

# Steps to effective “Da’wah” – Practical Instructions for the Muslim “Missionary”

Christine Schirmacher

„And who is better in speech than him who prays unto his Lord and does right and says: ‚I am of those who surrender (unto Him)’?“ (surah 41:33)

## Da’wah – a kind of Jihad

When Muslim leaders in a Western context insist that Christian churches should clearly distance themselves from missionary activity in order not to endanger interfaith dialogue, it is often overlooked that the obligation to propagate one’s faith is also a part of Islam, for “*Islam is thus a missionary religion from its very inception*”<sup>1</sup>.

The equivalent Arabic term for “mission” is “Da’wah”, which has a similar range of meaning to the English word “appeal”. The appeal to recognize Islam as the only true religion and accept the truth of the Qur’an is made to both non-Muslims and Muslims who do not fully practise their faith. The responsibility for extending this universal “invitation” to all mankind lay first and foremost with the prophets God sent to the peoples of the earth with the message of Islam. Since Muhammad, the last of the prophets (22:67), it is now the obligation of the whole Muslim community (“*Ummah*” in Arabic) and, as several spokespeople have affirmed, of every individual Muslim: „*Every Muslim by virtue of his faith is a missionary of*

*Islam*“<sup>2</sup>.

Anyone who does not fulfill his duty to call people to Islam will be accused on the Day of Judgement, and additional to that he makes himself to be an outsider of the Muslim community (*ummah*)<sup>3</sup>.

In support of this contention it is claimed Muhammad himself pursued dialogue through “Da’wah” and invited non-Muslims to the faith of Islam<sup>4</sup>. The fact that Muhammad later attacked and drove out people who failed to respond to his invitation, such as the three Jewish tribes in Medina, is often not referred to. Some extreme Muslim groups feel the time for armed struggle against the “infidels” has come, now that Islam has already been peacefully proclaimed world-wide. The injustice, oppression and persecution Muslims in Palestine are undergoing at the hands of Western governments justifies the “defence” of the Islamic community even by means of terrorist attacks against the Western aggressors. Even violence is justified by the need to counter Christian missionary activity or repel the political influence of the western world’s “Crusader states”.

„Da’wah” is thus “*an important form of Jihad*”<sup>5</sup>, getting involved in God’s cause. Depending on to which historical context of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Meaning and Significance of Dawah ila-Allah. A Guide to the Propagation of Islam. Markazi Maktaba Islami: Delhi, 1983, S. 43. In this article, I will only quote Muslim sources.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Ahmad H. Sakr. Dialogue with Non-Muslims. In: The Muslim World League Journal, Vol. 25/11, March 1998, pp. 18-20, here p. 18.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ahmad al-Khalifa. Da’wa in Deutschland – Probleme und Perspektiven. In: al-Islam. Zeitschrift von Muslimen in Deutschland 3/2001, pp. 11-13, here p. 11.

Qur'an various Muslim groups refer and whether they appeal to its "pacific" verses or those which countenance violence, this involvement can be interpreted as simply preaching or as armed struggle. Peaceful „Da‘wah” is carried out through the spread of literature and the Qur'an, correspondence courses, building schools and hospitals, prison visitation, public meetings, Mosque open days, radio and television and such like.

### **„Da‘wah” – after all, Christian are infidels too**

Muslims frequently emphasize that Christianity is recognized by Islam, but this does not mean Christians are seen as equal partners but just temporarily tolerated as those the Qur'an denotes "peoples of the book" (*ahl al-kitab* in Arabic), Jews and Christians. In the final analysis Muslim theologians view Christians as "infidels"<sup>6</sup> who thus need to be called to faith in Islam. "Some acquaintance with the Bible helps us to prepare better for dialogue with Christians. Most of them are completely ignorant of their Bible, they only know what they get to hear in church"<sup>7</sup>.

The aim of „Da‘wah” by socially active elements is not to convince every individual of the "peoples of the book" (as most inhabitants of Western countries are regarded) to convert to Islam but rather to give Islam a high profile in the West, for instance by building mosques with tall minarets, to infiltrate society with Islamic

<sup>6</sup> E. g. the former chief *mufti* (learned person issuing *fatwas* – legal opinions) of Saudi-Arabia, Sheikh Abdul Aziz Ibn Baz. Obligation of a Muslim Towards a Disbeliever. Quoted from: [www.themodernreligion.com/dawah/dawah\\_methodology.htm](http://www.themodernreligion.com/dawah/dawah_methodology.htm) (05.08.03).

<sup>7</sup> Sadiya Plath. „Sie entstellen die Schrift an ihren richtigen Stellen ...“ (Sure 5:13). Bibeltextstellen für Muslime im Dialog mit Christen. In: *al-Islam*. 4/2000, pp. 11-14, here p. 11

values and to push for acceptance of elements of Islamic law such as the permission to slaughter animals in accordance with Muslim ritual, for Muslim women and girls to wear the veil in school and, thus far only in isolated instances, the recognition of polygamy for immigrants to Germany.

### **„Da‘wah” – salvation from eternal damnation**

It is often emphasized that Islam is preached not to "convert" people<sup>8</sup>, for the missionary cannot ultimately influence the addressee's decision: "It is an attempt to save a person from the eternal punishment"<sup>9</sup>. The voluntary nature of the decision is underlined by quoting suraj 2:256 "There is no compulsion in religion."

"Da‘wah" nonetheless demands wholehearted commitment: "It is not an easy job, as it requires from that person commitment, hard work, continuance, sacrifice ..."<sup>10</sup>. „Da‘wah” work is no relict of the past but, especially where Muslims are in the minority, more urgent than ever, indeed "a golden opportunity"<sup>11</sup>, for: "Da‘wah opportunities are everywhere"<sup>12</sup>.

### **Practical tips for „Da‘wah”**

Practical hints for „Da‘wah” work appear in Muslim magazines and especially on the Internet, some even read as though they have taken a page out of the copy book of principles of Christian public relations<sup>13</sup>. Some publications

<sup>8</sup> Islamic Dawah: Presenting Islam to Non-Muslims. In: *The Muslim World League Journal* Vol. 25/8, Dec 1997, pp. 17-20, here pp. 18.

<sup>9</sup> [www.themodernreligion.com/dawah\\_volun\\_intpple.htm](http://www.themodernreligion.com/dawah_volun_intpple.htm) (05.08.03).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Sakr. Dialogue. Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>12</sup> [www.netmuslims.com/resources/dawah-intro.html](http://www.netmuslims.com/resources/dawah-intro.html) (05.08.03).

<sup>13</sup> It is reported, that Christians have devel-

give priority to personal conversation as the best way to advertize Islam. *“Personal one-to-one approach is the method of choice”*<sup>14</sup>.

Success in „Da‘wah” work means first of all knowing Islam and the Qur’an and being familiar with the traditions and stories from Muhammad’s life, for only then is it possible in conversation to give answers to followers of other faiths. Words alone will not suffice, however. *“Da‘wah can be by writing, speaking, behaviour, attitude, manners and sharing and caring with and for others ...”*<sup>15</sup>. A good example is also important: *“The best da‘wah is to be a good example”*<sup>16</sup>.

To practise “Da‘wah” one must be polite and respectful: *“To ‘invite’ implies to gently pursue, attract, be polite, be friendly, be caring and understanding”*<sup>17</sup>, or: *“Be friendly, and try to have a sense of humour”*<sup>18</sup>. Outward appearance has a role to play: *“be clean and neat”*; *“don’t eat raw onions or garlic before attending mosque or meeting people”*<sup>19</sup> and *“chew gum or something for good breath”*<sup>20</sup>.

## **Don’t deprecate other people or their religion**

Advocates of Islam are warned against making negative judgments on other religions or

---

oped means of Evangelism by going from door to door and offering to discuss religious questions: Islamic Dawah: Presenting Islam. Ibid., S. 18.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Dr. Ahmad H. Sakr. The Islamic Concept of Dawah. In: The Muslim World League Journal Vol. 25/8, Dec 1997, pp. 12-16, here p. 15.

<sup>16</sup> [www.netmuslims.com/resources/dawah-intro.html](http://www.netmuslims.com/resources/dawah-intro.html) (05.08.03).

<sup>17</sup> Islamic Dawah: Presenting Islam. Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>18</sup> Sakr. Dialogue. Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>19</sup> [www.muslima-aktiv.de/5dawah.htm](http://www.muslima-aktiv.de/5dawah.htm) (05.08.03).

<sup>20</sup> [www.netmuslims.com/resources/dawah-intro.html](http://www.netmuslims.com/resources/dawah-intro.html) (05.08.03)

getting involved in debate, for: *“Debates can be quite entertaining to Muslims, but a torture to the opponent group; torture never wins hearts”*<sup>21</sup>.

There are appeals for the appropriate modesty in approach: *“No one should brag about his activities, his favours, or his achievements. No one should think or believe that the ultimate truth is in his own brain. No one should claim that his method is the very best”*<sup>22</sup>. Elsewhere the following advice is given: *“The task ... of bringing someone closer to Allah ... should not be connected to arrogance, thinking you are the teacher and everyone else should be lucky you’ve embarked on a crusade to save them”*<sup>23</sup>.

Some “Da‘wah” instructions tell propagators of Islam not to lose their temper if their dialogue partner is critical or rejects the message. *“Be neither bitter nor swear revenge when you are attacked”*<sup>24</sup>.

## **“Da‘wah” and aid**

Other “Da‘wah” instructions emphasize the value of helping people to gain a hearing for Islam: *“Visit the sick ... help the needy, ... exchange gifts,”*<sup>25</sup>, for *“it is precisely these other deeds [doing good] which wins the hearts of the poor and bound for Islam”*<sup>26</sup>.

---

<sup>21</sup> Islamic Dawah: Presenting Islam. Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>22</sup> Sakr. Concept. Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>23</sup> [www.themodernreligion.com/dawah/dawah-12tips.html](http://www.themodernreligion.com/dawah/dawah-12tips.html) (05.08.03)

<sup>24</sup> [www.muslima-aktiv.de/5dawah.htm](http://www.muslima-aktiv.de/5dawah.htm) (05.08.03).

<sup>25</sup> [www.muslima-aktiv.de/5dawah.htm](http://www.muslima-aktiv.de/5dawah.htm) (05.08.03).

<sup>26</sup> Ahmad von Denffer. Da‘wa in der Zeit des Propheten. Schriftenreihe des Islamischen Zentrums München 12: München, 2001, p. 12.

## “Da‘wah” from woman to woman

“Da‘wah” from one woman to another has a particular role to play. On the one hand the relevant internet pages express regret that women’s general ignorance of Islam hardly puts them in a position to invite non-Muslim women to Islam. *“The level of general Islamic knowledge among most women is low. Women’s Da‘wah programs ... are rare, and not well organised”*<sup>27</sup>. Muslim women’s isolation makes another woman an ideal dialogue partner.

On the other hand they voice criticism of the fact that Muslim women are frequently confined to the home. “Many men are not convinced about the importance of women’s role and responsibilities in the field of Da‘wah ... In many instances we see men objecting to women’s participation in Da‘wah”<sup>28</sup>.

Husbands are appealed to at least let their wives attend the mosque<sup>29</sup> to expand their knowledge of Islam and to meet other women. *“So far, except in a few instances, women have been distanced from the field of Da‘wah work”*<sup>30</sup>, since according to Islamic marital law a wife needs her husband’s permission in principle to leave the house. *“It is vital that husbands encourage their wives to participate in Da‘wah work”*<sup>31</sup>, as long as this does not interfere with their duties as wife and mother and Muslim standards of decency are maintained.

<sup>27</sup> [www.themodernreligion.com/dawah/women-dawah.html](http://www.themodernreligion.com/dawah/women-dawah.html) (05.08.03).

<sup>28</sup> [www.themodernreligion.com/dawah/women-dawah.html](http://www.themodernreligion.com/dawah/women-dawah.html) (05.08.03).

<sup>29</sup> [www.themodernreligion.com/dawah/women-dawah.html](http://www.themodernreligion.com/dawah/women-dawah.html) (05.08.03).

<sup>30</sup> [www.themodernreligion.com/dawah/women-dawah.html](http://www.themodernreligion.com/dawah/women-dawah.html) (05.08.03).

<sup>31</sup> [www.themodernreligion.com/dawah/women-dawah.html](http://www.themodernreligion.com/dawah/women-dawah.html) (05.08.03).

## Last but not least...

*“Don’t be shy”*<sup>32</sup>, encourages an Islamic website, for *“Allah is always with us”*<sup>33</sup>.

### Zitat über die Demokratie

**Der „Verband der islamischen Vereine und Gemeinden“ e.V. (Köln) zur Demokratie:** „Die Demokratie ist ein ... System der Unwissenheit. Aus diesem Grund ist die Demokratie in einem islamischen Land nicht möglich. Die Nicht-Muslime aber halten an der Demokratie fest. Daher ist ein islamischer Staat nur mit Rebellion durchzusetzen.“

(Quelle: „Ümmet-i Muhammed“ Nr. 385 vom 28. Juni 2001.)

**The “Association of Muslim Organisations and Communities”, Cologne (“Verband der islamischen Vereine und Gemeinden”) e.V. about democracy:** “Democracy is a ... system of ignorance and is therefore not possible in a Muslim country. Because Non-Muslims stick to democracy, a Muslim state can only become reality by rebellion.”

(Source: "Ümmet-i Muhammed" Nr. 385 vom 28. Juni 2001.)

<sup>32</sup> [www.muslima-aktiv.de/5dawah.htm](http://www.muslima-aktiv.de/5dawah.htm) (05.08.03).

<sup>33</sup> Islamic Dawah: Presenting Islam. a.a.O., S. 20.