

“Da’wah” today: The Islamic call to Faith and Islamic PR Activities

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The Duty of Da’wah

Islam is a religion in which the call for the total rule of Allah over the whole world is proclaimed, as it is stated in the Qur’an: “Unto Allah belong the East and the West. He guides whom he will unto a straight path” (surah 2:142). The concept of Da’wah derives its meaning from the Arabic verb da’a = to call, to invite. Da’wah is therefore an imperative duty for all Muslims, namely to invite others to accept the truth of Islam. This duty is obligatory (in Arabic fard) as a proclamation. It means to call everyone to full submission to the One God (in Arabic: Tauhid) as Muhammad has defined Allah’s will and way. This includes also the concept to reject all unbelief and all of what is associated with Allah (in Arabic: shirk). It also includes the public confession:

“There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the Apostle (Messenger) of Allah.”
This responsibility is obligatory and applicable also in a Western secular context. In Surah 16:126 (125) it is stated:

“Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and reason with them in the better way. Lo! Thy Lord is best aware of him who does stray from his way, and He is best aware of those who go aright” (Pickthall).

Islamic opinion-makers and leading heads of Islamic organisation take a lot of effort to guide the faithful to fulfill the obligation of Da’wah. This includes verbal and non-verbal means of demonstrating an Islamic life style, for example how to dress in an Islamic way. Their list of demands does include the permission of an amplified loudspeaker call to prayer. The general concept of Da’wah regards the world categorised in “The House of Islam” (in Arabic: dar ul-Islam) and “The House of War” (in Arabic: dar ul-harb). Da’wah also does include the concept of Jihad, which has gained at the beginning of the 21st century a new significance in inner Islamic discussions. Due to lack of space these aspects will not be elaborated further, as they deserve to be further analysed. The awareness of being commissioned to get everyone engaged in Da’wah work is derived from the Qu’ran itself. Increasingly, the West is considered to be on the agenda of these Islamic activists as well. Herein Da’wah is recognised as an individual duty of every Muslim as well as the obligation for the whole Islamic community (in Arabic: ummah). Looking at the various Islamic websites, one does realise a tremendous amount of networking on these issues and a growing local as well as global awareness for Da’wah. What is thought and taught at Mecca, Medina, Cairo or any other Islamic Centre around the world does significantly influence the thought pattern of practicing Muslims in the West. It has to be recognised for what it is: one of the aspects of globalisation. The Qu’ran claims that Islam is the final religion, correcting all previous faiths and superseding them all (e.g. 3:85ff). Therefore the

call and invitation to accept Islam is also addressing the so-called “people of the book”, the Jews and the Christians. In the Islamic concept of thinking, all of these previous faiths have deficits. With the coming of Islam they have been declared to be redundant and without real meaning any more (3:110ff). Islam certainly does not accept other religions as equal to itself. Even those of the so-called Abrahamic Faiths ¹ (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) are not in parity. From the Islamic point of view, Islam is the only and unique religion. This is the reason why the Qu’ran always speaks in the singular when it touches the subject of religion (3:19; 3:85; 48:28). For Da’wah strategic reasons, this might not be mentioned in a dialogue setting, since after all they would eventually want to convince dialogue partners as well. After all, each non-Muslim is considered to be a potential Muslim, since there is no need to guide him to a “new faith”, but rather bring him “back” to the true faith which has been corrupted by his ancestors and by those who taught him. ² Every newborn child is considered to be a genuine Muslim by predestined nature and will only through education and upbringing be estranged from the true faith (30:30), ³ since only Islam is naturally genuine (in Arabic: fitra). Therefore quite a few of the new converts to Islam from the West do not speak about their “conversion” but rather of their “reversion” to Islam. They claim that through their acceptance of Islam they have found back to the true and perfect faith. ⁴

Da’wah: effort for Allah

But Da’wah, the Islamic call to the true faith and all the public relation and publicity exercises connected with, are not primarily aiming at creating a maximum number of individual converts as quickly as possible, even if it is taken for granted that there will be converts as a logical outcome of what is done for Allah. Nevertheless, the real strategy is much more basic and does primarily aim at establishing Islamic structures and institutions in a society, or at influencing and changing them, thus creating more rights for Islam and better conditions for Muslims. Through Da’wah Muslims aim at forcing a secular society to take religious issues more seriously and by this give up their neutrality towards religion. After all, a society needs to be conform to Islamic issues and agendas if one wants to overcome unbelief and ignorance (in Arabic: jahiliyya). In order to reach this goal eventually, one has to see that the Islamic leadership and opinion shapers consider it their logical Da’wah strategy to keep a democratically free elected government and its society at all levels of life busy with an Islamic agenda, including the media and the legal institutions. The struggle to allow the Islamic head scarf for civil servants in public schools, which in Germany went right up to the Supreme Constitutional Court, needs to be seen in this light. A federal press conference of the “Central Council of Muslims in Germany” (ZMD) on the 20th February 2003 in Berlin, at which the so called “Islamic Charter” was presented, turns out to serve the same purposes: The so-called “Islamic Charter” needs also to be seen as one of these PR activities of Islamic Da’wah. ⁵

Recognising a laudable desire of the Muslims in the Federal Republic of Germany to clarify their relation to society at large, it has nevertheless to be recognised that the Charter of Medina is the model for this venture of the ZMD. The original agreement and charter of Medina which Muhammad had negotiated soon after his arrival at Medina in 622 A.D. plays a certain model role in the thought pattern of Islamic opinion leaders and strategists. In order not to succumb to a

semi-intellectual idealist concept of Islam, we are well advised to a more careful look at the original Islamic texts and resource material. We have to take the real existing Islam in history and its contemporary theological and political expressions more serious in order to understand and evaluate aright the rhetoric and expressed opinions of Islamic thinkers of today. One aspect and expression in today's thinking about Da'wah seems to be the redefinition of the concept of "Jihad", namely the struggle for the cause of Allah, both defensively and, under certain conditions, offensively as well. Part of this effort is certainly the attempt to re-write and re-interpret history, as if "Jihad" would have been a "peaceful exercise" most of the time and more a kind of a "spiritual struggle" for the betterment of one's soul. Not only Christian but also Islamic history illustrates the temptation for those in power to make the end to justify the means. [6](#)

Amir Zaidan of the "Islamic Association of Hessen" (Islamische Religionsgemeinschaft Hessen) and a lecturer at the University of Frankfurt states in a paper entitled: "The Charter (Constitution) of Medina" that the Muslims in Germany need to understand the importance of their historical roots, especially the political and communal happenings soon after Muhammad's arrival at Medina. He then further elaborates:

"The first historical activity of the Prophet Muhammad ... right after his arrival in the exile of Medina was the purposed establishment of an Islamic identity in order to transform step by step the given structures of society." As a critical reader who is aware of past and contemporary history one becomes especially alert when one reads in the same article:

"In order to regulate the political relations of the Muslims with the other communities, the inhabitants of Medina entered into a written agreement and contract with the new rulers, the new immigrants as well the natives and all other minorities who dwelled there ... The Charter of Medina is a document based on the Quran and the Sunnah and recognises what is conform to Islam in the given communal and societal structures of Medina. It takes up thematically the basic law for all citizens, including certain human rights and rights of minorities as well as the power balance of a constitutional government with legislative aspects included". [7](#)

Amir Zaidan is even going so far as to state that from the concept of the "Charter of Medina" one could comparatively arrive at a power sharing constitutional statehood. What he does not mention, however, is the simple fact that at Muhammad's arrival Medina the majority population was Jewish. And that in a very tragic way these tribes of the Jewish faith were either sent into exile or eliminated during the life time of Muhammad and that thus the majority situation was turned over for the benefit of those newly in power. [8](#)

The life of Muhammad as an example for today

The life of Muhammad is of normative significance for Muslims. But this is also the reason why the concept of Da'wah towards those of another faith community appears to be so complex. In the early days of Muhammad's preaching in Mecca, Da'wah was simply a call and summon to faith in the one God, an invitation to his Arab fellow tribesmen to reject polytheism. Soon after his moving away from Mecca and his immigration to Medina, Muhammad developed, however,

into a very strategic, pragmatic and power conscious statesman and commander, who did not use only peaceful means or gentleness any more (surah 2:256) but was quite willing to apply military and political pressure in order to implement Allah's will (surah 9:5ff). ⁹ Under pressure, contracts were negotiated and when opportunity should arise, also broken. This created amongst the "unbelievers" of those days a legally shaky situation and a climate of uncertainty, and this has throughout history also accompanied the minority status (dhimmitude) of those under Islam. ¹⁰

The Charter of Medina and the approx. 10 year time when Muhammad lived in Medina is for many Muslims of today, namely those who represent the political Islam, a relevant model, since Muhammad illustrates how by mixing the political cards again and again, he could successfully "transform step by step the given structures of society" for the benefit of the ummah (Muslim community). The early time of the "Prophet in Medina" is for these circles of Muslims an ideal time longed for again, since for them it illustrates the desired unity of state and religion which is the only guarantee for the purity of faith. One can therefore take one's guess what further issues will be coming up in the Da'wah strategies in order to keep the society at large busy with an Islamic agenda. About 500.000 to 700.000 of the approximately 3,2 Million Muslims in the Federal Republic of Germany meanwhile hold German citizenship. Therefore Islam is not any longer an issue of refugees and immigrants only. As a religious community, the Muslim community will therefore now aim at gaining an equal status with all others in society. It has to be recognised that Islam does theologically as well as socio-politically challenge the church and society increasingly in the years to come. This is illustrated by a comment made by Mehmet Sabri Erbakan, the former chairman of the "Islamic Association Milli Görüs" (IGMG) concerning the Federal Constitutional Court's ruling on Islamic ritual slaughter:

"For the first time the Federal Constitutional Court had to consider how to integrate the Islamic commands into the German legal system". ¹¹

A normal native German citizen would assume that "integration" of a minority community would involve assimilation into the general majority culture and community and adopt thus its way of life. Not so a practising Muslim who is conscious of his Da'wah responsibility and commission. He would use the concept of "integration" rather as a means to achieve as many concessions and manoeuvring space for Islam as possible. Thus, the more concessions are allowed, the more a parallel "integrated" society is created. In this connection the role of German converts need to be examined as in how far a "hidden agenda" exists, since many are fully aware of their Da'wah responsibility and articulate themselves by what they publish in this direction. ¹²

Islam: Religion, ethics and social order

Islam is not a religion accepting to be restricted to the private sector. Rather Islam is faith and politics, economics and ethics together. The Islamic world therefore looks at the secularised and post modern West as a decadent entity. A part of Da'wah strategy therefore aims at finding ways to counter the faith corrupting influences of the Western Society. Islam is also a "one way road" when it comes to conversion and to "apostasy" from the Islamic faith to another faith. All four schools of law consider apostasy a death worthy crime. Therefore Muslims are extremely

sceptical about Christian missionary approaches towards them. ¹³ The Crusades, Colonialism as well as Christian Mission are considered the capital sins of the West. Western initiated globalisation and the hegemony of its culture, economics and politics is considered and viewed as the reason for the corruption of the Islamic world. Therefore as a kind of counter measure, the West itself is now on the agenda of Islamic Da'wah strategies. The best brains and thinkers have been put to task to analyse the cultural context of knowledge and to discern the strength and weaknesses of the West. Coordinated Da'wah strategies are developed, including the experimentation with semantic issues in order to islamize the context and imprint it with Islamic thought patterns and concepts. ¹⁴ It is interesting to read in this connection about the efforts of Ismail Raji al Faruqi who would like to integrate Islamic terminology and make it a part of the German language. ¹⁵ These so called "islamological translations" create some "new speak" in the German vocabulary, like for example "Mitgöttergebende" ¹⁶, namely those who are polytheists and guilty of "shirk" (polytheism). On the other side you will find Amir Zaidan, who seems to have made it his goal to introduce as many untranslatable Arabic termini and paradigms as possible into the German language. ¹⁷ The international umbrella organisations of Islamic states have taken up the subject of Da'wah and some organisations have been created for this very purpose. The OIC – "The Organisation of Islamic Conference" in Jeddah/Saudi-Arabia ¹⁸ is one of these bodies. The Muslim World League, based in Mecca, plays also an important role here. Also the "International Islamic Council for Da'wah and Relief", with offices in Cairo and Amman, has been created for this purpose.

International conferences are held to meet the challenges of specific contexts Da'wah is facing across the world, and much of the effort is co-ordinated through such bodies. Saudi-Arabia and also the Golf States as well as many rich private sponsors support the global Da'wah efforts. Political Islam has become increasingly impatient since the events of the 11th September 2001 and the subsequent military conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. What means should be applied for Da'wah and Jihad to be successful? These issues are being discussed, and there is an increasing number of controversial opinions being expressed. Yet the problems with activists of militant Islam are growing, since Islamists find their ideological justification in the Qu'ran and the Sunnah, the life of the Prophet, and they claim with a certain justification that violent means are legitimate in Islam. ¹⁹

How Islamic States obviously identify themselves with the Da'wah efforts becomes clear when one looks at the minutes, protocols, resolutions and information published by Islamic umbrella organisations and its members. The General Secretary of the OIC Foreign Minister Conference in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in June 2000 opened his report on Da'wah and the Committee for the Coordination of Joint Islamic Action by stating:

"Islamic Da'wah is one of the cornerstones of Joint Islamic Action, and Da'wah Institutions across the world today play a vital role in protecting the Islamic Ummah against the numerous dangers surrounding it. The Organisation of the Islamic Conference has realized this and acted for the propagation of Islamic Da'wah ... Islamic governmental and non-governmental organisations and institutions have been brought together under the OIC umbrella within the framework of a committee

known as 'The Committee for the Coordination of Joint Islamic Action'. The Committee has held twelve meetings so far." [20](#)

Here we see how an international forum for Da'wah efforts has been created in order to strengthen Islamic solidarity in the defence of Islamic interests, including international lobbying in the area of politics and economics. Islamic interests and the desire to spread Islam are strong on the agenda of these bodies and what they represent. At the Eighth Session of the Islamic Summit Conference of OIC in December 1997 in Teheran, Iran, we find amongst the many resolutions the following statement on Da'wah:

"Requests Member States to take necessary steps to incorporate this Strategy into their national policies in the educational information, Islamic Da'wah and other fields of methodology to be followed in Joint Islamic Action". [21](#)

Similar resolutions and statements can be found in the publications of the Muslim World League, whose primary aim is to assist Da'wah across the globe, including financial resources for the building of mosques, Da'wah centres and the use of mass media. [22](#) For the coordination and networking there is also The International "Islamic Council for Da'wah and Relief" in which various Islamic NGOs as well as umbrella organisations are represented. Here too it is evident how in the various organisations there is a close cooperation between political and religious leaders in their actions to further and support Da'wah work.

Da'wah and Christian Mission

This is not the place for a comparison between Islamic Da'wah and Christian mission. The differences are anyhow grave and are rooted in the irreconcilable divergent concepts of God and Revelation. Christian mission is rooted in the suffering and condescending love of God which bridges all barriers in order to seek and save lost humanity through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Therefore it is free of compulsion and an invitation to be and become truly human. Through the life, suffering, cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ the way to new life is opened for us in the Kingdom of God. Through the Holy Spirit faith and obedience to follow God's son is granted. Christian Mission is mandatory, because the love of God as revealed in Jesus Christ and as rooted in the commission of the Triune God demands a call to loving obedience. We are sent like Jesus was sent by the Father, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to be witnesses in the world and for the sake of the testimony of Jesus Christ. The Islamic rejection and resistance of Christian mission makes it not less mandatory and we cannot keep silent, since Christ needs to be shared. The very attitude of Islam confirms for Christians the mandate for mission, since Christ needs to be shared where he is so misrepresented. As long as the Church of Jesus Christ knows herself and her Lord, the witness to share the Gospel even with Muslims remains an obligation of love. This obligation is the very logic of following Christ in sharing the good news that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself (2. Corinthians 5:19). [23](#)

1. See Fatwa No: 19402, dated 25. Muharram 1418H „Unification of Religion“ in <http://islaam.com//Article.aspx?id=273> or <http://www.sunnahonline.com/ilm/aqeedah/0002.htm> (5.10.03). [↗](#)

2. F.A.Klein, *The Religion of Islam*, Curzon Press, London 1985, S.76ff; see also Khurram Murad, *Da'wah Among Non-Muslims in the West, Some Conceptual and Methodological Aspects*, Islamic Foundation, Leicester, 1986; Da'wah. *Getting it Right*. Abdul Walid Al Hamawi & Ibrahim Abu Khalid, <http://www.islam.org.au/articles/26/cover.htm> (15.09.03); Yahiya Emerik. *Building a Better Da'wah Program*, <http://islamicfoundation.com/articles10.htm> (15.09.03) and Yahiya Emerick „How to make America an Islamic Nation“ in <http://www.islamicfoundation.com/articles/article15.htm> (5.10.03). ↵
3. For the concept of „fitra“ see: *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, by H.A.R. Gibb and J.H. Kramers, Brill Leiden 1991. ↵
4. One only needs to feed an Internet Search Mashine with the concept of „Reversion to Islam“ and you will get a number of articles and testimonies of new Muslims who consider the acceptance of Islam as a „Reversion“ rather than a „Conversion“. Further interesting web sites on the thinking of new „Reverts“ (Converts) will be found at: <http://www.convertstoislam.org>; <http://www.convertstoislam.com> or <http://www.dawanet.com>. ↵
5. This charter has been dealt with in a previous issue: The „Islamic Charter“ of the Central Council of Muslims in Germany – a Comment (Michael Molthagen) in *Ifl Journal* No. 2/2002; also where readable is the „Islam – Focus 7, May 2003: „Die „Islamische Charta“ als Positionspapier von Muslimen in Deutschland – ein christlicher Diskussionsbeitrag“ – only available in German from the Publisher: islamfocus@gmx.de. ↵
6. See: Bat Ye'or. *The Dhimmi – Jews and Christians under Islam*. Associated University Press: London, 1985; Bat Ye'or. *The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam, From Jihad to Dhimmitude*. *ibid.*, 1996; Bat Ye'or, *Islam and Dhimmitude – Where Civilizations Collide*. *ibid.*, 2002; Carole Hillebrand. *The Crusades – Islamic Perspectives*, Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, 1999. ↵
7. Amir Zaidan, „Die Charta (Verfassung) von Medina“ in <http://www.enfal.de/charta.htm> (5.10.03). ↵
8. Johan Bouman, *Der Koran und die Juden – Die Geschichte einer Tragödie*. Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft: Darmstadt, 1990 (German book on the The Jews and the Qu'ran – the History of a Tragedy). ↵
9. Ibn Ishaq, *Das Leben des Propheten*. Spohr Verlag; Katern 1999 (German version of Ibn Ishaq's book: „The life of the Prophet“). In this regard it is also advisable to look afresh into the exegetical rule of „nasikh wa mansukh“, where an earlier qu'ranic verse might be abrogated if it stands in conflict with a later revealed qu'ranic verse. ↵
10. Walter Short. *The Exclusion of the Jews and Christians from the Arabic Peninsula* in <http://debate.org.uk/topics/history/xstnc-7.html> (8.10.03). ↵
11. Yassin Musharbash, article on the web site of the ZMD: <http://www.islam.de>, 24.01.02, in which Mehmet Sabri Erbakan of IGMG was quoted. ↵
12. Murad Hofmann. *Der Islam als Alternative*. Hugendubel/Dietrichs: München, 1992; Murad Hofmann. *Der Islam im 3. Jahrtausend – Eine Religion im Aufbruch*. *Ibid.* 2000 (German publications of a former civil servant and German Ambassador to Algier and Morocco who converted to Islam and wrote several books, including one on „Islam as Alternative“ and „Islam in the 21st Century“). ↵
13. An article in the „Moslemische Revue“. Soest, 1995, Heft 4: „Mohammedaner“ – Mission, S. 243 which

reads translated as follows: "The New Testament has handed down the Commission for Mission but in the meantime even in church related circles this is not any more without controversy, at least not the way the "Mission to Mohammedans" was conducted in the past. Nevertheless, it stands, that the commission to do mission is of essence to Christianity. Christianity would lose its influential character if it would give up mission. Yet, Muslims and Islamic organisations would not act honestly, if they would not ask explicitly for the termination of Christian Mission to Islam, only in order to gain some favour in church circles. The Qu'ran makes dialogue conditional to the implementation of this demand." ↵

14. Mona Abdul-Fadl. Where East meets West: The West on the Agenda of the Islamic Revival. The International Institute of Islamic Thought: Herndon/Va.USA, 1992. ↵
15. Ismail Raji al Faruqi. Für ein islamisches Deutsch (For an Islamic German). International Institut for Islamic Thought and Muslim Student Unions. Washington D.C./Cologne, 1988 (Text in German. There may be an English text available). ↵
16. Ahmad von Denffer, Der Koran. Die Heilige Schrift des Islam in deutscher Übertragung mit Erläuterungen nach den Kommentaren von Dschalalain, Tabari und anderen hervorragenden klassischen Koranauslegern. München: Islam. Zentrum, 20018 (a translation by a German convert) „Mitgöttergebende“ is a new word creation and almost not translatable. It means someone who actively associates with Allah some idols. ↵
17. Amir M.A. Zaidan. At-Tafsir. Eine philologisch, islamologisch fundierte Erläuterung des Quran-Textes, ADIB Verlag: Offenbach, 2000, 430 S. (a philological and islamological dictionary, explaining the quranic text). ↵
18. Abdullah al Ahsan. OIC The Organization Of The Islamic Conference. An Introduction to an Islamic Political Institution. The International Institute of Islamic Thought: Herndon, Va./U.S.A., 1988. ↵
19. See the many press releases, reports and studies of the Arabic media in: www.memri.org. ↵
20. Report of the Secretary General on the Activities of Da'wa and the Committee for Coordination of Joint Islamic Action. ↵
21. Resolution No. 37/8-C (is) on Da'wah Activities and the Reactivation of the Committee on the Coordination of Islamic Action, in den Resolutionen der 8. OIC Vollversammlung im Dezember 1997 im Iran, in <http://www.president.ir/oic/joiccul.html#38> (5.10.03). ↵
22. See: <http://www.muslimworldleague.org>. ↵
23. Kenneth Cragg. The Call of the Minaret. Crollius: London, 1986, p. 304f. ↵