Operational Guidelines for Effective Delivery of Friday Khutbah (Sermon) in the Contemporary World

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Abstract

In the present age, Friday sermon is seen as a veritable Islamic medium through which information and message can be transferred from the Imam to the congregation (Worshippers) and the society at large. Arguably, Friday sermon, if well prepared, subject-focused and articulately delivered could have positive impact on the socio-economic, political and moral lives of the listeners. However, it seems contemporary Friday Imams are not utilizing their pulpits to reform the degenerating society. It seems that Friday sermons are no longer aspiring to many listeners. This could be probably due to noticeable loopholes in the delivery of the sermon. Thus, impact of Friday sermon on Muslims could largely depend on the delivery techniques employed by the Imam. This paper, therefore, identifies the art of public speaking techniques which an Imam could adopt while delivering his sermon in this modern age. The paper also highlights concisely what could constitute impediments to effective delivery of Friday sermon. Considering the positive impact which Friday sermon could have on Muslims and their society at large, the paper offers some suggestions that could make delivery of Friday sermon more effective for reformation and development.

Keywords: Friday Khutbah, Sermon, Imam, Khateeb, effective delivery, guidelines
Muslims allover the world, irrespective of their socio-economic background, converge on every Friday to observe Salatul-Jum'a (Friday prayer). In this verse, Allah commands Muslims to leave all their transactions on Friday and hasten to observe Salatul-Jum'a (Friday prayer). Friday prayer is a two unit prayer which replaces Salatuz-Zuhur (i.e. the four-unit prayer observed daily at noon) SC1H110 precedes Friday prayer. Prophet Muhammad urged Muslims till Illc11d, Friday prayer punctually, stressing that delivering and listening to Friday sermon is not only rewarding but also beneficial to Muslims; The Prophet warned members of the congregation not to talk or do anything while Friday sermon is being delivered. The implication of the divine injunction and the Prophetic tradition is that Friday sermon is very impoliant in the lives of Muslims and their society. This is due to the fact that Friday sermon is geared towards addressing Islamic fundamental issues and other prevalent issues affecting Muslims and their respective communities.

Interestingly, right from the period of Prophet Muhammad (610-632CE) to the times of al-Khulafau ar-Rashidun (the four rightly guided caliphs) (632-661CE) and extended to the reigns of the Ummayad caliphs (661-750CE), delivery of Friday Khutbah was being championed by the caliphs or their representatives. In fact, in the medieval period of Islam, Friday sermon occupied a prominent position because the task of its delivery was squarely placed on the caliphs that were seen as religious and political rulers of the Islamic empire. Those were the golden periods when Friday sermon was used as a political tool in reconstructing the Muslim Ummah (Community) by improving the conditions of the Muslims. Delivery of Friday sermon entails certain techniques and methods which Friday Imam is expected to explore in the course of preaching on minbar (pulpit). However, it seems that Friday sermon, in the present age, is not being articulately structured and delivered. Most often, Friday sermons are hurriedly prepared and this invariably may account for reason(s) why lessons of the Friday sermons seem not to be put into use by the listeners. It is against this background that this paper seeks to examine some guidelines for effective delivery of Friday sermon with a view to challenging the contemporary Friday Imams to re-strategize their delivery methods towards utilizing their sermon to reshape and reform the lives of Muslims and their society.
Basis for Friday Khutbah (Sermon) in Islam:

Friday Khutbah simply refers to the speech, address or sermon delivered by Khateeb or Imam in the mosque at weekly Friday prayer. It is a unique characteristic and integral part of Friday prayer. Majority of the Muslim jurists unanimously agreed that Friday Khutbah is obligatory and that it is a condition for the validity of Friday prayer (Dabas and Zaraboso, 1985). The evidence of its compulsion, according to the jurists, is based on the injunction in the Qur'an where Allah commands thus:

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\text{O you who believe! When the call is proclaimed for Friday prayer, hasten unto the remembrance of Allah} \quad (\text{Suratul-lum'a, 62:9})
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The understanding of the Muslim jurists on the quoted verse is that it contains an order to hasten unto remembrance of Allah, which implies that Friday prayer is obligatory and the fact that scholars interpret "Dhikr" as remembrance of Allah to include Friday Khutbah also implies that Friday Khutbah is equally obligatory (Dabas and Zaraboso, 1985, Ismail, 1997).

Besides the Quranic verse which legalizes Friday Khutbah, there are also some ahadith (prophetic sayings) which confirm that Friday Khutbah is obligatory. The proponents of this opinion, among the jurists, base their argument on the hadith of the Prophet which Ibrahim bn Musa and Uthman bn Abi Sheybah Al-Mughin reported from Abi Al-Ahwas that Salfiak heard Jabir bn Samarat saying:

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\begin{align*}
\text{The Messenger of Allah used to have two sermons} \\
\text{in the Friday prayer} \quad (\text{Abdul Wali, 2010:24, Dabas and Zaraboso, 1985: 137).}
\end{align*}
\]

However, some jurists maintain that Friday Khutbah is not obligatory. One of them is Ash-Shawkani who understood the Quranic verse on Friday prayer as simply a command to be present at the Friday prayer and not that Friday Khutbah is obligatory. Al Shawkani, as quoted by Dabas and Zaraboso (1985: 137) further says:
Regarding their argument relating to the commandment to hasten unto the remembrance of Allhn, it only refers to the prayer which is the real cause for making haste. There is, however, an agreement that Friday prayer is obligatory while there is a dispute over whether or not the Khutbah is obligatory. The correct view is that the Khutbah is only a highly recommended act.

Al-Fawzani (2009) maintains that delivering Friday Khutbah is a condition for the validity of Friday prayer. The reason is that the Prophet used to deliver two sermons before performing the Friday prayer. On the divergent opinions on whether Friday Khutbah is obligatory or recommended for the validity of Friday prayer, Nyazee (2006) states that whoever maintains that Friday Khutbah represents two rak'at of the Zuhr (noon) prayer will conclude that Friday Khutbah is a condition for the validity of Friday prayer. On the other hand, whoever maintains that Friday Khutbah is an ordinary sermon or usual exhortation will conclude that Friday Khutbah is not obligatory but a recommended act.

From the foregoing, we can attribute the divergent views on Friday Khutbah among the Muslim jurists to the fact that the word "Khutbah" is not categorically mentioned in Suratul Jum'a (Chapter of Friday) where Friday prayer is ordained for the Muslims. Similarly, the word "Kbutbah" is not mentioned in any other surah (chapter) of the Qur'an. Hence, "Ohila", which means remembrance of Allah as contained in Suratul Jum'a is given different interpretations by Muslim jurists. To some jurists, Ohikr implies Friday Khutbah and for the fact that Friday prayer is obligatory, its Khutbah, according to the understanding of the majority of jurists of the Maliki School of thought, is also obligatory for the validity of Friday prayer. Besides the interpretation of the Qurbanic verse by the jurists, the Prophetic traditions (as earlier mentioned) also affirm that Friday Khutbah is obligatory. Therefore, this jurists' position implies that deliberate omission of Friday Khutbah by the Imam renders Friday prayer invalid, null and void. However, some jurists oppose this view stressing that Friday Khutbah is not obligatory, rather it is a recommended act and that its omission by the worshippers does not invalidate their Friday prayer. In our opinion, delivering Friday sermon and listening to it is very important in the lives of Muslims, though its omission by listeners or worshippers does not render their Friday prayer invalid rather they would not earn full reward of the prayer.
Preparation for the Delivery of Friday Khutbah (Sermon)

It is incontrovertible among the Muslim jurists that Friday Khutbah is an integral part of the Friday prayer. The Friday sermon is not a mere speech uttered by the Khateeb or Imam rather it is a task which requires much effort and long time in the course of preparation. It has to be well planned, structured and organized in such a way that it will persuade the audience (listeners), guard their soul and draw their hearts to Allah (Abdul Wali, 2010). Preparation of a Friday Khutbah is a responsibility which may take fifteen to thirty hours (Abdul Rahman, 1999). Preparation and delivery of Friday Khutbah during the Ummayad dynasty was considered a strenuous task which often took most of the time of the caliphs: Abdul Malik bn Marwan (685-750CE), an Ummayad caliph was once queried by a man who said:

You have become prematurely old, O Commander of the faithful! He (the Caliph), replied: How would I not grow grey hair? When I always trouble my brain attending to the people (the congregation) every Friday. It would be splendid to rule without the clatter of the post horses and the hard wood of the pulpit (Bakhsh and Margoliouth, 1978:317, Abdu Wali, 2010:29).

Abdul Wali (2010) identifies five stages of preparation for Friday Khutbah. These are (i) stage of selecting suitable topic (ii) stage of gathering and arranging view (iii) stage of limitation of the scope of the sermon (iv) stage of selecting and arranging evidences and (v) stage of expression.

While explaining the five stages of preparation for Friday Khutbah, Abdul Wali (2010) maintains that a suitable topic that is relevant and current to issues going on in one’s environment should be considered by the Khateeb or Imam. Thereafter, the Imam will gather and arrange his views in a logical manner for effective delivery. The sermon has to cover a specific subject or topic so that the congregation is not bored. The Khateeb should not jump to another topic without finishing his sermon on the first topic. The stage of selecting and arranging evidences, which is the fourth stage, refers to extracting verses from the Qur’an and Hadith as well as taking evidence from the sayings of the Muslim scholars and intellectuals. The last one is the stage of expression. It is the stage that requires the preacher or the Imam to deliver his sermon technically in such a way that the expression will be smooth, persuasive and arouse the interest of the listeners. While suggesting ways of solving the problems of the Khateeb in the course of delivering sermon, Mulal Tahir admonishes the Khateeb thus:
If it could be possible for you (Khateeb) to reach the highest level of eloquent explanation and you are able to make people understand the specific meaning of your speech and you are also able to adorn it with comprehensive words, unambiguous, you are indeed a complete eloquent Khateeb (preacher). (Abdul Wali, 2010:31-34).

**Impediments to Delivery of Friday Khutbah (Sermon)**

A Khateeb or Imam, who is seen as a religious preacher or communicator must be able to understand and appreciate the world view of the target audience (congregation). An Imam should not alienate the audience from any of the elements of the communication process. His language must be simple, clear, precise and direct. In the words of Oso (2000), "the speaker should avoid officialise and the language of bureaucracy". This implies that speaker (Friday Imam) expresses himself in the language which the audience does not understand. Language, according to Oso (2000), is the most effective and efficient means of conveying ideas from one mind to the other.

Factors which could impede effective delivery of Friday Khutbah are those identified by Nicholls (1998). According to him, some of the common delivery speech problems include insufficient use of pauses by the speaker, speaking too fast, speaking too softly and not projecting the voice, and too high a pitch which is often due to nerves. Other delivery impediments are lack of clarity in distinct and muffled speech, speaking through the nose, hoarseness, lack of proper intonation, equal emphasis on word and speech appendages by using irritating words such as "urns", "ers", "sort of" and "like" (Nicholls, 1998).

Besides the above enumerated impediments, there are others speech delivery defects that could hinder effective delivery of Friday sermon. These include Imam’s dialects, accents, harelip, and slight slip. Others are stuttering and poor vision (Steven, 1986). If Imam/Khateeb has some of these identified
speech delivery defects, his Friday sermons may have little or no impact on his congregation. In the present age, Friday sermon is delivered in a central mosque usually located within the heart of the town or a community. If a central mosque lacks the basic facilities such as electricity supply and or generating plant and public address system (speakers, microphone or megaphone) or if those facilities are malfunctioning, delivering Friday Khutbah in such an environment may be an exercise in futility.

Guidelines for Effective Delivery of Friday Khutbah (Sermon)

Delivering Friday Khutbah is a responsibility of Khateeb or Imam whose main duty on Friday is to deliver Friday sermon and lead the congregation in prayer. Khateeb is an Arabic word meaning preacher, speaker orator. It connotes different meanings in the annals of the Arabs. In pre-Islamic times, Khateeb was a prominent tribal spokesman who expressed himself in beautiful prose that extolled the nobility and achievement of his tribesmen and denigrated the weakness of the tribe’s enemies (Wensik, 2008). In the early Islam, Khateeb became a religious character who delivered Khutbah (speech/address) from minbar (pulpit). The rightly guided caliphs and their followers (tab’iun) were noted to be best speakers for delivering Friday sermons because they were the political and religious leaders of the Islamic empires. However, during the Abbasid period, the political post was separated from the spiritual one. Hence, the Abbasid caliphs stopped delivering Friday sermon instead appointed Khateeb whose duty was primarily to deliver Khutbah on Friday (Mujahid, 2000).

In the modern days, the posts of Khateeb and Imam are conferred on one person, a learned man in religious matters. In other words, Khateeb is the one who delivers the Friday Khutbah (sermon) and at the same time leads the congregation in the observance of Salatul-Jum’a (Friday prayer). Khateeb is expected to possess certain sterling leadership qualities or virtues to enable him perform his role effectively and efficiently.

The Khateeb, while delivering the Khutbah, is expected to first pronounce the hamda (an expression to praise God and show gratitude to Him) as contained in the Khutbah Hajjah of the Prophet. The Khateeb should also shower blessing or invocation of peace on Prophet Muhammad. This is followed by recitation of a part of the Qur’an in the first and second parts of the sermon. The Khateeb will then give admonition on a topic of his choice and end
According to Abdul Rahman (1999), the Khateeb, towards the end of the Khutbah may offer the following supplication:

What Abdul Rahman (1999) considers as a globally standardized conclusion of the Friday Khutbah is the following Qur'an verse:

(Servants of Allah)!

Indeed Allah commands justice, the doing of good and giving to kith and kin, and He forbids all indecent deeds, and evil and rebellion. He instructs you that ye may receive admonition (Suratul an-Nabl, 16:90)

Then, the khateeb will conclude the Khutbah by saying to the Mu'adhin: Aqimu salat meaning call for the prayer (iqama). The Khateeb will descend from the minbar (pulpit) and lead the Friday prayer (Abdul Rahman, 1999). The Khateeb or the Imam is at liberty to follow the format or the guidelines highlighted while delivering the Friday Khutbah. Though Abdul Rahman (1999) claims that the guidelines enumerated above are the global standardized format for the delivery of the Friday Khutbah.

It is important to state that some Friday Imams do not write down their Friday sermons in black and white. What they do is to orally present the Khutbah (sermon) and follow the steps mentioned above. Some Imams in educational institutions use laptops to present Friday Khutbah (sem10n).

From the foregoing discussion, one will agree that an Imam's
personality and qualities could also enhance effective delivery of Friday Khutbah. The Friday Imam should be eloquent with good voice and apply gesticulation or movement of body while delivering Khutbah. He should master the language he employs for the delivery of the Friday Khutbah (Adetunji, 2006). The Imam’s dress or attire should be modest, clean and humble. During the Abbasid regime, the Khateeb Imam wore black attire. In the old Fatimid countries, the official dress was white colour. In Mesopotamia and Khuzistan, the Khateeb (preacher) wore full military uniform, tunic and girdle. In Khorasan, preachers wore coat. The full regalia of Khateeb in the olden days in Egypt were a tunic of white Egyptian linen, a yellow head band, trousers of red brocade and shoes (Bakhsh and Margoliouth, 1978).

The language and expression of the Imam should be simple and clear to the audience. It is highly recommended for the Khateeb or the Imam to speak or preach to the congregation in accordance to their intelligence and understanding. According to Dale (1997), a public speaker, such as Imam or a preacher should “stress important words in his language, vary his rate of speaking, pause before and after expressing an important idea or message. Ambiguous topic or controversial issues should not be discussed on minbar (pulpit). Ali bnAbu Talib is quoted as saying:

Talk to the people on what they understand; would you lie to tell lies against Allah and His Messenger? (Ismail, 1997:232).

It is also advisable for the Khateeb/Imam to deliver his Khutbah on one topic, possibly on current affairs. The Imam should avoid excessive speech which may cause the congregation to forget many details. Five minutes is enough to convey an immense amount of knowledge. Ten or fifteen minutes is enough for a good Khutbah (Al-Ghazali, 2003 on www.isJamonline.2011). One needs to make comment on Al-Ghazali’s recommendation of ten to fifteen minutes for the Friday Imam to deliver Friday Khutbah. In non-Arab countries where Khateeb or Imam uses both Arabic and local languages to deliver Friday Khutbah, it may be practically impossible to spend ten to fifteen minutes on a Friday Khutbah. This is because the Imam has to translate the Khutbah
reputable Islamic organizations and bodies in Muslim communities would assist the Friday Imams towards effective delivery of Friday Khutbah. Establishment of Imam's college by the Muslim Community that does not have one is paramount. The establishment could be made possible by Islamic apex bodies or Muslim philanthropists in the community. Formation of a council of Friday Imams by all Imams that lead Muslims in Friday prayer in each of the Muslim communities is very important. The council is to, among others, meet on a regular basis (possibly monthly) purposely to educate members (Imams) on preparation and delivery of Friday Khutbah. Provision of monthly stipends or allowances for the office of Friday Imams could go a long way in assisting Imams in delivering effective sermons for societal reform and development.

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