

Da'wah towards shunning un-Islamic trends in Northern Nigeria.

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Abstract: *This research is a contribution and a piece of Da'wah work towards alleviating un-Islamic trends which include Magic and Witchcraft, Fortunetelling and superstitions. A detailed description of these un-Islamic trends was highlighted. The research also highlighted the prohibition of these issues in the light of the primary sources of Islam- Qur'an and Sunnah. Also the role of Da'wah of Shaykh Uthman bn Foduwe and other Muslim Scholars and religious organisations in their effort of educating the people on Islamic ideology and its practice, has aided the reformation of the people and its impact is felt in reducing the evils of Magic and Witchcraft, Fortunetelling and superstitions in Northern Nigeria. Similarly, the literature Shaykh Uthman bn Foduwe and his students left is numerous and its impact is felt even in the contemporary Northern Nigeria. Today their works were of great advantage towards alleviating these un-Islamic trends and are also Da'wah tools for establishing correct belief system of Islam.*

Keywords: *Da'wah, shunning, Magic and Witchcraft, Fortunetelling, superstitions, Northern Nigeria.*

I. Introduction

Islam is a religion of *Da'wah*, it is a religion which encouraged the Muslims to propagate the message to non-Muslims and also to teach and provide continuous guidance to the believers in order to take precaution against all un-Islamic trends in all their manifestations. Northern Nigeria was in repulsive condition before the *Da'wah* of Shaykh Uthman bn Foduwe. The widespread of un-Islamic trends coupled with the people's ignorance of *Tawhid* (Islamic belief system), and illiteracy on how to properly perform Islamic rituals led to manifestation of various trends contrary to correct Islamic principle of *Tawhid*. In other words, syncretism among the people and medicine men that combined the practice of Islam with pagan practices and rituals firmly established in blameworthy customs and satanic innovations is still having some traces in the region. This paper therefore is an attempt to highlight some of these un-Islamic trends and explain the Islamic position on them with a view to call people to shun them. The term un-Islamic trends studied include devilish innovations and customs that contradicted the correct belief system of Islam and its devotional practices. Included in these un-Islamic trends are *Awaid al-riddiyah* (syncretism) such as some acts of *shirk* (polytheism) and *kufr* (unbelief) which include: Magic and Witchcraft, Fortunetelling and superstitions.

1. Magic And Witchcraft

In Hausaland of Northern Nigeria many years ago and still today in local markets and festivities, people would gather round to watch those who wandered through the streets and markets performing their trickery in front of people, to see how they could take golden coins, birds and razor blades from their mouths. But after they finish their tricks, these magicians who pretend to create something from nothing and to know unseen things ask people to give them money and buy their charms. Some of them even stab themselves with sharp tools like spears or knives in front of a crowd of people, or play with snakes without biting them. These people use magic from their devilish companions. Such acts of the magician which contradict reality: like stabbing one's own abdomen with a knife or a spear, or playing with fire, are indeed mere magic and fancy deception, in which magicians give the observer the impression that they are doing these things. According to Mohammad Emin Sheikho, the magicians are;

Human in origin, but they have allowed the spirits of their malignant companions, the jinn, to surround their bodies...They are accompanied by devilish companions who break laws and come to our world by use of their spirit in response to the call of the human devil magicians. These jinn then pass through the bodies of these magicians into garments for their spirit. Thus they made these magicians into garments for their spirits. Hence the control of these spirits of the jinn, whose bodies are originally created from fire, protects these magicians from being burnt by the firebrands on which they tread. As a result of this, the magicians were able to carry out the deceptive, devilish actions of the jinn. Indeed, these are not in fact physical wonders, but rather are spiritual ones.¹

These acts of stabbing themselves with skewers, eating glass, walking over water or fire as they pretend to do, and foretelling unseen matters by means of devilish companions are nothing but magic, trickery, and amusing stories. It is only a process of controlling events through the use of spirits and other secret forces thereby producing unexpected objects by tricks. The magicians are skilled at visual deception and hallucination.²

Witchcraft on the other hand is defined by Oxford Dictionary as “the exercise of supernatural power supposed to be possessed by persons in league with the devil or evil spirits”³ It is the practice of Magic to gain wealth or other worldly things and cause bad things happen to some people. They all use magic spells for calling up spirit to help them. Stories of child kidnappings, ritual killings, and trades in body parts are the result of magic practices for selfish interest of acquiring worldly possessions. Many a times one will be listening to radio and television announcements requesting the public who knows the whereabouts of missing people to please inform the relatives. Stories of the occult of magic and witchcraft are some of the un-Islamic trends in Nigerian contemporary society. These practices contradict the Islamic belief system. Some ignorant Muslims in Hausaland even went to the extent of seeking the help of the magicians in many ways. These include seeking assistance for wealth, children, political power, curing of diseases, success in trading, love and marriage affairs, self-protection etc. Many politicians and the affluent today depend solely on the magicians for self protection against any vicissitude in their lives or properties.⁴

Apart from the general magic practice, also cases of spirit witchcraft have been practiced by some people in remote villages in Northern Nigeria. Victims of such forms of witchcraft typically lose their life to a blood-sucking spirits unless something is done to extract them from the clutches of their spiritual attackers by Witches (*Maita*) experts. Witches uses diverse appearances and employ a variety of tactics to manipulate their victim. Their aspiration is to satisfy their thirst for wealth. Sometimes they use tricks to attack travellers to snatch their belongings, caught souls to present to their spirits, bury evil charms to attract misfortune to other people. They engage in nefarious activities for the sole purpose of accumulating riches. They are experts in the art of getting rich. Because their lust for wealth knows no bounds, they stop at nothing to acquire riches, even if it means sacrificing the lives of their sons, daughters and relations in the process.⁵

Magic and witchcraft therefore are forms of un-Islamic trends whose punishment is death and those who died committing it will have severe punishment. Allah the Most Exalted said:

They follow what the devils relate of Solomon’s kingdom. Solomon never disbelieved, but the devils did. They instruct people in witchcraft which was certainly not revealed to the two angels, Hārūt and Mārūt, at Babylon. Yet these two [angels] never taught anyone without first declaring, ‘We are but a temptation to evil, so do not renounce your faith.’ From these two, people learned what they would use to cause discord between a man and his wife. However, with that knowledge they can harm no one except by God’s leave. Indeed, they learn what harms them and brings them no profit. They knew full well that whoever contracted such a deal would have no share in the life to come. Vile indeed is what they had sold their souls for, if they but knew it (Q 2 V102)

Allah the Most Exalted also said:

We said “fear not! Surely, you will have the upper hand. And throw that which is in your right hand! It will swallow up that which they have made. That which they have made is only a magician’s trick, and the magician will never be successful, to whatever amount (of skill) he may attain. (Q20 Vs 68-69).

Again, narrated Abu Hurairah: The Prophet said:

"Avoid the seven great destructive sins." The people enquire, O Allah's Apostle! What are they? He said, "To join others in worship along with Allah, to practice sorcery, to kill the life which Allah has forbidden except for a just cause, (according to Islamic law), to eat up *Riba* (usury), to eat up an orphan's wealth, to give back to the enemy and fleeing from the battlefield at the time of fighting, and to accuse chaste women, who never even think of anything touching chastity and are good believers".⁶

Also Jundub (May Allah be pleased with him) narrated the following *Marfu'* (elevated) Hadith, which At-Tirmidhi reported:

The punishment for the sorcerer/magician is that he be stuck with the sword (executed).⁷

2. Fortunetelling

Telling people’s fortune and claiming the knowledge of the unseen through possessing magic powers is the art of the fortune tellers. A fortune teller is a person who claims to be able to tell something that will happen to a person in the future. The practice of fortunetelling is rampant in some parts of remote areas of Hausaland while the practice is gaining diminishing in the urban areas possibly because of the number of *Du’at*

who sojourns the area. Some people totally depended on fortune tellers and in return, and the fortune tellers make a lot of money out of them. Such people always consult the fortune tellers before their journey, for trading, for conventional jobs, for marriage, or before moving into a new building/house. In this way, they surrender and totally relied on the fortune tellers' magic to bring them fortunes.⁸ There are various methods used around the world by oracles, fortune-tellers, and the likes, these include, palm-reading, I-Ching, fortune cookies, tea leaves as well as Zodiacal signs and Bio-rhythm computer programs, all claim to inform those who believe in them about their future.⁹ According to Ibn Baaz, due to the increase in the number of magicians and fortune tellers who claim the ability to cure people by the use of magic and fortunetelling by taking the advantage of some simple minded, ignorant people, it became necessary for *Du'at* (preachers) to clarify the great danger of these people on Muslims. This is because it entails becoming attached to other than Allah and disobeying His commands and the commands of the Prophet (SAW). In Islam it is not permissible for a person to seek the help of fortune tellers who claim the knowledge of the unseen. It is also prohibited to believe anything they tell him, for they only conjecture or use the Jinn to help them in their fortunetelling and magic.¹⁰ Narrated 'Aisha: Some people asked the Prophet regarding the soothsayers. He said,

"They are nothing." They said, O Allah's Apostle! Some of their talks come true. The Prophet said, "That word which happens to be true is what a Jinn snatches away by stealth (from the Heaven) and pours it in the ears of his friend (the foreteller) with a sound like the cackling of a hen. The soothsayers then mix with that word, one hundred lies".¹¹

Another contemporary method of fortunetelling is known as horoscope, this is the modern type of reading one's horoscope in the dailies thereby predicting ones future, and this is also forbidden! Since astrology is mainly used for predicting the future, those who practice it are considered fortune-tellers. Consequently, one who seeks his horoscope comes under the ruling of visiting fortune teller.¹² Narrated 'Abdullah bn 'Abbas: The Prophet (SAW) said:

If anyone acquires any knowledge of astrology, he acquires a branch of magic of which he gets more as long as he continues to do so.¹³

Because of the sacrilege and heresy involved in fortune telling, Islam has taken a very strong rejection of it. Islam opposes any form of association with those who practice fortune-telling, except to advise them to give up their forbidden practices. The practice of fortunetelling involves communicating with Jinn who are able to inform their human contact of the relative future. For example, when someone comes to a fortune-teller, the fortune-teller's Jinn gets information from the man's companion (*Qariyn*) the jinn assigned to every human being) of what plans he had made prior to his coming. So the fortune-teller is able to tell him that he will do this or that, or go here or there. By this method, the real fortune-teller is also able to learn about a stranger's past in vivid detail. He is able to tell a total stranger of his parents' names, where he was born, the acts of his childhood, etc. The ability to vividly describe the past is one of the marks of a true fortune-teller who has made contact with the Jinn. Because the Jinn are able to traverse huge distances instantaneously, they are also able to gather huge stores of information about hidden things, lost articles and unobserved events.¹⁴

From the above it is clear that the Islamic ruling with regard to anyone who visits a fortune-teller believing that he knows the unseen and the future is that of *Kufr* (disbelief).

3. Superstition

The term superstition has been defined by Longman's Dictionary of English Language as:

A belief or practice resulting from ignorance, fear of unknown, trust in the magic or change or misunderstanding of cause and effect, an irrational object attitude of the mind towards the supernatural, nature of God, resulting from superstitions.¹⁵

Also according to the New Columbia Encyclopaedia, superstition is;

an irrational belief or practice resulting from ignorance or fear of the unknown. The validity of superstition is based on the belief in the power of magic and witchcraft and in such invisible forces as spirits and demons.¹⁶

From the above definitions therefore, superstition is a belief in and reverence for the supernatural, it is a belief in the supernatural influences, especially as bringing good or bad luck. After the coming of Islam superstitious beliefs and practices were frowned upon and were considered as evil. However, belief in superstition as an irrational belief based on assumption that are against the doctrine of Islam still continues and various types of superstitious beliefs exist in Hausaland which have impacted many people and led them do or not do certain acts. Ibrahim Madauchi, Yahaya Isah and Bello Daura have outlined about seventy six different types of superstition in Hausaland. They include:

If there is a bastard in a house, a person should never set eyes on him before breakfast. If he does all kinds of misfortunes may befall him. If he is a trader, for example, he will not be able to sell his wares that day.

If a person should look at a one-eyed man early in the morning, before he has washed his face, not a penny will he make or receive from any source that day.

If a man falls into a latrine, when he is pulled out, he must be taken round the market place amidst drumming, otherwise he will become mad.

If you mistakenly wear your gown back to front, you will come into a lot of money.

If a person is going on a journey, he must leave his home before sunrise and arrive at his destination after sunset, for the journey to be a successful one.

The pregnant woman should not fetch water from streams or wells at night, because, if she does, the jinns will take out of her womb her own child and substitute a jinn child.¹⁷

The above quoted superstitious beliefs are but few of the many such un-Islamic trends in Hausaland. They also include lucky charms and amulets used by some ignorant people who become so attached to these objects that they are afraid to move around without them. If they lose them, they fear disaster because they imagine themselves to be unprotected and their good luck will diminish.¹⁸ This is part of Shirk, Narrated 'Abdullah bn Mas'ud:

The Prophet (SAW) said: "Taking omens is polytheism; taking omens is polytheism. He said it three times. Every one of us has some, but Allah removes it by trust (in Him)."¹⁹

Also superstition is prohibited and it is a belief which goes contrary against *Tawhid*. Muḥammad ṣālih al-Munajjid states:

It (superstition) also includes the practice of regarding certain times etc., as inauspicious, such as not holding a wedding in Safar, or regarding the last Wednesday of every month as a day of evil omen and ongoing calamity, or believing that numbers such as 13, or certain names, are unlucky... It is also *haram* (prohibited) to believe that handicapped people are bad omens, such as going to open one's store but turning back upon seeing a one-eyed man. All of this is haram and is part of the shirk for which the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) disowned people... Pessimism is a part of everyone's nature, to a greater or lesser extent; the best cure for it is reliance upon Allah (*tawakkul*).²⁰

In the Hadith, narrated Abu Hurairah: Allah's Apostle said,

(There is) no *'Adwa* (no contagious disease is conveyed without Allah's permission). nor is there any bad omen (from birds), nor is there any Hamah (the omen of the night bird i.e., owl), nor is there any bad omen in the month of ṣafar, and one should run away from the leper as one runs away from a lion.²¹

The expiation required from the person who commits any of these sins is reported in the Hadith reported by 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr bn al-Ass: The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said:

Whoever was turned away (from doing something) because of a bad omen is guilty of shirk. The people asked, O Messenger of Allah, what expiation is there for doing that? He said, That he should say: O Allah, there is no goodness except Your goodness and no omen except your omen and there is no god but You.²²

II. Conclusion

The above un-Islamic trends were still being practiced by *Maguzawa* (Atheists) and some ignorant people who contravene many of the laws laid down by Islam and continued to participate in some idolatrous rites of animism like making sacrifices and libation to various objects of worship. Others even failed to observe the rituals of Islam through ignorance or neglect. In social and economic matters they followed their own indigenous customs and practices. These led to the spread of many un-Islamic trends in Hausa land. This situation is similar to the situation of Hausa land during the time of Shaykh Uthman bn Foduye. The emergence of Shaykh Uthman bn Foduwe at that time is a blessings to the people, after acquiring knowledge, he started conducting *Da'wah* with which he directly attacked the widespread of innovations and customs that contradicted the teachings of Islam. Similarly, the literature he and his students wrote is numerous and its impact is felt in the contemporary Northern Nigeria. Today their works were of great advantage to the Muslims in Northern Nigeria and has impacted them in all aspect of their life. Anti Islamic trends promoted among the Muslims by venal scholars in all facets of life were also highlighted by the contemporary scholars and people were cautioned against it.

End Notes

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