyadh, International Islamic Publishing House: 2018), p. 417

## EMPATHY AND COMPASSION: CASE STUDIES

Imagine the one you are conveying the message to heralds a series of false claims against Islam, and against the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ. What should you do?

Oftentimes such false opinions can be quelled by responding with kindness as the Qurʾān instructs. If a person is being belligerent however, and one still sees it beneficial to continue to engage with such a person due to onlooking or more sincere listeners, then at times, contingent on moral context, one should be assertive and confident. Aforementioned verses from Sūrah Ṭāhā, are here very instructive. In verse 44, Allah had directed Prophet Mūsā to speak with the pharaoh in a kind and mild manner: “Speak to him gently so that he may take heed, or show respect.”<sup>446</sup>

The verses that follow however show that the pharaoh was warned if he remained on disbelief and continued his oppression over his people; “It has been revealed to us that punishment falls on whoever rejects the truth and turns his back on it.”<sup>447</sup>

In verse 60 we read: “Pharaoh withdrew and gathered his resources, then he returned.”<sup>448</sup> Prophet Mūsā said in reply to the pharaoh’s rejection, “Beware, do not invent lies against God or He will destroy you with His punishment. Whoever invents lies will fail.”<sup>449</sup> So, always use kindness as the best approach when communicating. Speak with mercy and good manners. If, however one is faced by an antagonist who is trying to derail a conversation, one should be assertive and confident, whilst not forgetting the essentiality of compassion as an underpinning of all conversations.

What should one do if one’s interlocutor raises his voice and appears aggressive in the conversation?

The Qurʾānic advice is to respond to ignorant people with *‘salam’*: “The servants of the Lord of Mercy are those who walk humbly on the earth, and who, when the foolish address them, reply, ‘Peace’;”<sup>450</sup> it is no use to shout back or raise one’s voice louder because such a conversation might

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446 Al-Qurʾān, Chapter 20, verse 44.

447 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 20, verse 48.

448 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 20, verse 60.

449 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 20, verse 61.

450 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 25, verse 63.

descend into a battle of egos. It is better to respond with forbearance and good character even in the face of rude behaviour.

However, if the antagonist's behaviour is such that it could become harmful for you or those around you, a firmer approach might be suited to prevent future aggression. Again, the *dāṛī* should be wise in his decision making. For example, if the antagonist(s) choose to continuously hang around a particular spot it might be advisable to choose a different location so that the message can be better conveyed to others.

## Good Character

*And you are truly a man of outstanding character.*<sup>451</sup>

One of the clearest examples of the prime importance of adopting good character is found in the Prophet's own proclamation that his mission was intricately connected to the harnessing of good character. He said, "Indeed, I was only sent to complete the most noble of character traits."<sup>452</sup> The emphasis in *innamā* denotes a particularity, meaning one of the Prophet's prime undertakings was to teach and embody great character. Allāh bears testimony to the lofty standard of character in the Prophet's disposition: "Surely you (Muḥammad) have a magnificent character."<sup>453</sup>

### Excellence of Prophet Muḥammad's ﷺ character

It is a requirement upon us as Muslims, to ensure that one's public character does not lie at odds with one's private character. It was the Prophetic approach to speak with people with an approach wherein they felt comfortable in his presence and therefore more predisposed to learning in such an environment. His companion Zayd bin Thābit relates for example, "when we sat in his presence if we were speaking about Allāh's remembrance he would join us in that; and if we were speaking about something worldly, he would join us in that; and if we were speaking about something to do with food and drink, he would join us in that."<sup>454</sup>

The Prophetic personality was infused with a remarkable character of goodness. Everything in his persona resonated with exemplary conduct, illustrating how teaching through words and action was the mainstay of his prophetic mission. A *dā'ī's* conduct is the most palpable reflection of his

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451 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 68, verse 4.

452 Al-Muwaṭṭa' 1614

453 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 68, Verse 4.

454 Al-Ṭabarānī 4882

state of being, and if that state of being is harnessed by the characteristics required of the *dā'i* as shown in this book then that character becomes a beautiful manifestation of Islam. The Prophet ﷺ was described in the following way:

“The Prophet was not indecent, he was not obscene, he would not shout in the markets, and he would not respond to an evil deed with an evil deed, but rather he would pardon and overlook.”<sup>455</sup>

One can notice outstanding characteristics of decorum in the Prophet's character that reflected in his social conduct with others. Uprightness, dignity, forbearance and forgiveness all coalesce here in the Prophet's character. His character was astounding in effecting change in a people, who witnessed from him a behaviour that spoke volumes. Once a man came to him and asked him for something. The Prophet gave him a large flock of sheep and goats and the man went back to his people and said: “My people, embrace Islam, for Muḥammad gives so much charity as if he has no fear of poverty.”<sup>456</sup> Character is not only what is shown and reflected to the world outside of us; it is what is held deep inside of us, lives with us and shared with the world outside of us. A tradition that draws attention to a most pressing consideration is one in which one's behaviour with household members, and particularly women, is spoken of as a standard of good character: “Verily, the most complete of believers in faith are those with the best character and who are most kind to their families.”<sup>457</sup> It might have been assumed in one's pre-marital life that good dealings with one's friends and associates is a fair reflection of one's character, yet a truer state of exposition exists with loved ones and with one's partner. Monumental virtues of patience and gratitude, of courage and forbearance are put to the test in a familial home on a day-to-day basis and so if a Muslim can exemplify good character with loved ones it will exhibit an authenticity in his disposition that comes through in the outside world. His character is sincere and transparent. Notice how Imān and character are inextricably linked in the ḥadīth and lest it be asked how one should exemplify such character, the Prophet ﷺ positioned one's womenfolk as the hopeful recipients of good character.

Excellent character is the hallmark of a Muslim, and for the Muslim there is an added emphasis since he is presenting Islam with his conduct. There are many things that can impede a productive engagement with another, such as, bad mannerisms, aggression, impatience and mockery.

455 Al-Tirmidhī 2016

456 Muslim 74.

457 Al-Tirmidhī 2612.

For the Muslim, it is important to remember that he or she should do his utmost to ensure that the best of character is displayed. When the Prophet ﷺ dispatched Mu'adh ibn Jabal (Allāh be pleased with him) to Yemen to call the Christians to Islam he advised him to make things easy for the people – ‘Make things easy, and don't make things hard. Give them good news and don't make them run away from you.’<sup>458</sup>

Mu'adh commented, “The last piece of advice the Prophet gave me, as I placed my foot on the saddle was “And make excellent your character O Mu'adh ibn Jabal!” The advice is paradigmatic and lays the foundation for effective communication of the message of Islam. A person's character can speak a much better and more vocal language than words, leaving a far lasting impression than words spoken. People tend to remember not so much what was said, but how it was said. Furthermore, a good character is the completion of a person. It is his most manifest attribute and for it he is loved or loathed.

Ibn al-Qayyim said,

“The entire religion is good character. Whoever therefore outdoes you in good character has outdone you in the religion.”<sup>459</sup>

There are many Prophetic instructions pertaining to the displaying of good character. The Prophet ﷺ mentioned that the closest people to him and the most beloved to him on the Day of Judgement will be those who had the best character. He said that there is nothing that is heavier on the scale of a believer on the Day of Judgement than a good character. If the Muslim carries within him a beautiful character, it will be the most observable reflection of the effect of Islamic guidance on him. His speaking and listening, patience, forbearance and inner calm transcends his landscape and reflects the beauty of the call he is verbally presenting. Ibn Baṭṭāl said: “In line with the character of a believer is to lower the wings of humility unto mankind, to have gentle speech, and leaving off roughness in speech to them, and that is from the strongest means of sincere affection.”<sup>460</sup>

The Muslim remembers that it is not himself that he is serving. It is not for the purpose of self-aggrandisement that he speaks about Allāh. Though the Muslim, relevant to his contextual surrounding, adapts and appreciate the protocols of his circumstance, he must not lose sight of his purpose of reflecting the beauty of Islamic teachings. This is even if he is, at any moment, faced with arrogance, disdain and mockery or is overwhelmed with another's wit and argumentative skill. The Muslim holds on to patience

458 Al-Bukhārī 7172.

459 Madārij al-Sālikīn 2/294.

460 Faṭḥ al-Bārī, 10/528.

and remembers that it is not he who changes anyone's heart, but that it is Allāh who turns hearts:

“If they deny you O Prophet, so did the people of Noah before them, as well as the tribes of ‘Ād and Thamūd. the people of Abraham, the people of Lot, and the residents of Midian. And Moses was denied too...”<sup>461</sup>

Sometimes a display of magnanimity can be far more expressive than a sophisticated argument. At the heart of a discussion is precisely a heart, one that searches for a beautiful character. It might show that people want not only to be guided, but to find an honourable guide in their midst. Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī said:

“The believer is forbearing; he does not behave ignorantly even if ignorance is done unto him. He is forbearing and does not wrong others. If he is wronged then he forgives. He does not cut off from people; and if he is cut off then he reconciles. He does not show miserliness. And if he is shown miserliness, then he instead shows patience.”<sup>462</sup>

A beautiful example of how such forbearance was demonstrated is found in the most excellent character of the Prophet ﷺ when met by a disgruntled Bedouin:

“I was walking with the Messenger of Allāh and he had put on a mantle of Najrān with a thick border. A bedouin met him and pulled the mantle so violently that I saw this violent pulling leaving marks of the border of the mantle on the skin of the neck of the Messenger of Allāh. And he (the bedouin) said: Muḥammad, issue command that I should be given out of the wealth of Allāh which is at your disposal. The Messenger of Allāh turned his attention to him and smiled, and then ordered for him a gift (provision).”<sup>463</sup>

In another narration, the Prophet's companions were prepared to physically rebuke the Bedouin for his impudence, but the Prophet ﷺ stopped them and showed that a teaching based on kindness and forbearance can be far more meaningful and transformative for all than retaliating. The Prophet ﷺ repelled with what was better. Wahb ibn Munabbih said,

461 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 22, verse 42-44.

462 Ibn Abī Dunya, 1246/54-55.

463 Muslim 1057a.



“Knowledge is the close friend of the believer, and forbearance is his minister, and intelligence is his proof, and actions are his worth, and patience is his leader, and compassion is his father, and gentleness is his brother.”<sup>464</sup>

Humans seek dignity in being respected and this is something Allāh affords man in his core, human state. This is crucial in our own understanding of ourselves and of others. The way we seek to protect our own dignity gives us an insight into the way others too value themselves and the mode of respect that needs to exist between people. This attitude of living with the bearing of dignity is even more vital in times of conflict and when people are at their most vulnerable. This sense of promoting and respecting a person’s dignity is pivotal in calling others to Allāh since it challenges any attitudes of superiority that can easily act as a barrier to the Muslim’s sincerity. This approach from the Muslim prevents his interactions with others disintegrating into a battle of egos. Any attempt at informing them of Islam at that point is simply lost in translation. Sometimes even ‘retreating’, or holding back can be so much more worthwhile than feeling a need to say something at every junction.<sup>465</sup>

It is for the *dā‘ī* to remember that the success of his conveying of the message depends much on his or her character. An insulting word can immediately steer any conversation into a wrong direction and an opportunity can easily be lost. Of course, we are not born with the fineness of character and develop both good and bad habits as time progresses. Consider the following narration,

“When a delegation from his tribe travelled to Madinah, they raced to greet the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ as soon as they arrived. However, Ashajj stayed behind, knelt his camel, and changed into a fresh pair of garments before going to meet the Prophet ﷺ. The Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ said to Ashajj, “You have two characteristics which Allāh loves: forbearance (*ḥilm*) and deliberation (*anāh*).” Ashajj asked, “Have I acquired them or was I born with them?” The Prophet replied, “Rather it is something you were born with.” Ashajj then said, “Praise be to Allāh who created me with those very qualities which He loves.”<sup>466</sup>

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464 Al-Ḥāfiẓ ibn Shāhīn, *Al-Targhīb fi Faḍā’il al-A’ māl*/251.

465 Osman Latiff, *On Being Human: How Islam addresses othering, dehumanisation and empathy* (Sapience Institute, 2020), p. 26.

466 Ibn Mājah 4187

We are not all born with the best of characters, though some qualities might shine from us due to a series of things that have aided us from birth: our parents, family, close friends, early education, environment all have a bearing on the formulation of character. Perhaps we have grown with some good character traits and have developed negative ones along the way. In light of the *hadith* above, scholars explain that the one who has to acquire and learn good character has a greater reward than the one to whom those things come much easier.

## Steps towards good character

1. The best teaching in this regard is to learn from the Prophet's character, to see how he was forbearing and patient, courageous and compassionate in conveying the message for example. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī has a beautiful description of the Prophet's character here –

“He was the most forbearing of people, the most courageous of people, the most just of people, the most chaste of people...He was the most generous of people...He was the most modest of people and would not look anyone straight in the eye. He would respond to the invitations of slaves and free alike, and accept a gift even if it was a cup of milk, and he would reward a person for it...He got angry for the sake of his Lord but he did not get angry for his own sake. He would adhere to the truth even if that resulted in harm for himself or his companions. He would accept invitations to meals, visit the sick, and attend funerals. He walked alone among his enemies without a guard. He was the most humble and quiet of people without being arrogant, the most eloquent without being long-winded, the most cheerful of countenance. He did not worry about worldly matters. He wore whatever he found, and let his slave or others ride behind him on his mount. He rode whatever was available, sometimes a horse, sometimes a camel, sometimes a mule and sometimes a donkey. Sometimes he walked barefoot, with no cloak, turban or cap, visiting the sick in the furthest parts of Madina...He would sit with the poor and offer food to and eat with the needy, honouring the virtuous and softening the hearts of people of status by treating them kindly. He upheld ties of kinship without favouring his relatives over those who were better than them, and he did not treat anyone harshly. He accepted the excuses of those who apologised to him... When

voices were raised against him, he bore that with patience...He did not look down on any poor person because of his poverty or chronic sickness, and he did not fear any king because of his power. He called both of them to Allāh on equal terms.”<sup>467</sup>

2. To remember that the whole of life is about improving oneself. Developing good character takes time. Leaving off bad habits can take time, but the believer must commit to this task: “Indeed he succeeds who purifies his own self”<sup>468</sup>
3. Learn and practice reciting the following supplications –

اللَّهُمَّ حَسَّنْتَ خَلْقِي فَحَسِّنْ خُلُقِي

“O Allāh, You have made my creation beautiful, thus make my character beautiful.”<sup>469</sup>

and:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنْ مُنْكَرَاتِ الْأَخْلَاقِ وَالْأَعْمَالِ وَالْأَهْوَاءِ

“O Allāh, I seek refuge in you from evil character traits, evil deeds, and evil desires.”<sup>470</sup>

*Da'wah* is an act of worship associated with tests and trials, and has been the way of all prophets with their respected nations. Even though Prophet Nūḥ tried relentlessly with his people to communicate the message to them, and in a variety of different ways – using different times and settings, sometimes approaching individuals and at other times speaking to groups, and adopting differing styles of approach, from giving advice, to sermonising, to debate, to speaking with a soft, gentle approach, nevertheless the nation of prophet Nūḥ were staunch in their opposition to his call. They resorted to covering their ears and mocking him and his message:

“The disbelieving chiefs of his people responded, “We surely see you as a fool, and we certainly think you are a liar.”<sup>471</sup>

467 Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* 2/430-442.

468 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 91, verse 9.

469 Ibn Ḥibbān 6734

470 Al-Tirmidhī 3591

471 Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 7, verse 66.

“They threatened, “If you do not desist, O Noah, you will surely be stoned to death.”<sup>472</sup>

From verbal assaults to threats of murder, Prophet Nūḥ faced the whole onslaught of opposition to the divine call. These tactics will continue to exist from detractors who would insult and threaten rather than communicate. While *daʿwāh* is calling others to Islam, *Duʿā* is calling upon one’s Lord for assistance in that task. Upon the Muslim is to call upon His Lord for success in this world and the next life. *Duʿā* is a daily activity and connects with many vital elements of Islam such as having reliance on Allāh – a deep reflection of our servitude towards Him; to finding hope in His deliverance, and instilling within the believers a profound sense of humility. Allāh describes in the Qurʾān,

“Call on your Lord humbly and privately...”<sup>473</sup>

Say: “I invoke my Sustainer alone, for I do not ascribe divinity to anyone beside Him.”<sup>474</sup>

There are numerous occasions wherein Prophets and their followers resorted to their Lord’s assistance in preparation for communicating the message, as in Prophet Mūsā (“Moses prayed, “My Lord! Uplift my heart for me”<sup>475</sup> – until the end of his prayer), or during the commission of *daʿwāh*, shown for example in Prophet Nūḥ’s continuous imploring unto his Lord which is a very interesting display since it coalesces his personal *duʿā* with *daʿwāh* to his people as the main subject (He cried, “My Lord! I have surely called my people day and night...”<sup>476</sup> until the end of his beseeching) or upon the completion of the task of *daʿwāh* shown in the example of the man who came running from the furthest city (If only my people knew). There is a beautiful contrasting here between physical distance in reaching his people and maximal closeness to Allāh reflected in his final words (He was told, ‘Enter the Garden,’ so he said, ‘If only my people knew how my Lord has forgiven me and set me among the highly honoured.’<sup>477</sup>). Another example of *duʿā* upon the completion of the task of *daʿwāh* is in what is reported of the Prophet’s ﷺ supplication after the events of Tāʾif when he prayed,

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472 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 26, verse 116.

473 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 7, verse 55.

474 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 72, verse 20.

475 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 20, verse 25.

476 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 71, verse 5.

477 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 36, verse 26-27.

“O Allāh, I appeal to You for the weakness in my strength and my limited power and the treatment of contempt and humiliation from people. To You, the Most Merciful of all the merciful ones, You are the Lord of the oppressed, and You are my Lord. Under whose care are You leaving me to? To an enemy oppressing me? Or to a friend You have given control of my affair? If there is no anger from You on me I will forever be content. However, Your blessing is vastly important for me I seek refuge with the glory of Your Light which the heavens and earth are lit from, Your anger will not befall on me, nor Your displeasure descends on me. To You is the supplication until You are pleased and there is no control or power except by You.”<sup>478</sup>

In each of these examples we see a profound sense of patience in the characters of the supplicants. The Prophet’s companion Ṭufail ibn ‘Amr al-Dausī who went back to his people in Yemen after embracing Islam and only spending a short time with the Prophet ﷺ - propelled to reach his people so he could share the news of Islam with them, came back to the Prophet ﷺ with these words,

“O Allāh’s Messenger ﷺ! The people of the tribe of Daus disobeyed and refused to follow you; so invoke Allāh against them.” The people said, “The tribe of Daus is ruined.” The Prophet ﷺ said, “O Allāh! Give guidance to the people of Daus, and let them embrace Islam.”<sup>479</sup>

Ṭufail returned when the Prophet s had migrated to Madīna with his companions, thirteen years after his time in Makkah. This means that Ṭufail patiently devoted his time with his people until they embraced Islam in large numbers. It was then that he returned many years later, a reflection of the focused energy he devoted to his own people and the patience he would have employed in disseminating the message throughout those years. Ṭufail was not swept away in the tide of distractions but considered his people as the most necessary recipients of the divine message, and that required focus and patience. From those who embraced Islam as a consequence of his *da‘wah* was the Prophet’s companion Abū Huraira, and he too has an interesting account of the patience required in *da‘wah*. While Ṭufail was initially demoralised by the indolence of his people accepting Islam, Abū Huraira was saddened by his mother’s refusal to follow him in faith. He reports:

478 Tabarani 13/73/181 (*da‘if*)

479 Al-Bukhārī 2937

“I invited my mother, who was a polytheist, to Islam. I invited her one day and she said to me something about Allāh’s Messenger which I hated. I came to Allāh’s Messenger weeping and said: Allāh’s Messenger, I invited my mother to Islam but she did not accept my invitation. I invited her today but she said to me something which I did not like. Please supplicate Allāh that He may guide the mother of Abū Huraira. Thereupon Allāh’s Messenger said: O Allāh, guide mother of Abū Huraira on the right path. I came out quite pleased with the supplication of Allāh’s Prophet ﷺ and when I came near the door it was closed from within. My mother heard the noise of my footsteps and she said: Abū Huraira, just wait, and I heard the noise of falling water. She took a bath and put on the shirt and quickly covered her head with a headdress and opened the door and then said: Abū Huraira, I bear witness to the fact that there is none worthy of worship but Allāh and Muḥammad is His servant and His Messenger. Abū Huraira said: I went back to Allāh’s Messenger and was shedding the tears of joy. I said: Allāh’s Messenger, be happy, for Allāh has responded to your supplication and He has guided the mother of Abū Huraira. The Prophet ﷺ praised Allāh, and extolled Him and uttered good words.<sup>480</sup>

In another narration, we are told,

“I desired for my mother to be upon Islam but she refused. I told her again but she refused again. I went to the Prophet ﷺ, and I said, “Supplicate to Allāh for her.” The Prophet ﷺ supplicated and I went to her. She answered the door and she said, “O Abū Huraira, I have embraced Islam.” I told the Prophet ﷺ, saying, “Supplicate to Allāh for me and my mother.” The Prophet said, “O Allāh, endear your servant Abū Huraira and his mother to the people.”<sup>481</sup>

To be forbearing is to win a war against your own ego. Forbearance is self-control and restraint. It is a hallmark of mercy and patience and reflects the beauty of Islam on many levels. Allāh of course is Al-Ḥalīm (The Forbearing One). His creation disobey Him, worship other than Him, disbelieve in Him, but He still provides for them, allowing them to make use of His provisions in His creation. Allāh, in His infinite Mercy grants respite to the sinner, assisting him to find his way back and receiving the

480 Muslim 2491

481 Al-Adab al-Mufrad 34

sinner with forgiveness. That a person could sin against Allāh for the entirety of a life and find guidance back to Allāh at a final moment, and then to be met with forgiveness is reflective of Allāh's most perfect forbearance.

Fitting with the way Allāh described the Prophet ﷺ, "you are but a mercy to the worlds",<sup>482</sup> and "upon an exalted [standard] of character",<sup>483</sup> it was the standard of the Prophet ﷺ to show forbearance and nobility when insulted and attacked. It was those key verses in Sūrah al-Fuṣṣilat that marked the transformation in a people who had not previously encountered a holistic message centred on belief in One God, living a life aware of a Day of divine accountability and with a strong emphasis on displaying a great standard of character towards others. Allāh sets forth the model of transformative personal and social change through the work of calling others to His way. He says:

"And whose words are better than someone who calls others to Allāh, does good, and says, "I am truly one of those who submit."?"<sup>484</sup>

"Good and evil cannot be equal.

The remarkably beautiful thing about this verse is its context in relation to *da'wah*. The rhetorical question, "who is better... than?" stresses the understanding that no speech can be equated to the speech engaged in the task of inviting people to the way of Allāh and while practicing it himself. In *tafsīr al-Jalalayn*, "who is better" means "no one is better in speech", and that the "call to Allāh" is a "call to *tawhīd* (monotheism)", and repelling with what is better "is to face anger with patience, ignorance with forbearance, bad conduct with forgiveness."<sup>485</sup> Ibn 'Abbās explains that "If they do this, Allāh will save them from Satan and subdue their enemies to them until they become like close friends."<sup>486</sup>

4. Whenever the caller to Islam is faced with arrogance and other bad manners, he should remember this verse and it will instil in the caller a serene sense of comfort since he will remember that it is Allāh alone who controls hearts and it is Allāh who can turn a situation of hostility into one of friendship. The way of the 'Servants of the Most Compassionate' described in the Qur'an is that they counter hostility with a better disposition, that,

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482 Al-Qur'an. Chapter 21, verse 107.

483 Al-Qur'an. Chapter 68, verse 4.

484 Al-Qur'an. Chapter 41, verse 33.

485 Al-Mahallī and al-Suyuṭī, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* (Dār al-Ikhaa, 1992), p. 380

486 Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Lebanon, Dār al-Ma'rifa:2003), p. 1409.

“The true servants of the Most Compassionate are those who walk on the earth humbly, and when the foolish address them improperly, they only respond with peace.”<sup>487</sup>

This is pertinent for the *dāʿī* to take to heart since it is likely that some of those he calls to, will meet him with ignorant words and behaviour. Let him remember also the verse

“Be gracious, enjoin what is right, and turn away from those who act ignorantly.”<sup>488</sup>

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487 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 25, verse 63.

488 Al-Qurʾān. Chapter 7, verse 199.



## GOOD CHARACTER: CASE STUDIES

How might one think about *daʿwah* when not behind a *daʿwah* table or communicating to someone. What are the other types of *daʿwah* wherein the characteristics described in the book can be useful?

On a normal day when we encounter pedestrians or commuters think about how going out of your way to show kindness to others and lending a hand to those in need around you can leave a very positive impression and even aid in reversing stereotypes. Helping someone in need and simply talking to people can sometimes be very comforting. We should be mindful of the epidemic of loneliness in our societies. It may very well be that the person with whom you are communicating values the communication time more than the content of your communication, or values a non-judgmental exchange void of abuse, mockery or intimidation and thus remains in your company.

Spending time with the people such as the elderly and valuing their life experiences and showing kindness and respect and sharing something of Islam with them can be a rewarding experience. The *dāʿī* should convey the spirit of Islamic compassion and reflect the way Islam promotes a remarkable sense of togetherness with the human spirit. You should not forget the undercurrents of life which tug at every human being and how the Qurʾānic narrative interweaves instructions and intellectual reasoning with an appeal to heart and emotions.

Sometimes it might be family members or close friends that we are calling to Islam. Always remember to be positive, friendly, approachable and compassionate in your dealings. A gift bestowed on someone can have a good effect of softening that person's heart, and that coupled with compassionately conveying the message can be a productive encounter.

How can the *dāʿī* use good character to overcome negative impressions others might have of Islam, and how can one's dealing with others reflect the beauty of Islam, and how can this be shown?

The Prophet taught that the conveying of the Islamic call is the entirety of you. Words well-spoken can have a lasting impact. It is often the 'how'

of what is said that transcends the ‘what’ of whatever was said. When a Makkan individual, Fuḍāla ibn ‘Umayr, was within reach of trying to assassinate the Prophet, the Prophet looked up at Fuḍāla and asked, “What is it that you were saying to yourself?” Fuḍāla brushed off the question by saying he was simply praising Allāh. The Prophet smiled at Fuḍāla and said, “Ask Allāh to forgive you,” placing his hand on Fuḍāla’s chest. Fuḍāla would later say, “By Allāh, from the moment he lifted his hand from my chest, there remained nothing of Allāh’s creation except that he was more beloved to me than it.”<sup>489</sup> The Prophet stressed upon the great importance of leaving an impression and displaying integrity of character on others, of displaying forbearance and genuinely caring for the well-being of others. This should be the cornerstone of our work in *da‘wah*. There are countless stories of people who, previously hostile, left their ill-intended encounters as Muslims. What oftentimes transformed their perceptions was the good dealing coupled with true words of the Islamic message.

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489 Ibn ‘Abdul-Barr, *al-Durar fi Ikhtiṣār al-Maghāzī wal-Siyar*, p. 235

## Conclusion

This book, *Calling to Islam: The Characteristics of the Dā'ī & How to Attain Them*, has listed perhaps the most important qualities that one needs when communicating the message of Islam to someone. Some of these attributes overlap in the case studies presented from the Qur'an and prophetic example. Oftentimes, for example, a prophet of Allāh would exhibit many of these traits within a single encounter with his people.

These characteristics, outlined in this book as Righteousness, Sincerity, Wisdom, Knowledge, Courage, Empathy and Good Character are ones the *dā'ī* should embody to make his work beneficial to himself and to others around him. There are others intertwined within these such as patience, forbearance, compassion etc and these are all covered at different points. The importance and place of these characteristics is drawn upon from many Qur'anic examples and from the life of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ cited in the book.

With these characteristics in mind, the *dā'ī's* approach should reflect versatility. He should be able to access varying means at his disposal; the message of Islam can be communicated in a variety of ways. In our world today, mass media and communication has become an important means of *da'wah*. Allāh has informed us that the excellence of the *ummah* is strongly related to its propagating the true message of Islam to humanity, in commanding to good and forbidding evil. Muslims have to effectively utilise such modern media and communication to spread the message of Islam. If the *dā'ī* remembers that his goal is to make the word of Allāh the highest as discussed in the opening section, then whatever permissible means are available can be utilised for the purpose of *da'wah*. All forms of *da'wah* have their effects, and Allāh can instil guidance in the hearts of people through a variety of means. People embrace Islam on internet podcasts as they do at *da'wah* tables in city centres.

The boundaries between people can overlap and we must not simplify such binaries. Allāh informs us that man can be inspired to perform won-

drous displays of kindness, but so too can he sink into moral depravity and betray his own better sense of self. The Qur'an in Surah al-Shams draws our attention to the dichotomies which exist within the human condition:

“by the soul and how He formed it/and inspired it [to know] its own rebellion and piety!/The one who purifies his soul succeeds/ and the one who corrupts it fails.”<sup>490</sup>

There are of course many things a *dā'ī* can do to present the beautiful way of Islam. As discussed in the book, communicating the message through dialogue; taking someone out for lunch and building a bridge of communication; the displaying of great character and the upholding of Islamic values in daily interactions, can each reflect a positive display of Islam. The key is to remember that humans are not machines and though the purpose is to call mankind to the Oneness of Allāh, there is no set script of *da'wah*. We are called on to follow and emulate the Prophet's perfect example and the characteristics of the *dā'ī* are all found in his noble character.

The significance of *da'wah* cannot therefore be overemphasized. It is the mission of all the Prophets and is a work centred on reviving the hearts and minds of people, about calling people back to their natural way:

“Can those who had been dead, to whom We gave life and a light with which they can walk among people, be compared to those in complete darkness from which they can never emerge?”<sup>491</sup>

It is every believer's duty to see themselves as a *dā'ī*, as a caller to the way of Islam. Those whom Allāh has bestowed with knowledge must learn and teach about the importance of conveying the message of Islam and utilise their knowledge in the spread of Islam. Those who have been gifted with good health and wealth must utilise those blessings to teach and spread the religion. Everyone should see themselves as being a part of this most sacred endeavour.

*O Allāh I am the weakest of your servants  
You honoured me to know You and call others to You  
When you know I am sincere in my intentions,  
protect me upon it, and protect it for me  
When you are aware of other than that from me,  
rectify me before my passing.  
Let me not pass until you are pleased with me*

490 Al-Qur'an. Chapter 91, verses 7-10.

491 Al-Qur'an. Chapter 6, verse 122.

