

The Problems of Mu'allaf in Malaysia

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ABSTRAK

Adalah suatu kebiasaan bagi masyarakat Islam di Malaysia bahawa orang yang memeluk agama Islam menghadapi dilemma yang memperlihatkan mereka tidak menghayati Islam. Kebanyakan kes dalam fenomena ini tidak mengurangkan keyakinan atau salah niat ketika mereka menerima Islam, tetapi sebenarnya mereka pada umumnya tidak mendapat kesinambungan bimbingan teratur yang membolehkan mereka mendalami pengetahuan Islam. Ramai di kalangan mereka yang memeluk agama Islam sebelumnya tidak menumpukan perhatian terhadap Islam sebagai cara hidup. Sebilangan kecil Saudara Baru ini cuba kembali kepada agama asalnya. Umat Islam di Malaysia pada keseluruhannya, Pusat Islam Malaysia, NGO, individu dan jemaah Islam mungkin boleh mencari jalan penyelesaian untuk menyelamatkan dan mengubah keadaan mereka. Masalah yang dihadapi oleh Saudara Baru di Malaysia tidak memunculkan penyelesaian segera yang dapat membantu mereka menyelesaikan masalah melainkan suatu pemikiran muncul yang dapat membantu mereka kembali menemukan pengetahuan Islam bersama dengan adanya usaha masyarakat baru yang bercirikan masyarakat Islam Madinah al-Munawwarah.

ABSTRACT

It is almost a common knowledge in Malaysia that the Muslims, normally referred to as 'Muslim converts', are facing a dilemma resulting in them not becoming practicing Muslims. In the majority of cases, this phenomenon does not suggest a lack of conviction or wrong intention at the time when they accepted Islam, but because they have absolutely no access to proper and continuous guidance to enable them to deepen their knowledge of Islam. Most of them, after they have embraced Islam, continue to exist, as before, not giving adequate attention to the Islamic way of life. Some of these new Muslims in Malaysia revert to their previous religions. The Muslims in Malaysia as a whole, the Pusat Islam Malaysia, the Non-Governmental Organizations, the Muslims individually and collectively could perhaps contribute in an effort to seek a way to save them and change the situation. The problems confronting new Muslims in Malaysia appear to have no immediate resolution, unless there emerges a way of thinking which may help them to rediscover the know-

ledge together with the will to form a unique community, having the necessary qualities of primal Islam of the first community of al-Medina al-Munawwara.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the Muslim converts are subject to all kinds of objection, prejudice and persecution as so severe as the early Muslims suffered during the time of Prophet Muhammad (may Allah bless him and grant him peace). In Malaysia, the number of conversion had been increasing since independence. In 1955, before independence, the Muslim converts was only five for the whole year in Selangor (Selangor at that time included Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur). In 1999, the number of conversion in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur was more than one thousand. That is a rise of 200 times from 1955 (Osman Abdullah 2001:84). Since 1969, the number of conversion had increased tremendously (Osman Abdullah 2001. 2-9).

While the number of converts is increasing, there are also many problems faced by them. These are great challenges for academicians, officials in the religious department and non-governmental organizations. A Muslim convert unlike converts to other religions has to learn Islam and start a new Islamic way of life. There are two main problems faced by the converts. That is, he has to change his way of living according to Islam. Of course, not all his previous way of life is against Islam. If he works, he can continue, provided if his occupation is not against Islam. Besides, as Islam is a very comprehensive way of life, a convert has to readjust his living according to Islam. That is, he needs to pray five times a day, fast in the month of Ramadan, pay Zakat, and go to hajj in Mecca, if he is capable, and has the capacity. If he does not know how to perform the hajj, he has to learn about it. He also has to eat and drink *halal* food and abandon habits unbecoming of Muslims, like drinking of alcohol. He must adjust to a new social way of community living such as he must join the Jum'ah prayer together in the mosque with other Muslims. Thus, there are many things that a convert must learn and practice as a Muslim. On the other hand, he may also face objection, prejudice and persecution from his own ethnic group and those who cannot understand Islam. If he is a married man, his wife may ask for divorce. His parents may not like his conversion and may take action against him. His brothers and sisters may hate him. Besides, even his non-Muslim friends and his own ethnic group may boycott him.

In Malaysia, the converts are of varied backgrounds and of various different ethnic groups and religious beliefs. They consist of Buddhists, Taoists, Christians, followers of Hinduism, and others like freethinkers or atheists. They are also of various ages from 19 to 70. They face hostile objection for embracing Islam from their family, and an insult and ridicule from their own community. This article will specifically look into these problems and attempt to find a solution.

THE DEFINITION AND CATEGORY OF *MU'ALLAF* IN THE ISLAMIC VIEW

The word *Mu'allaf* has its root in the Arabic word *alifa*, which means, "to soften" *Mu'allaf* is a Quranic term referring to those hearts that need softening. The reference is to the newly converted Muslims as cited in the surah al-Tawbah: 60:

Zakat is for: the poor, the destitute, those who collect it, reconciling people's hearts, freeing slaves, spending in the way of Allah, and travelers. It is a legal obligation from Allah. Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise.

According to 'Abdu'LLāh Yūsuf Ali (1973:456), *Mu'allaf* are new Muslim converts. He used the words 'reconciled recently to the truth' to refer to the converts. However, in Malaysia and in other parts of South East Asia, the Malay Muslims call them as our brother (*Saudara Kita*) and new brother (*Saudara Baru*). The word new brother (*Saudara Baru*), used in the Malay Muslim society in Malaysia and other parts of South East Asia, is to indicate and state that someone has embraced Islam. By referring to them as such, is a way to enhance Islamic brotherhood, care and love to the converts. However, this also may alienate the converts and make them separated from the main stream of the Muslim ummah as the converts may feel that they are not one of the born Muslims. This can divide the Muslims into born Muslims and converts. This is not good for integration, that is, to socialize and mix freely as Muslim brothers.

In Islam, generally *Mu'allaf* means the group whose hearts need to be softened (al-Tawbah: 60). The term *Mu'allaf* can aptly refer to the converts as their hearts been newly adjusted to the truth of Islam. However, the term, *Mu'allaf* also includes non-Muslims and could be further sub-divided:

1. Yūsuf al-Qaradāwī (1986:595) states that there is a group of infidels being courted in the hope that they accept Islam such as in the case of Safwān bin Umayyah. During the opening (*futuh*) of Mecca, Safwān was given a period of 4 months by the Prophet to consider about accepting Islam. When the battle of Hunayn occurred, he took part in it. The Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) then lent Safwān his sword and gave him a few camels, taken from a valley. Consequently, after that incident, Safwān became a good Muslim. The Hadith referring to the event appears in the *Sunan al-Termidhī* (1992:802) as quoted below with the sanad:

From al-Hasan bin Ali al-Khallāl to Yahyā bin Ādam who told us, which was related from Ibn Mubārak, from Yūnus, from al-Zuhrī, from Sa'īd bin al-Musayyab, from Safwān, son of Umayyah, who said: "On the day of Hunayn war, the Prophet had given me something. Truly, he was the person whom I hated most, but he always gave me (something) until He (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) really became the person that I love most.

The Hadith mentioned above explained that Rasulullah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) had transformed Safwān who hated him most at first; but through love, care and materials showered on him by Rasulullah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace), his hatred changed to love.

Similarly, there is another Hadith collected by Imam Shawkānī (1987:1220-1221) and cited by Imam Ahmad with the sanad from Anas:

Truly, the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) never asked something except for the importance of Islam unless he was definitely able to fulfill it. Once, a man came and asked him something, he then was told to take a large part of the zakat, (goats) which occupied between two mountains. So, the man went back to his people and said: "My people, all of you should embrace Islam, for Muhammad (loves) gave me something as though a person who was afraid of hunger"

2. The infidels are worrisome in their evilness. Imam al-Tabarī (1986:133) took from the scribes of Ibn ʿAbbās about a group that came to the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) and after having given them a part of the Zakat, praised Islam. However, those who had not received any criticized it.

The Mu'allaf are also divided into categories, amongst them:

1. Those who just embraced Islam. They need support in order to build up their confidence towards Islam. Imam al-Qurtubī (1954:180) quoted from al-Zuhrī, who was of the opinion that those included in this group were the Jews and Christians who had newly accepted Islam, even though they were rich.
2. Leaders and public figures that embraced Islam but still had many friends who were non-Muslims. By giving them a part of the Zakat, it was hoped to be able to attract the attention of his friends and got them to embrace Islam as was in the case of when Abū Bakr gave Zakat to ʿUday bin Hātim and Zabarqān bin Badr. Both of them were of high social standings in their society (Ismail 1985:6).
3. Leaders and Islamic figures that were influential in their communities but whose iman was still weak. They received a part of the Zakat in the hope that their iman would become strong and unwavering. They were also motivated to strive for a better life (jihad), and various other activities. They were some of the citizens of Mecca who were free and had embraced Islam. Amongst them were the hypocrites (munafiqun) and those whose *iman* was still very weak (Ibn Taymiyyah 1989:78).
4. Muslims who lived in the forts and border areas with the enemies. They were given part of the Zakat in the hope that they were able to institute their own defence and protect the other Muslims that lived far from the forts, from the attacks of the enemies (Sayyid Muhammad 1960:574).

5. The Muslims that needed a middleman to organize or take Zakat from unwilling people, except through force such as an act of war. In this matter, they received a part of the Zakat to become such a middleman (M. Razali 1990:16).

VIEWS OF THE UMMAH ABOUT THE *MU'ALLAF*

Hasbi Ash-Siddieqy (1987:189) said that the number of *Mu'allaf* perceived, as *Mu'allaf* by Ibn Jawzī were only 50 people in the time of the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace). Among them were Abū Sufyān, Shāker bin Harb, °Uyaynah bin Hisn, al-Aqra° bin Habīs, °Uday bin Hātīm, Zabarqān bin Badr and Safwān bin Umayyah.

After the death of the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace), there were different views of scholars about the meaning of *Mu'allaf*. Scholars put forward different definitions and categories of *Mu'allaf*. They differed in their rights to receive zakat; and these were the reasons, categorizing the *Mu'allaf*.

During the time of the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace), °Uyaynah bin Hisn, al-Aqra° bin Habīs and °Abbās bin Mirdās were each given a guarantee (a letter) from Abū Bakr that they would be given portion of the Zakat collection. When the letter was brought to the notice of °Umar, he immediately tore the letter. He said: "The Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) gave you that portion to entice you to Islam. Now Allah has exalted Islam and there are no longer any bond between you and us. If you are still in Islam, then we accept you but if you are not, then our tie is through the sword" (Amiur 1991.141-142). After that, °Umar read Al-Qur'an surah Al-Kahf: 29:

Say, "It is the truth from your Lord; so let whoever wishes have iman and whoever wishes be kafir"

They went back to Abū Bakr and told him what had happened and thus asked: "Are you the Caliph or °Umar?" Abū Bakr answered: "°Umar, Insyallah" Abū Bakr did not refute the sayings and actions of °Umar, nor did the other companions until that matter achieved the consensus of opinion (*ijma°*) of them all, according to some scholars. There were no comments from °Usman and Ali about that portion hitherto meant for the *Mu'allaf* taken away from them. When Abū Bakr was caliph, he kept giving that part to °Uday bin Hātīm and his people in his era.

After the companions era, there are a few differences of opinion among the *Fiqh* scholars (*fuqaha'*), for examples:

Hanafi *Fiqh* scholar is one of the opinion that the portion for the *Mu'allaf* being abrogated; they thus lost all rights after the death of Rasulullah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) until now. They based their opinion on the

ijma' of the companions of the Prophet, since Abū Bakr and all the other companions did not question the action and saying of ʿUmar (Yusuf 1986:600).

However according to the opinion of *Abadiyah* scholars, the portion of Zakat collection for the *Mu'allaf* ceased to be theirs once they became strong and therefore did not need it. Nevertheless, when they were in need, it would be all right for them to receive the said portion in order to win their hearts, and to prevent them from doing bad deeds towards the Muslims or to take advantage of them (Yusuf 1986:600).

According to al-Qurtubī (1954:180), the Maliki scholars have two differences of views on this matter.

1. The loss of the *Mu'allaf* rights is due to the strength and the expansion of Islam.
2. The rights of the *Mu'allaf* are permanent.

Both of these opinions were of the two *qadi* of the Maliki *madhahab*. They are *qadi* Abd al-Wahhāb and *qadi* Ibn ʿArabī. According to *qadi* Abd al-Wahhāb, when they (*Mu'allaf*) need it, then they should receive their part of the Zakat.

According to Imam Shafie (t.th:16), there are two opinions on the problem of giving Zakat to the *Mu'allaf*:

1. The new converts to Islam could be given part of the Zakat because Allah have commanded Zakat taken from Muslims to be given back to Muslims and not to be given to people of other religion.
2. The polytheist (*mushrikūn*) should not receive any part of the Zakat even to attract them to Islam. Although the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) had once given part of the Zakat to some polytheist in the Hunayn War but it was actually from the property of *faik* (*faik* is *ghanīmah* acquired without the use of force or struggle) and more specifically from the Prophet's own property.

According to Imam Fakhr al-Rāzī (1938:111) in his interpretation, the *Mu'allaf* from the *musyrikīn* group received only from the property of *faik* and not from the zakat (the *Mu'allaf*'s portion).

Imam al-Nawawī was in complete agreement with Imam Syafie's opinion that in order to attract the hearts of the non-believers to Islam *faik*'s property, or any other, could be used, but not out of the zakat collection. Concerning the giving of a portion of the zakat collection to the *Mu'allaf*, since the time the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) began receiving his wahyu until the time of his death, there have been two distinct schools of thoughts.

1. Not giving the portion from the Zakat to the people who newly accepted Islam because Allah had strengthened Islam, and thus it no longer needed

to soften their hearts using wealth. This occurred in the time of ʿUmar as the Caliph.

2. They must be given a portion of the Zakat because the means and reasons of giving Zakat is based on Allah's decree already mentioned (at-Tawbah: 60).

Imam al-Tabarī (1986:314) expressed the views of Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal and his followers that the giving of part of Zakat to *Mu'allaf* was still valid; because there never was any abrogation of the ayat concerning the matter. This opinion was agreed to by Imam al-Zuhrī and Abū Jaʿfar al-Bāqir. The Jaʿafariyyah and Zaydiyyah sects of the Syiah persuasion also mentioned this (al-Qaradāwī 1986:567).

Ibn Taymiyyah (1989:75) was of the view that not only was it permissible, but also it was necessary to give Zakat to the *Mu'allaf* because Allah (s.w.t.) allowed this in the Qur'an and in the Sunnah.

According to Yusuf al-Qaradāwī (1986: 567), the *Mu'allaf* includes both the infidels (kāfirūn) and the Muslims, giving a portion of the Zakat to them would be in order if it could attract the infidels to Islam. The prohibition is concerning giving a part of Zakat specifically to them. New converts, however, should receive their portion as prescribed. Hasbi Ash-Siddieqy (1987:189-90) also expressed the same opinion. He agreed that a part of the Zakat be given to the new converts (*Mu'allaf*) because the very great difficulties faced by them. They face not only a hostile and stubborn attitude towards Islam from their own communities but they also need to adjust to an Islamic way of life. The converts also need to learn the *Deen* in depth in order to become good Muslims.

PURPOSE OF CHARACTER BUILDING OF *MU'ALLAF* IN ISLAM

For 13 years, the Prophet Muhammad (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) in Mecca had successfully guided the companions to a completely new life with an impeccable *ʿaqīdah* and an excellent way of how to behave. The companions had undergone the process of transformation successfully to become the best *ummah*, an exemplar to generations of Muslims after them. Despite the persecution perpetrated by the pagan Quraysh they were all very committed to Islam and practiced the *Deen* in its totality and splendour.

The *hijrah* from Mecca to Yathrib by the companions of the Prophet Muhammad (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) proved the success of the leadership and guidance of Prophet Muhammad (may Allah bless him and grant him peace). The companions were ever willing to sacrifice themselves, their nation, home, wealth, friends and families to migrate to Yathrib (Medina). The companions also proved that they loved Allah (s.w.t.) and the Prophet Muhammad (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) more than anything else. As an example, ʿAli bin Abī Tālib willingly took the place of Rasulullah (may

Allah bless him and grant him peace) lying on his bed even though he knew the Pagan Quraysh had already designed to kill the Prophet. Abū Bakr al-Siddīq too constantly looked ahead to ensure that he had chosen the best way for the Prophet Muhammad (may Allah bless him and grant him peace). And at the same time looked back to see no danger coming from behind in order to protect the Prophet Muhammad (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) whilst on their journey to Yathrib. He also prepared all the necessities required by the Prophet Muhammad (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) for the journey to Yathrib. He said, "I look in front to see and choose a good road for the Prophet Muhammad (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) and look back to see if there are enemies trailing from behind". They were the model of selflessness, love and devotion to Islam as demonstrated by the two great companions of the Prophet Muhammad (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) (Ahmad Shalaby 1975:158-159). Meanwhile, the other companions of the Prophet Muhammad (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) also migrated from Mecca to Yathrib despite great difficulties and obstructions from the Pagan Quraysh. For example, Abū Salamah had to migrate without his wife and son. Similarly Suhayb al-Rūmī migrated only when the Pagan Quraysh had taken all his wealth. Thus, *hijrah* was proof of dedication and sincerity for the sake of Islam, and what it entails. It was a test of iman and the rectitude of the believers, and their preference for Islam over worldly affairs. It was the proper way to behave as the vicegerent of Allah (s.w.t.) (khalīfatu'Llāh) on earth (Akram Diyā' al-'Umārī, 1992:63).

By way of examples, the Prophet Muhammad (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) instilled in the early Muslims the admirable attribute to aspire for triumph and success, (which in the Quranic Arabic is called *al-Falāh*). There would be a lot of benefits for Muslim converts to acquire a thorough insight into the way of *al-Falāh* as understood by the early Muslims in their effort to cultivate Islamic character and behaviour. The *hijrah* was an indication of the soundness of the Prophet Muhammad's way of guiding new believers. Through a process of guidance by the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace), the believers succeeded to become vicegerent (Khalīfatu'Llāh) on earth, in the true sense of the word. Nowadays, all converts should also follow the teaching of the Prophet Muhammad (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) and become men of great success like the Prophet Muhammad's (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) companions. Surah al-Tawbah: 60 also provided the converts the means to develop into good Muslims, as they are one of the eight groups of *asnāf* mentioned.

According to Imam al-Qurtubī (1954:179), the *raison d'être* to giving attention and guidance to *Mu'allaf* in the way of Islam is part of Islamic jihad. Some *ulama* of the Maliki *madhahab* are of the opinion that it is a dakwah methodology since it is obligatory for Muslims to propagate Islam, to save them from the swords of the Muslims here on earth and the fire in the life after death. The same also seems to be the opinion of Hasbi Ash-Shiddieqy (1987:189):

It cannot be denied that Muslims nowadays is in need of the strength of money to tabligh, propagate and disseminate their religion. It is great, if at any place, we could gather and enlarge this part until it become especially huge for Islamic dakwah.

According to Ibn Taymiyyah (1989:78), the purpose of providing guidance to the *Mu'allaf* in the basic knowledge of the *Deen* and instilling them with qualities of correct moral behaviour is to encourage them to willingly embrace Islam, and to avoid evil deeds. From the above, we can then summarize the importance of Zakat to the well being of the *Mu'allaf*.

Mu'allaf are human, and therefore they are not free from the weaknesses; and because of their poor Islamic knowledge and lack of spiritual education when they first embrace Islam, they are open to the various temptations to leave Islam. Thus, giving them their portion of Zakat collection may soften their heart, and consequentially may also have the following impacts:

1. To prevent them from deeds that may spark social unrest.
2. To make them realize the wholesomeness (*shumūl*) of Islam as their constant guide on the right path.
3. To encourage them to hope for the blessing of Allah (s.w.t.) so that their hearts are open to accept the teaching of Islam.
4. Giving a portion of Zakat to the *Mu'allaf* is one of the tools of Islamic dakwah.
5. To show them how Islam always care and love the *Mu'allaf* and that the Prophet Muhammad (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) is the blessing for all and especially the new convert.

From the life experience of the companions of the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace), we know that developing the *Mu'allaf* into good Muslims with correct moral behaviour is an important social responsibility of all Muslims. Thus, it is important if we can contribute to improve the welfare of the *Mu'allaf* by the following ways.

1. To help strengthen ties of Islamic brotherhood. This is also a jihad in Islam.
2. To save Muslim converts from reverting to their previous religions.
3. To give motivation to strengthen their trust in Islam, and at the same time enhance their knowledge of Islam as a universal way of life for all the people from every part of the world.
4. To instill real confidence about the perfection and beauty of Islam.
5. To give them the basic teachings on Islam, *Iman*, and *Ihsan*.

THE PROBLEMS OF LIVING FACED BY THE *MU'ALLAF* IN MALAYSIA

In Malaysia, the Muslim converts faced many difficulties. Other than persecutions from their own non-Muslim races, they have to readjust their way of life in

accordance with the tenets of Islam. At the same time, they are caught by the polarization of races, due partly to the 'divide and rule' policy and the education system left by the colonial British. The colonial rule is not good for social integration; it divided the races into Malays, Chinese, Indians and others. For example, the Malaysian education system perpetuates the separation of schools according to race, Malays, Chinese, Indian and others, with different syllabus in the colonial times (Chow 1979:104-5). Since independence, there have been great changes and now, there is National Primary and Secondary schools, where people of all races, Malay, Chinese, Indians and others mix. However, ethnic schools, such as Chinese and Indian still exist besides, the Madrasah only cater for the Muslim children. Thus, there still exist ethnic feeling of individual groups; Malays are for Malays, Chinese for Chinese, Indians for Indians and similarly for other races.

This has created a great impact on someone who is non-Malay when he embraced Islam. The non-Malay community is of the opinion that when someone embraced Islam, he has become Malay, known as *Masuk Melayu*. That is, the community takes for granted that the convert has taken up the way of the Malays. This is a disgrace to the non-Muslim race although the convert denies it. His intention is merely to follow Islam and not the way of the Malays (Noorzila 1994:7). However, the non-Muslims community perceives them as betrayal to their birthrights of origin, lineage, culture, heritage and ancestors ways of worship (Amran 1985:1988; *Masa* 1978:86-90). This is similar to the sayings of the known socialist of minority ethnic groups Wagley and Hāris (1964:8) whose quotations are as below:-

The minority group for denying his ancestry and heritage of his people may denounce a person who seeks to escape identification as a member of a minority by changing name, by adopting a new religion and acquiring new behavioral traits.

This is exactly the situation of converts in Malaysia. To the non-Muslims, the converts seek to change his identities by changing his name, adopting the new religion (Islam) and acquiring new behavioral traits, (food, drink, clothing, festival and many others). Thus, their own races denounced and condemned them as betrayers; and their own family, relatives and race for abandoning the birthrights of origins, religion, civilization, culture and heritage. Because, in term of marriage, a Muslim has to marry another Muslim; thus, in Malaysia even marriage, they accuse him of preferring the Malay Muslims, whereas a non-Muslim usually marries someone of his own race. There are interracial marriages in Malaysia but their number is very insignificant. Thus, their own families, families and races cruelly reject the converts in Malaysia. This also happens in Indonesia for Chinese Muslim converts (Ma'ruf Siregar 1972). Osman Chuah (1999) found some cases in his studied, for example: A married couple with one of their members embraced Islam could give rise to divorce. On May 21, 1999, Nor Aishah Teh Abdullah @ Teh Siew Choo sued Teng Eng Hua for divorce

after having embraced Islam, the judge in the session court ruled that a civil marriage with her husband be dissolved according to section 54(1d) of the law reform of Marriage And Divorce Act of 1976 (*New Straits Times* 1999:8). A policeman embracing Islam had to face the demand of his non-Muslim wife for divorce for more than a year while he persuaded her to embrace Islam. Finally, he had to sign the divorced deed.

There are also many cases of converts reverting to their previous religions. This is of some concern, and a lecturer (Amran Kasimin 1988) from UKM had already conducted a research on this matter. Thus, it is very clear that converts in Malaysia inevitably faced many problems. Some of which are as follows:-

1. The families and race of the *Mu'allaf* ostracize or reject them. Some converts have to leave their home and stay out of their families' homes because of conflicts after conversion.
2. There are *Mu'allaf* whose employers are non-Muslims who have tried to separate and exclude them from other workers, as they cannot eat with the non-Muslims because of non-halal food. Some employers dismiss them.
3. Some families of the *Mu'allaf* threaten and assault them, especially those below nineteen years old and women. These force them to revert to their former religion.
4. Friends and families continuously speak against Islam openly or they insist and hint to the converts to abandon Islam. They belittle Islam at all time and accuse Islam as retrogressive.
5. The stubborn adherence to ancestor religion among non-Muslims is strong. They and the non-Muslim members of the families dislike Islam. Their attitudes and ways make it difficult for the *Mu'allaf* to live in peace within the non-Muslim family environment.
6. There are *Mu'allaf* who have to find other jobs because their present jobs are against the injunctions of the Qur'an and the Sunnah.
7. Many converts after cutting off contacts with their non-Muslim families lost the inheritance that should have been theirs if they had not embraced Islam.
8. The difficulty adjusting to the principles of Islam for the converts when they learn Islam because they are from different background, age, education and social circles and used to non-Muslim way of life.

THE PROBLEM OF MU'ALLAF LIVING IN A NON-MUSLIM SOCIETY

There are a lot of *Mu'allaf* who still stay in the non muslim society after they have embrassed Islam. This is just because they have different background of up-bringing that may cause them could not suite themselves with the Malay muslim community. The *Mu'allaf* who are still living in a non-Muslim society

and whose iman is still weak faces also many hardships. Among the problems are:

1. Problem of prohibited food or non-halal food: There are some converts who cannot leave the consumption of prohibited food and drink like pork and alcohol at the beginning after conversion.
2. Some of the converts are from the low-income group and they have no time to attend religious classes because:
 - i. The timetable for learning Islam clashes with their working time and they have to earn a living.
 - ii. The religious classes are far from their homes.
 - iii. They have problems in the usage of languages.
3. There are some converts who do not know how to pray, fast, paying zakat, hajj, reciting the Qur'an and other Islamic practices because there is no one who can teach them and practice together with them since they are afraid that the society will know about, they having converted to Islam. They are afraid to face the hostile from non-Muslim society. The non-Muslims will be bias, prejudiced and discriminating against the converts. They would not like even to employ a convert and discriminate against him in other matters as well. Because of these, the converts also do not want their family members to know that they have embraced Islam. Thus, they concealed their conversion without telling anyone.

Because of concealing the conversion, other problems arise, when they die. When they die, their families may bury them at non-Islamic burial ground without following the Islamic way. According to Islam, when a Muslim passes away, the rites before burial such as bathing and clothing of the dead, and the praying before the burial have to be done. If their non-Muslim families organize the burial, there would not be the observation of these rites.

The non-Muslim will claim the corpse and naturally want to bury it according to non-Islamic customs. This will cause conflict between the non-Muslims and Muslims concerning claiming the corpse of the *Mu'allaf*. It is natural for the non-Muslims to want to discharge their duty to bury the corpse as they do not know the dead relative has embraced Islam but for the Muslims, it is *fard kifāyah* and it is the joint responsibility of the Muslims to bath the corpse, to cloth it, pray it and bury it.

A case of this sort of conflict did happen in 1978. The non-Muslim deceased family intended to claim the corpse of a Chinese *Mu'allaf* by force. The Wilayah Persekutuan Islamic Council had no choice but called for the help of the police. However finally, he was buried at the Muslim burial ground (Amran Kasim 1988).

In 1980, an Indian *Mu'allaf* passed away and his family buried him at a Christian burial ground. The deceased did not change his Christian name and did not inform his family of his conversion. However later, on the twelfth of January 1980 the deceased's body was exhumed and reburied in the Islamic burial ground in Cheras (Amran Kasimin 1988).

Based on an analysis of Report of the Malaysian Muslim Welfare Organizations, between 1976-1980, there were 10 cases of these conflicts, which became crisis between the families and the welfare organizations. Cases of these kinds continue to happen now. Sometimes, the non-Muslim can claim the corpse and bury according to non-Muslim rites because the religious department has lost the record of conversion.

THE PROBLEMS OF *MU'ALLAF* LIVING IN A MALAY MUSLIM SOCIETY

The problems faced by *Mu'allaf* living in a Malay Muslim society are different from the problems faced by a *Mu'allaf* living in a non-Muslim society. Among the problems are:

1. Self-adjustment of a *Mu'allaf* concerning his social integration with the Malay Muslim society: Generally, sometimes, the *Mu'allaf* cannot adapt and interact with the Malay community because they have inferior feeling. By this, they can be isolated in the community. Sometimes, the fault is not one-sided, in certain situations; the attitudes of some Malay individuals too are discouraging the converts. They have failed to show their love and care for the *Mu'allaf* as what the Prophet Muhammad (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) towards people who embraced Islam. The Malays do not project themselves as role models of good Muslims for the *Mu'allaf*. Sometimes, the attitudes of some Malays have made the *Mu'allaf* dislike socializing with them. Firstly, they do not have the love and care of Islamic brotherhood. They also do not like to befriend with the *Mu'allaf*. Besides, they commit all types of sins and some of them never care about the Islamic attire. Some of them are not decently dressed as Muslims as compared with non-Muslims in term of covering their *aurat*. This makes the *Mu'allaf* feel difficult to mix with them. Of course, not all Malays belong to this category. Some are good and receptive to the *Mu'allaf*.
2. The Malay Acceptance of the *Mu'allaf*.
The attitudes of some Malays have confused the *Mu'allaf*, since they assume embracing Islam as embracing the Malay way or becoming Malay. Sometimes they perceive the *Mu'allaf* must follow Malay customs, which have nothing to do with Islam. That is, the *Mu'allaf* must follow everything Malay. They must speak Malay, practice Malay customs and culture. They must eat by hand and wear Malay attire. Only then, the Malays regard them

as real Muslims. They are also suspicious of the intention to embrace Islam when the *Mu'allaf* visit their non-Muslim families. They did not know even the Prophet Muhammad (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) always visited his uncle Abû Tâlib who was not Muslim during the time.

This is the theory of assimilation advocated by Robert Ezra Park (1950:150). This theory says that small group must assimilate with the big group. This social theory is outdated as there is also the pluralism theory, which claims that all men can live in pluralistic ways. Even the non-Muslims also realize that assimilation is not the norm but the Muslim Malays do not know that conversion is only concerned with Islamic ways and not related to any other than Islam.

3. Intention Conversion to Islam

Sometimes, some conversions are due to gain personal advantages such as below:

- i. Some of them are of the opinion that embracing Islam make them Malay, and thus they are entitled to the special rights as given to Malays in accordance with the law. This may not be correct.
- ii. To easily obtain the status of Malaysian citizenship. This is also not true.
- iii. To easily change their identity card from red to blue.
- iv. To escape from criminal cases by changing their names to avoid detection by the police. This cannot be true, as even Malays who commit crime have to face trials under the Malaysian legal system.
- v. To facilitate dealing in business matters with Malays.

If these *Mu'allaf* have failed to achieve any of their aims mentioned above, they may bring problems to them and their lives. Most of the *Mu'allaf* before they became Muslims lived and grew up among Malays, and some even were born within a Malay society. This could have an influence on their decision to embrace Islam. Their intimate relations with Muslim friends could have made them attracted to Islam. Some of the immediate causes attracting them to Islam mentioned above may not be true, and could be mere imagination and wrong perception of some people. Sometimes the conversion is due to the following factors

- a. The intention to marry Malays.
- b. A broken home environment.
- c. Understanding the principles and practicability of Islam through reading, thoughts and research.
- d. Due to the guidance (hidāyah) from Allah (s.w.t.).

Because of these factors (Amran Kasim 1985:95-99; Masa 1978:87), the Malays sometimes have doubt of their conversion. This is not good. We agree with the views of Hussein Yee (*al-Islam* 1994:9) that the Muslims should have good opinion of the *Mu'allaf* without questioning their intentions of becoming Muslims as the Prophet once said in a Hadith from *Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (t.th..2):

‘Umar bin al-Khattāb (r.a.) on the pulpit, he said: I heard the Prophet said:

Truly, every action depends on intention, and for every work done, follow of what it is intended. Anyone whose hijrah is for Allah and His Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace), one will get Allah and His Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace). One whose hijrah is for worldly reason (prize and its possession) or for wanting to marry a lady, thus one will get what he wishes for.

From the above Hadith, it is clear that intention for the *hijrah* are two, either specific or general (Omar 1979:399-424). Therefore, the intention to do something for the cause of Allah and His Prophet is the general intention. Regardless of the numerous motives for embracing Islam given above, the *Mu'allaf* have to purify their intention while embracing Islam in accordance with the said *hadith*. The religious officers should have explained to the *Mu'allaf* about this at the time of their conversion. Otherwise, the aim becomes merely worldly.

ALTERNATIF SOLUTION FOR THE *MU'ALLAF'S* PROBLEM

From the discussion above, we see that the problems faced by the *Mu'allaf* at the initial period after their conversion to Islam are many in Malaysia. In the era of Rasulullah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) the early Muslims suffered prosecution, boycott and experienced all the pains because the enemies of Islam opposed the mission of the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace). The suffering of the newly converted Muslims too exist in Malaysia, but few as compared with the early believers in the era of the Prophet Muhammad (may Allah bless him and grant him peace). Nevertheless, the attitude of non-Muslims towards Islam is the same compared with that of the pagan non-Muslims during the time of Rasulullah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace). They dislike Islam, misconceive Islam and fear Islam. The converts are the victims of this unfriendly attitude. Other than this, their counterpart Malay Muslims also misunderstands the converts. Sometimes, the born Muslims also harbour unnecessary suspicions on the converts. Some perceive the conversion is to facilitate them to gain favour at their expense or gain political and economic advantages.

However, in the era of the Prophet Muhammad (may Allah bless him and grant him peace), the leadership of the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) had transformed the converted Muslims to the best Ummah. The success of the early Muslims was due to a large extent to their strong *imān*, deep consciousness of Islam and impeccable Islamic *akhlāq*. The early Muslims (The

companions of the Prophet Muhammad may Allah bless him and grant him peace) too became the inheritors of the knowledge of Rasulullah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace). They not only attracted other people to Islam but also, for example, became leaders of Islam like Abū Bakr al-Siddīq, ʿUmar, ʿOthmān, ʿAlī and others.

In Malaysia, however, the converts or *Mu'allaf*, do not achieve the same level of success as the early Muslims. They have been plagued with all kinds of problems. Some of them do not learn and practise Islam in the right manner. Some also do not integrate well in the Muslim society. They are in great need of guidance in Islamic knowledge and practice. They are also some who revert to their previous religions. Thus, it is the responsibility of the governmental religious departments and the Ummah to guide them out of the darkness of the Jāhiliyyah way. The Pusat Islam Malaysia, the state religious departments, the Non-governmental Organisations, individual preachers, the Imam of the mosques and even academicians and the whole Islamic Ummah should work hard, hand in hand to guide the converts to become good Muslims with impeccable *imān*, correct practices of Islam and deep consciousness of *ihsān*.

Unless some things are in place to help them to be on the right path, converts with weak *Imān* and lack of practices of Islam can fall, and deviate from Islam. While from the political, economic and social aspects, the converts could face alienation, as their family, race and their own people, do not accept them. This is because, Islam is comprehensive and when the converts start practicing Islam, their ways are different from their original race. They eat, wear and pray differently. Their own race brands them as betrayers. On the other hand, as new converts, they also faced difficulties to adjust to a new Islamic way of living, as some of them may have no time to learn Islam and practise them such as the five obligatory prayers and other aspects of the *Qawā'id*. Thus, it is necessary to give them appropriate counseling that they should give sufficient attention to Islamic learning and practices. The phase of objection from their families is only short and the message be transmitted completely to all converts. Whereas learning and practicing Islam is the key to success of the converts as life after death is better and eternal. The Pusat Islam Malaysia and the various state religious departments should organize more learning centers and motivate the converts to learn and practise Islam, Non Governmental Organisations like PERKIM, (Muslim Welfare Organisation of Malaysia) Islamic Outreach, Persatuan Darul Fitrah can supplement the roles of the government religious authorities by cooperating with them. The officials and *muballigh* should also know the psychology of converts as they face external pressure to leave Islam. The *Mu'allaf* should receive what is due to them from the Zakat collection in order to alleviate their plight. Everybody should take this as a very important responsibility to change the situation.

Surah al-Tawbah: 60 had mentioned the eight *asnāf* who should receive the Zakat including the *Mu'allaf*, cited as the fourth category. The fuqaha ulama

should ensure verse to the proper distribution of Zakat fund to the converts. Surah Tawbah: 60 is Medina revealed after the Prophet Muhammad (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) had already quite settled in the city. The companions of Prophet Muhammad (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) were par excellence in their esprit de corp; such as helping one another, and freeing the slaves. Now, In Malaysia, the converts definitely come under the *Mu'allaf* category, and therefore they deserve to receive the Zakat because of the delicate problems faced by them.

The Zakat could also help the poor born Muslims. However, it should not exclude the converts and the right amount of fund is necessary to help them. The job of orientating the converted Muslims is a very huge task. Thus, it should become the shared responsibility of the Pusat Islam Malaysia, the state religious bodies like Jabatan Agama Islam Selangor, Jabatan Agama Islam Wilayah Persekutuan and others. The registered Non-Governmental Organisations like PERKIM, al-Hunafa, Darul Fitrah, Malaysian Chinese Muslim Society and others should work in co-operation to solve the problems of the converts. All must try to cultivate Islam to these converts so that they successfully become good Muslims.

Before launching any scheme to help the converts, Muslims, individually and as a group should try to evaluate their weaknesses, and to examine how during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (may Allah bless him and grant him peace), the companions of the Prophet became successful Muslims, like Abū Bakr, °Umar, °Othmān, Ali and others. Whereas in the modern age, the number of good Muslims among converts are few. Besides, they are also converts reverting to his/her previous religion. If we attempt to identify the problems of the converts, there are two major ones. First, it is to develop in the knowledge of Islam, and character becoming of Muslims. Second, to integrate them into the Muslim society and be part of the *Ummah*.

The former requires the governmental religious organizations, non-governmental organisations and individual Muslims friends to motivate the converts to learn Islam and practise it from the time of conversion until death. The later requires the born Muslims and the *Mu'allaf* to mix socially and friendly to one another like brothers. The born Muslims must come with open arm to receive the converts and the converts must be willing to mix socially. Religious departments under the states must also organise more family days participated by converts and born Muslims. The Pusat Islam Malaysia, the state religious departments too should organize more centers for Islamic classes on the regular basis. Even though there exist many Islamic centers in Malaysia, sometimes, converts go to the center the ustaz or ustazah is not available. Sometimes, the timetable keeps on changing until the converts do not know exactly when they should come to the centers for their lessons. Besides, converts also have problems with ustaz. It seems that the ustaz and ustazah teaching converts themselves require training in counseling for them to become effective ustaz or ustazah. The religious de-

partment should also be able to have quality management to be effective in guiding the converts. The state religious departments ought to advertise the timetable so that the converts know exactly when they can go for their Islamic lessons. On the individual basis, as Muslim we must show care and love for the converts. On the educational aspects of the converts, *Bayt al-Māl* of the various state religious organizations should provide full scholarship for the converts to pursue diploma, graduate and post graduate degrees for converts so that they can live a meaningful life with professional qualifications. During the time of the Prophet Muhammad (may Allah bless him and grant him peace), in Medina, after their migration to Medina, the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) had arranged for the Muhājirūn and the Ansar to have close ties with one another. Governmental religious bodies and Non Governmental Organisations could also arrange the same sort of relationship between born Muslims and converts to strengthen the ties between them. Both parties must be sincere in their intention, and help each other. Similarly, the converts and the born Muslims should have closer ties by the organization of various activities. Perhaps, one of the solutions to the problems is to have a convert or *Mu'allaf* kampong on land alienated by government in order that all the converts can stay together with *Ulama* frequently to guide them in their religious knowledge and practices. He can take charge of the welfare and religious needs of all converts. By this, it is easier to bring the converts together as presently all Muslim converts live everywhere throughout Malaysia. They also do not know one another. By this, it is easy for the converts to acquire knowledge and practise Islam together. Besides, all sorts of programme for the spiritual progress of *Mu'allaf* can be organized here. All new converts should learn and practise Islam together with all the others for a minimum period so that they can understand the basic knowledge and practices of Islam.

Preferably, the amir of this *Mu'allaf* kampong should be also a learned *Mu'allaf* so that he can disseminate Islamic knowledge to the converts. The dilemma of converts needs serious consideration, and resolution. The spiritual development of a human being is as important as the physical aspects. Muslim should know Islam, together with knowledge and practice. For this reason, I would like to stress that *Mu'allaf* village is a proposal of an attempt to encourage the *Mu'allaf* to live as a community in the same pattern as the first community lived in Medina al-Munawwara during the time of the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) and generations of Muslims after that. By this, their welfare not only receives the necessary attention it deserves, but also as a community they will acquire the potential to develop in strength and well-being. It is also easier to identify their weaknesses. I would like to suggest that the government create a special Islamic Center with a mandate to implement this program, and to handle matters concerning the Muslim social problems. Unless there is an opportunity in place for the converts to transform into good Muslims, the image of Islam may become tarnished. If a convert did not learn Islam, he

would not perform the obligatory prayers, fast in the month of Ramadan or if he crossed the legal parameter of the *sha'riah*, this would definitely tarnish the good name of Islam and the whole *ummah*. This is the reality of some of the converts. Thus, we should not belittle the need for guidance and the apportionment of Zakat fund in any effort to address the problems confronting the converts. In the present reality, it is not an easy task to provide the converts with an opportunity to transform themselves as Muslims of the level of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad (may Allah bless him and grant him peace). However, with sincere intention and research of past records of successes, fresh understanding of the problems of the converts, it is possible for us to create a new generation of good Muslims out of them. Let us not allow the converts to go astray, lose the light, and trust in Islam.

CONCLUSION

Problems and challenges faced by the *Mu'allaf* are the same as faced by the companions of Prophet Muhammad (may Allah bless him and grant him peace). However there are more pains for the *Mu'allaf* now as there is no guidance and leadership as good as Rasulullah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace). Besides, there are also minor group of Malays muslim who are not care in favour of the *Mu'allaf*. Because of this, these *Mu'allaf* should be given the proper love and care according to Islam. If someone has embraced Islam are should be given a shelter and protection so that Islam can further expand in our country.

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