

## Chapter 2: Initial Stages and Foundation

Officially founded only in 1990, Pesantren Daarut Tauhid was in fact established earlier in 1987 by Abdullah Gymnastiar. This period from 1987 up until 1990 represents the period of the initial stages of the pesantren. There were, during this period, some events which are not merely significant but determinant in the foundation of the pesantren. Echoing Van Gennepien sequences, these events were to a great extent rites de passage, in that they were necessary rites which turned Gymnastiar from an “ordinary persona” into an extraordinary *kyai* (the leader of both the pesantren and many Muslims) and transformed the environment from an ordinary community into a distinguished pesantren milieu.

Furthermore, these events can be seen as a potential foundation and will later explicitly illuminate both the very nature and the primary function of Daarut Tauhid as the *Bengkel Akhlaq* (Workshop for Morality). It will be tangibly apparent in the chapters to follow how these events, with the relative exception of *hajj* and *umrah*, became practised rituals in Daarut Tauhid in fulfilment of its “mission” as the *Bengkel Akhlaq*.

These events were, first, the one-month *i'tikaf* (retreat, stay in a mosque) during Ramadhan and the closely related notion of *lailatul qodar* (the night of power/determinism), secondly the dreams of the Prophet Muhammad, then the *hajj* and *umrah* to Mecca, and finally the *shilaturrahmi* (bonds of friendship). Here I shall respectively describe these events, portraying how they functioned as the preconditions to the foundation of the pesantren and further tracing their significance as rites de passage. But, before doing so, both because K.H. Abdullah Gymnastiar is the key-actor in these events and because he is the key-person as at once the founder and the leader of Daarut Tauhid, I would like first to introduce him.

### 2.1 The Founder: K. H. Abdullah Gymnastiar

KH. Abdullah Gymnastiar (I shall hereafter name him *Aa Gym*<sup>1</sup> by which he is well-known) is a very young religious leader since he was born in 1962 and only 33 years of age. Being the first-born child of four children, Aa Gym has the characteristic of self-sufficiency and high creativity. Furthermore, early in his childhood, he already showed a talent for leadership. He used to initiate and lead play-groups amongst the children of his own age and even older.

These characteristics of self-sufficiency, creativity, and leadership became more and more apparent throughout his school age growth. Young Aa Gym, and to some extent all his brothers and sister, tend to meet their own needs, both

academic and other, without bothering their parents. Aa Gym never asked anything so expensive that his parent could not afford it. If anything, he saved his money and would ask his parent only for the amount he lacked. Concerning this, his mother once imitated for me his words when he wished to buy an expensive pair of shoes: "*Teh*,<sup>2</sup> do you have any spare money?" "What are you after, indeed?" replied his mother. "I wish to buy a pair of shoes but I have only part of money." This begging was however very rarely done by Aa Gym. "Aa Gym never let himself bother me or his father," his mother convinced me. "He and the rest of my children never *merekesel* (force) requested money," she emphasised, "as children commonly do."

This characteristic of self-sufficiency has given rise to another characteristic of Aa Gym, his sense of entrepreneurial business. Early in his primary school period, when he was seven years of age, he had already learned to sell toys such as *kelereng* (marbles), *petasan* (firecracker), and the like. "When attending the first year of primary school," his younger brother once told me, "he used to sell *petasan* to his class- and play-mates." When there was a social event such as a football match, musical show, and the like that attracted a massive crowd of people, he used to sell anything creatively saleable during the occasion.

Aa Gym's parents once in a while attempted to stop this because they worried that it would have a bad impact on his study. Nevertheless, without belittling his parents' concern, he continued his business and succeeded. It is thus evident that the parental apprehension was unnecessary and his parents were eventually proud of Aa Gym's entrepreneurial spirit, which become his inherent characteristic. His parents were particularly proud when these characteristics proved fruitful. By the time Aa Gym graduated from SMP (*Sekolah Menengah Pertama*, Lower Secondary School), he already bought a motorcycle entirely from his own savings. Even more striking was that he could buy a car, again from his own savings, when he graduated from SMA (*Sekolah Menengah Atas*, Upper Secondary School). It is not surprising therefore that he would rely on himself during his tertiary study. He was as capable of meeting his educational fees as other students meet their needs for texts and notebooks. These were all the fruits of his "*bisnis* (business)" activities. "Aa [Gym] *the tiasa milari rizqi sorangan* (Overall, Aa [Gym] has a potent capability to make his own way in life)," concluded his mother. And it was this kind of entrepreneurial talent that brought Aa Gym to his current activities of Islamic entrepreneurship.

Underlying this outstanding characteristic is the fact that Aa Gym was clever as a boy and continues as a brilliant individual. By the time he was three, he could already recite by heart some shortest *surah* (chapters) of the Holy Qur'an. Also by this age he could recite the Latin alphabet from A to Z. It is therefore no surprise that when starting kindergarten he already had the capacity to write

and read, commonly only achieved by Sundanese children when they have spent a year or so at primary school.

This intelligence gave Aa Gym special positions throughout his educational career. He was always at the top rank during his school periods at SD (*Sekolah Dasar*, Primary School) and then SMP. “When he graduated from SMP, he was awarded the *juara umum* (best graduate),” his father once told me. Such a distinctive reputation remained unshakeable throughout his SMA-period which qualified him to further his study at the university level.

Aa Gym purportedly used to have a dream to study at ITB (*Institut Teknologi Bandung*, Bandung Institute of Technology). He therefore sat the entry test, which was at that time known as *SIPENMARU* (*Seleksi Penerimaan Mahasiswa Baru*, Entry Selection for New Student), but unfortunately he did not pass and therefore did not gain a place at the institute of his dream.

Interesting to me is the narrative concerning this failure. It is purportedly said that the failure did not at all reflect Aa Gym’s incapability for undertaking a study at ITB because he is too clever to fail. Instead, the failure was due to an unfair competition in the process of the test. It was told that when preparing to do the *SIPENMARU*, Aa Gym made an endeavour to do his own preparation.<sup>3</sup> There were some SMA-graduates who joined Aa Gym in this self-study. Lacking academic ability and knowing Aa Gym was a brilliant SMA-student, they asked Aa Gym to guide and teach them.

The results of the *SIPENMARU* were extremely surprising to both Aa Gym and his family. Aa Gym failed while most of his fellows, whose academic ability was “upgraded” by Aa Gym himself, passed. Everyone had the same impression that it was astonishing, suspecting that there was something wrong. There was much speculation as to the reasons for such an unfair decision. One out of Aa Gym’s fellows was a son of an influential *pejabat* (governmental authority) in Bandung. The decision might therefore have been “intervened” by a special message from the family of the *pejabat*, as is sometimes the case. Also the test number of this *pejabat*’s son and that of Aa Gym were very close, with only one digit difference. This was believed to make a deliberate exchange not merely possible but also very easy. Based on at least these two reasons, the *SIPENMARU* decision was viewed as unfair and it implied that Aa Gym, as the victim of this unfair competition, was still of high reputation. This narrative plays its own significant contribution in keeping Aa Gym respectable in the eyes of his followers.

Although Aa Gym was unable to attend ITB, he took his place at UNPAD (*Universitas Padjadjaran*, Padjadjaran University) to study accountancy in the Faculty of Economics and Commerce. Accountancy was understandably incompatible with his spirit and thus he resigned from UNPAD after only one year.

Having only spent a year at UNPAD, he transferred to ATA (*Akademi Teknologi Ahmad Yani*, Ahmad Yani Technology Academy) which was renamed UNJANI (*Universitas Jenderal Ahmad Yani*, University of General Ahmad Yani). UNJANI is a private university unlike ITB, which is a public tertiary institute. The common impression is that the former is expensive but not as prestigious as ITB which is nationally prestigious yet inexpensive.

During his time at UNJANI, Aa Gym gained an excellent academic reputation and showed a high level of organisational leadership. He graduated from UNJANI in 1986 with an excellent cum laude record and was chosen as the best graduate of the year. In terms of leadership, he was elected as *ketua senat*, that is, president of the academy-level student association. In fact, Aa Gym had shown this talent for leadership earlier at other schools. He was several times chosen as the KM (*Ketua Murid*, head of students), as he once told me. The students' trust in him to be their leader was a reflection of their admiration of his intelligence and leadership talent. Their trust was based on Aa Gym's intellectual qualities and leadership skill rather than on his physical appearance since he is short and thin. (One metre and fifty-nine in height and about fifty-one kilograms on weight.)

There was a second incident of apparent "bad luck" suffered by Aa Gym besides his failure to attend ITB. His other purported dream was of joining ABRI (*Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia*, Indonesian Armed Forces). In this case, he wished to follow in his father's footsteps having been heavily influenced by his military environment. His grandfather and father were ABRI officers and Aa Gym grew-up not only in an army family but in the midst of ABRI housing, that is KPAD (*Komplek Perwira Angkatan Darat*, Housing of Army Ground Forces) in Gegerkalong. When at UNPAD, he joined the MENWA (*Resiment Mahasiswa*, Students with Military Training) and he was qualified as a *komandan* (commander), the highest leadership rank in the MENWA.

When taking the entry test for ABRI, he could meet all cognitive requirements to be considered eligible to carry on military training, but, unfortunately, he failed the physical qualification: he lacked a centimetre in height to meet the minimum qualification. As a result, he missed out on his other dream.

These two failures might have left Aa Gym in a state of frustration. His father told me that frustration was seen in Aa Gym's attitude following these failures. His father talked about this when we discussed Aa Gym's motivation in doing *i'tikaf* and in the successive foundation of the pesantren. Such frustration is, I believe, quite understandable if we consider his successful educational career.

Given the two failures with their consequent state of frustration, Aa Gym looked for a place where he could express his feelings and thereby perhaps gain compensation. This place was, to Muslims quite rightly, a neighbouring mosque where he went on retreat observing the so-called *i'tikaf* and hence benefiting from the divine grant of *lailatul qodar*.

## 2.2 *I'tikaf* and *Lailatul Qodar*

In Islamic *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *i'tikaf* terminologically means to stay in a mosque with a stated *niat* (intention) and in a condition of being *suci* (clean) by the means of doing *wudlu* (ablution) before entering the mosque. *I'tikaf* therefore implies no other rituals than merely staying in the mosque with the condition of being *suci*. Closely related to *i'tikaf*, *lailatul qadar* etymologically means the night of power or determinism. It is revealed in the Qur'an that there is a single night during the month Ramadhan that is called *lailatul qadar*. On this night, Allah determines the future fate of every human being. This night is therefore so valuable that it is considered by Allah as better than a thousand years (QS. 97:1-5). That a Muslim might be blessed and his fate be a fortunate one he needs to approach Allah. One such way is the *i'tikaf*. To perform *i'tikaf* on the night of power is to be blessed by Allah a thousand fold.

It was in 1987 that Aa Gym stayed in solitude, doing *i'tikaf*, in a neighbouring mosque during Ramadhan 1407 Hijriyya. While Indonesian Muslims usually do *i'tikaf* only during the final ten days of Ramadhan and many of them do it only on the odd days of the ten, Aa Gym did *i'tikaf* during the whole month of Ramadhan. He spent almost the whole day and night in the mosque and "just came home to *buka puasa* (break his fasting) while only rarely coming home to have *sahur* (the dawn meal before fasting)," his parents assured me.

In the mosque Aa Gym did not spend his days complaining to Allah for the failures he was facing, as one might think. Instead, he devoted all the time to performing *shalat*, reciting the holy Qur'an, doing *dzikir* (chanting certain phrases in remembrance or praise of Allah) and *shalawat* (invocation of Allah's mercy for the Prophet Muhammad), and carrying out contemplation in which he did *taubat* (repenting and forswearing). He was making a sincere attempt to know Allah better. All these *i'tikaf* rituals were done to purify himself as part of his effort of *taqorrub ila al-Lah* (approaching Allah).

Performing *shalat* during the *i'tikaf* was to Aa Gym a means by which he could approach the Almighty Allah. He could when performing *shalat* make closer contact with Allah. Indeed, as the very word suggests, *shalat* (prayer!) consists of *do'a* (prayer, invocation)<sup>4</sup> toward the Beneficial Allah. In *shalat*, a Muslim acknowledges the divinity and the might of Allah, to name only some of His honours. Then he asks His forgiveness for all of his sins. Next he begs His blessing and overall guidance for living his worldly life. Such does the "dialogue" between a servant creature and his Absolute Creator continue within the *shalat*. Given such a profound meaning, *shalat* symbolises a high level of piety—regardless of the quality of the *shalat* performed.

Aa Gym therefore performed during his *i'tikaf* more *shalat* than the obligatory ones.<sup>5</sup> He performed many other *shalat sunnat* (optional prayers) that are usually neglected by common Muslims. He diligently performed *shalat lail*, better known

as *tahajjud* (optional midnight prayer) when most Muslims are usually sleeping soundly. He also routinely performed *shalat fajar*, an optional prayer preceding *shalat subuh*, *shalat dhuha* (optional prayers performed before noon), *shalat hajat* (prayer service held for the fulfilment of a wish), *shalat taubat* (prayer service held to repent and forswear), and *shalat sunnat qobliyyah* and *ba'diyyah* (overall optional prayers prior to and following the five obligatory payers).

Some of his *i'tikaf* time as well was devoted to reciting the holy Qur'an as a form of sincere dedication to the Merciful Allah. Instead of simply reciting, Aa Gym made an attempt to comprehend the revealed meaning of it. He would therefore recite the holy Qur'an together with its Indonesian translation because he did not at the time fully understand Arabic. However, comprehension itself was not his main goal because in Islam the mere recitation of the Qur'an is a strongly encouraged *ibadah* (act of pure devotion), which brings its own high value of *pahala* (reward, merit) from Allah. As Muslims do, Aa Gym believes that the mere recitation of the Qur'an itself is a valuable *ibadah* while the effort to comprehend it is another form of *ibadah*. At this point, Aa Gym does not follow the reformist's notion that reciting the Qur'an without understanding its meaning is a useless act. During the *i'tikaf*, Aa Gym *khatam* (finished reading) the whole Qur'an several times with the *niat* (intention) of *ibadah*. Besides, he tried grasping the messages of the Qur'an, as another act of *ibadah*, hoping that he could apply its messages to his secular life.

Meditative reflection also assumed a significant part in Aa Gym's *i'tikaf* during the Ramadhan. For this reflection, he had a special room in the mosque. This room was said to be called by his friends as *guha Hiro* (cave Hira). Naming his room such alludes to the prophetic process of the Prophet Muhammad. Cave Hira is the cave near Mecca in which the prophet Muhammad spent much time in spiritual meditation. The prophet is said to have gone on retreat there a month each year meditating on spiritual matters, including conditions in Mecca.

Some parallels can be drawn between these two reflective experiences of Aa Gym and the Prophet Muhammad. This is in no need to raise evidence that Aa Gym is a prophet because, according to Islamic belief, there will be no more prophets sent to earth, the Prophet Muhammad being the last forever. The first parallel is that both the Prophet and Aa Gym went on retreat following the frustration they each faced. The Prophet initially went to the cave when facing the frustration arising from his inability to use his skills and intellectual qualities in trading because of his lack of capital. Aa Gym was driven to reflective *i'tikaf* by the frustration arising from his failure to use his skills and intellectual qualities in realising his dreams. The second parallel is that both were eventually concerned not only with their personal affairs but also with the condition of their communities. The reflection of the Prophet extended from his personal concerns to the malaise in the community of Mecca, especially concerning their

polytheistic religious services and intertribal warfare.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, the personal reflection of Aa Gym extended to the social conditions of the community in Bandung that appeared to him to be deviant from the straight path of Islam. This leads to the third parallel that both are believed to have received a kind of divine message. Both the Prophet and Aa Gym were convinced that their awareness of the social conditions was a message coming from Allah and not the product of their own thinking. This finally resulted in the fourth parallel that both became convinced that they had been called to be the agent of Allah in maintaining religious law and order on the earth. The important point to note here is the predication of the principally distinct agency of these two men; Muhammad is the Prophet, a Messenger of Allah, Aa Gym is a *kyai*, an *ulama* who is the heir of the Prophets.<sup>7</sup>

Returning to the *i'tikaf*, Aa Gym spent a great amount of his *i'tikaf* time, at night in particular, staying in the *guha Hiro* and reflecting upon himself, doing so-called *muhasabah* (introspection) concerning his secular life in this contemporary world. He then came to the belief that whatever failure he was facing was his fault; it originated from his weaknesses. When traced further, he believed, such failure was nothing but the impact of every sin he both intentionally and unintentionally committed. Therefore during the reflection he recalled and acknowledged every sin he might have done and then asked forgiveness from Allah the Forgiver.

This awareness of sin and responsibility for the failure he faced brought Aa Gym to a consciousness of his existence on the earth. The longer his reflection lasted the more conscious he became of his insignificance in the face of the Almighty Allah who created him. He had nothing to be proud of but an abundance of sins engendered by overall negligence of and the subsequent deviance from the *syari'ah* (Islamic path) of Allah. Again, under this acute awareness of his deviance from the straight path, he viewed his failures as a divine "alarm" from none other than Allah.

In the light of this consciousness, he considered that his failures could be conversely viewed as a "success", that would bring him a fortune. Aa Gym came to know that whichever fate Allah determines for him will be for the sake of his *maslahat* (profit, benefit) as he lives in this world. Allah is, Aa Gym believes, Omniscient in such a way that He knows well what is good for him and the reverse. When Allah has predestined that someone "fails" to be an engineer, he exemplified, it is because of Allah's divine knowledge that he is better to "fail"; either because there will be a far better profession than being an engineer, or because it is unbeneficial or even dangerous for him to be an engineer. This conviction of Aa Gym is reflected in this quote:

Let us learn an example from someone who carried out UMPTN. Say he worked as hard as he could in preparing himself, working together with his classmates by means of forming a study club. As well he said prayers

day and night to Allah. However, Allah's decision was completely out of his expectation. Most of his classmates, whom he helped study, passed the test while he himself, who guided them, failed. Certainly, he could not understand the fact. It is inconceivable that "followers" succeeded whereas their "leader" did not. At the time he could hardly understand the *hikmah* (divine wisdom) behind the scene, he can come to learn it. Praise be to Allah that, while some of his former classmates have become lecturers, he can even deliver *ceramah* (lectures) before lecturers, deans, and counsellors. While some of his former classmates have become soldiers, lieutenant, or captain, he can, by the Will of Allah and wearing "white barret" [Arabic head-cover], even give *pengajian* before majors and generals. So great is the *hikmah* that Allah provided for this person. If we find our face as bitter and a burden, it is simply because either we have not yet recognise a *hikmah* behind it or we tend to claim that our plan is better than Allah's.

This kind of high religious consciousness was achieved by Aa Gym through his reflection during the distinctive occasion of the *i'tikaf*.

Such radical improvement of Aa Gym's religiosity after the *i'tikaf* was said to be the visible evidence of his success in gaining *lailatul qodar*. This was told to me by a religious functionary who said that to gain this means that a Muslim has been granted by Allah a sacred fate for the next year of his life. A Muslim is most likely to gain the *lailatul qodar* if, by the night of power (*lailatul qodar*) he is of the closest relation to Allah, one way of which has been the *i'tikaf*. The concept of obtaining the *lailatul qodar* is in part a matter of coincidence, a Muslim would gain it if the night coincides with his condition of the closest possible relation to Allah. It is believed that, by the night of determination in the year 1407 Hijriyya, Aa Gym's *i'tikaf*, compounded with the various Islamic rituals, gave him a very reasonable chance of gaining the *lailatul qodar*.

In fact, there is no definite "parameter" by which to know whether a Muslim obtains the *lailatul qodar* or not because no one in fact knows the exact night at which the *lailatul qodar* will take place. Muslims only believe that it is but once a year and it is one night out of Ramadhan. Allah does not reveal any exact night in Ramadhan so that it is actually a matter of speculation. Muslim *ulama* estimate that the most likely night must be one of the last ten days of Ramadhan, particularly on the odd dates such as the twenty-first, the twenty-third, and so forth. Given this speculation, it is hard to identify which night coincides with the night of determination.

The only criterion is the post-Ramadhan behavioural performance of any Muslim. If a Muslim acts more pious, showing a higher religious quality, than he had before Ramadhan, it would then most likely be that he gained the *lailatul qodar*. As such, Aa Gym was considered to gain the *lailatul qodar* for he showed a



radical change of his religious behaviour, becoming a highly pious Muslim, after passing the month Ramadhan and the *i'tikaf* he exercised therein.<sup>8</sup>

The overall phenomena above provide enough evidence to the view that Aa Gym's *i'tikaf*, with its related *lailatul qodar* is a genuine rite of passage. It radically changed the formerly "ordinary" Aa Gym to an incredibly pious Muslim, who would soon be considered appropriate for the role of a *kyai*.<sup>9</sup> And it was no accident that this presumed *kyaiship* was later legitimised by some dreams involving the prophet Muhammad.

## 2.3 The Dreams Involving the Prophet Muhammad

Undeniably playing an important part in many cultures, dreams and their interpretation are frequently associated with religious discourses. They are in some cultures believed to be a source of important information regarding the future, the supernatural or spirit world, and religious truth which is not easily provided by ordinary consciousness. This is best exemplified by the shamanistic beliefs in which the dream is perceived as a means of communication with the supernatural world. Likewise, dreams are often believed to reveal aspects of the subjective world and its dynamics in both Western and non-Western cultures, although in the latter they are understandably related to a spiritual world outside the individual (Seymour-Smith 1986:83). In all cases, dreams seem to function as revelatory means.

This function of the dream seems to be apparent in the foundation and later the amazingly rapid growth of Daarut Tauhid. Following the event of *i'tikaf* and the impression of gaining the *lailatul qodar*, there were some dreams believed to reveal to the necessary emergence of Daarut Tauhid and its leader. The dreams were experienced three years before the official foundation of Pesantren Daarut Tauhid. Aa Gym, his relatives, and some of his disciples were said to experience dreams of this kind. These dreams invariably consisted of encounters with the Prophet Muhammad.

1. Aa Gym's mother one day experienced a dream in which she came across the Prophet Muhammad who was at the time busy looking for some one. It was unfortunate that she herself did not know whom the Prophet was looking for. She, however, vividly noticed that the Prophet seemed to need someone to whom he wanted to give a sort of instruction.
2. A couple of night later Aa Gym's younger brother, Agung, had a dream in which the Prophet Muhammad visited his home. Agung's father asked his elder brother, that is Aa Gym, to welcome the guest, who was none other than the Prophet Muhammad, and have a talk with him. Part of their talk was purportedly the Prophet's deeply-felt concerns over the current situation of Muslims, who seemed to be neglecting some principal pillars of Islamic teachings, such as *shalat*. The Prophet hence

instructed Aa Gym to initiate steps through which he reoriented Muslims by particularly appealing to them to perform *shalat*.

3. Several nights later, it was Aa Gym's turn to experience a dream of this kind. Not only did Aa Gym in his dream see the Prophet Muhammad but he also performed *shalat* together with the Prophet and his immediate companions, namely Abu Bakar, Umar, Utsman, and Ali, who respectively succeeded in the Islamic leadership following the death of the Prophet. Aa Gym said that in the dream, while performing *shalat*, he stood next to Ali while the Prophet himself was the *imam* (head) of the *shalat* performance.

These versions of the dream are cited from *Mangle* (December 1993). There are other dreams with a different story but a slightly similar "message."

4. Agung had a dream that the Prophet Muhammad visited his home. At the time, all members of his family were about to perform *shalat bejamaah* (congregational prayer) at home, as they sometimes do when not going to the mosque. But the Prophet did not join them performing *shalat* on the ground floor. He instead intended to perform *shalat* on the upper level (part of a house that is usually used to dry such things as clothes). Aa Gym's father then asked Aa Gym to see the Prophet saying: "Gym, invite the prophet to perform *shalat* together here and ask his excellency to be the *imam* (head of prayer) for us." Aa Gym then went upstairs. But, instead of coming down with the prophet, Aa Gym strike a *bedug* (large drum usually suspended horizontally at a mosque to summon people to prayer) and made an *Adzan* (call to prayer) upstairs. When coming down, Aa Gym told his father: "The prophet is not pleased to come down. Although it is raining upstairs (the upper level was not roof-covered), the Prophet is rain-proof so that he will not get wet."

5. At another time, Agung had another dream involving Aa Gym. it is said that in the dream Aa Gym was amongst a crowd of people. To Agung's surprise, all the people, except Aa Gym, had monkey-like faces and behaviour. These monkey-like people were one by one lifted-up by Aa Gym, by the means of *dipunggu* (carrying them on his shoulders), to a *menara* (tower of a mosque). From the *menara*, a thundering sound of a massive number of people reciting the Qur'an was heard and a wonderfully bright light was seen illuminating the surroundings.

6. Aa Gym had a dream in which he was visited by an old man in a clean, white Arabic-styled garment. The old man daubed a kind of honey, using a chicken feather, over Aa Gym's face, telling him that Aa Gym would be a noble person in the future.

7. Abdurrahman Yuri, the second-born in the family, had another dream again involving the Prophet Muhammad. Yuri told me in an interview that he can always vividly remember the dream and wishes to experience again a dream of that kind. In the dream, he was engaged in a war in a valley together with the Prophet and his companions. He was safeguarding the Prophet Muhammad against any attack from the enemy.

Before further analysing these dreams, I would like to introduce the key-person who experienced the seminal dream. The story of the dream, relating to the foundation of Daarut Tauhid, centres on Agung, Aa Gym's younger brother, both because he was the most frequent individual who dreamt and because of the fact that almost all the dreams, experienced by others, were in some ways related to him.

Agung, the third born son, had suffered from paralysis years before he passed away at age 25 in 1991. During those years, many uninvited volunteers took care of him. According to Agung's brother Yuri nearly everyone of the volunteers miraculously experienced a dream, or dreams, in which they encountered the Prophet Muhammad. Hakim, a volunteer, was one day found by Aa Gym's mother crying beside Agung. Aa Gym's mother surprisedly asked Hakim what happened to him. Hakim, with teardrops trickling down his cheeks, answered: "Mother, I am happy. I just encountered the Prophet Muhammad in my dream." "But I did not see you sleeping?" wondered the mother. "Well, I fell asleep on the feet of Aa Agung while I was looking after him," explained Hakim. This is just an example of how someone related to Agung could have a dream involving the Prophet. It was then believed that, when Agung's mother, Aa Gym, and Yuri saw the Prophet in their dreams, it was to a great extent a *hikmah* (divine wisdom) from having a very close relation with and taking care of Agung.

By no means had Agung become Allah's agent in helping others see the Prophet in a dream. It is believed that it is not Agung himself who "generated" that kind of the dream but it was the others' kindness in helping Agung survive which brought forth these dreams. In light of the notion of *hikmah* and *amal shaleh* (pious deed), it is believed that one will always benefit somehow from whatever kindness one does. Taking care of Agung was so valuable an *amal shaleh* that one would be surely worthy of gaining a subsequent reward. Since Agung missing out on physical enjoyment due to his paralysis enjoyed several dreams with the Prophet, the reciprocal was that these others could share the enjoyment of having a dream of the Prophet. Put another way, Agung was a passive medium through which one, providing he was kind enough toward Agung, might be able to see the Prophet in a dream.

Agung was also viewed as a passive channel for the transmission of *baraka* (divine blessing). Hakim is believed to be one of those who enjoyed the *baraka* transmitted through Agung when he achieved great success in school. This

success was, it is believed, a manifestation of *baraka* for his kindness in offering himself to tend Agung, bathing him and even helping him to defecate and urinate.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, it was believed that Agung's physical paralysis had no any impact on his human feeling and thinking. His mother even suspected whether what Agung suffered was a paralysis at all because she believes that, up until the last day, Agung's feelings remained active, even better than others'. According to Yuri, the paralysis made no impact on Agung's heart and mind, indicating no memory loss. "He was visited by many people coming to ask him for *do'a* or mere wisdom." Yuri said. Hence it is clear that Agung was thought of by many as deserving the authority of being a passive medium via which the *hikmah* and *baraka* might be gained.

This conviction contributed a considerable significance to the way people viewed the dreams Agung told. The dreams were viewed as *ru'ya shadiqah* (true dreams) which can be experienced only by such sinless and pious Muslims as Agung. In relation to this, an informant quotes two Hadith:

"The believers' vision is a forty-sixth part of prophecy."

"Naught is now left of prophecy but the bearers of good tidings." The companions asked: "What are the bearer of good tidings?" The Prophet said: "They are the visions of the pious."

All dreams experienced by the Prophet Muhammad were *ru'ya shadiqah* and the Prophet would only come in *ru'ya shodiqoh* that are experienced by Muslims. The presence of the Prophet in a dream itself is believed to be the sign of a revelatory dream as hinted in the Hadith. So, those dreams related to Daarut Tauhid appear to be profoundly revelatory.

The second dream, for instance, reveals that the Prophet Muhammad, in his visit to Aa Gym's family, directly gave instruction to Aa Gym to do a sort of prophetic job. The Prophet, being deeply concerned about the current condition of Muslims who tended in the eyes of the Prophet to be deviating from an Islamic course, asked Aa Gym to turn Muslims back to the path of Islam. Since *shalat* is the pillar of Islam, this instruction was symbolised by appealing to Muslims to perform at least the five obligatory *shalat*. Worth noting here is that the Prophet's direct command was to Aa Gym, neither to any of his brothers or sister nor to his parents. This served as an explicit legitimation for Aa Gym. It was tangibly Aa Gym who was to be the heir of the Prophet, not anyone else.

The fourth dream revealed similar messages with a slightly different story. Again, *shalat* appears to be the main issue here; Aa Gym's family were about to perform *shalat* when the Prophet came intending to perform *shalat* in Aa Gym's family's house. *Shalat* seems even more crucial when the sound of *bedug* and *adzan*, features inherently related to *shalat*, occurred in the story. Furthermore, the

symbolic function of *shalat* is stronger here since there were no verbal instruction made by the Prophet, unlike that in the first dream. And again, Aa Gym was the key-actor being the only person who saw the Prophet, sounded the *bedug*, and announced the *adzan*. That the Prophet refused to go downstairs is not to prove that he is water-proof but to have a chance to talk privately to Aa Gym as they did in the first dream. This is another explicit statement of legitimacy for Aa Gym.

The symbolic function of *shalat* and the legitimacy for Aa Gym were reinforced further through the third dream. In this dream, the Prophet Muhammad practically symbolised the way of correcting Muslims by performing *shalat* together with his main four companions and Aa Gym himself. The involvement of Aa Gym in the *shalat* performance is an absolute statement of legitimacy for him to be considered one of the heirs of the Prophet, inheriting the prophet's job on earth, but not the prophethood. This is strengthened by another feature that Aa Gym was next to Ali in the *shalat* performance. Ali was the youngest of the earliest converts to Islam by the Prophet. Ali is therefore a symbol of the young devout Muslim. So when it is portrayed that Aa Gym and Ali stood side by side in the *shalat*, Aa Gym is associated with Ali, in that he should be, as Ali was, a young devout Muslim sacrificing his life for the spread and the maintenance of Islam as a world religion. Moreover the presence of the four *khulafa al-rasyidin* (the guiding Vice Regents) symbolises the continuity of post-Muhammad leadership. These four Vice Regents were considered the legitimate post-Muhammad leaders. Being together with them, Aa Gym might thus be considered to inherit directly their authority of leadership.

The religious role of Aa Gym is further depicted in the fifth dream. The crowd of monkey faced people is thought of as an image of the great majority of contemporary Muslims who tend to deviate from the Islamic path. As in the Qur'an or Hadith, the animal-like performance is often used as a symbol of deviation and sinfulness. That crowd is thus a crowd of sinful Muslims. Aa Gym came there to reorient them. This reorientation is symbolised by transporting the people one by one to the *menara* of the mosque where devout Muslim were reciting the Qur'an. The mosque, the thunderous recitation of the Qur'an and the very bright light all symbolise the straight path and the *nur* (divine light) of Islam. Conspicuous here is the certain impression of the religious authority and competence of Aa Gym. And this is of course another potential source of legitimacy.

Those dreams demonstrate twin functions; legitimative and instructive. The dreams are legitimative in the sense that they, with great efficacy, convinced Muslims that they would have a *kyai*. Those dream are instructive as well in the sense that they convinced Aa Gym, personally, and his family that he had been

chosen by Allah to be His agent in reorienting Muslims to the straight path of Islam.

Why were those Muslims convinced by the dreams since we know not all dreams are legitimated? Mainly because these dreams involved the Prophet and were followed by the fact that Aa Gym experienced a fundamental transformation of religiosity and that he was suddenly driven by Allah to perform *haji* and *umrah*. Furthermore, the dreams were made public first by Agung, Agung's volunteer tenders, the visitors to Agung, his family, and later by the mass media and Aa Gym's public talks. Thus, the significance of those dreams was judged by what followed immediately, just like we can see from many cases in the history of Java (Fox 1991:29). People at Daarut Tauhid believe that the meaning of the dreams is what they are witnessing: the extraordinary leadership of Aa Gym and the establishment of the pesantren.



**Photograph 2** Aa Gym, the dreams, and the foundation of the pesantren as published by *Mangle*, a local magazine<sup>11</sup>

## **2.4 The *Haji* and The *Umrah***

The *haji* is the Muslims' greater pilgrimage to the holy places of Mecca and Madina. It is performed annually between the eighth and thirteenth days of Dzul Hijja, the twelfth month of Hijriyya. Being the fifth of the five pillars of Islam, the *haji* is conceived of as the final religious duty that every well-to-do

Muslim is required to perform at least once in a lifetime. It is not, however, an obligation for those Muslims who do not have the capacity, economical or physical, to do so.

Meanwhile, the *umrah* is the Muslims' lesser pilgrimage to those places. It is lesser in value because, while the *hajj*, being the fifth pillar of Islam, is *wajib* (obligatory), the *umrah* is only *sunnah* (optional, but meritorious if performed). It is also lesser because, while the *hajj* is an event of millions of attendant Muslims in Mecca at a certain time, the *umrah* is prescribed for Muslims at any time of the year, so that it is not a massive occasion. Notwithstanding its importance, the *umrah* shares many features of the *hajj*.

Aa Gym performed his first *hajj* in 1407 Hijriyya, or 1987 A.D., not long after the *i'tikaf* in the preceding Ramadhan and after the revealing and guiding dreams. He did the pilgrimage to Mecca together with his beloved mother. Unlike other Muslims who usually plan the *hajj* long before departure, it is said that Aa Gym did not plan the *hajj* except briefly a few days before departure. It occurred suddenly and unpredictably and required immediate attention without a long planned itinerary. If anything, this instant itinerary is seen as divine not human as is clear from the following belief. According to his mother, this suddenness was a sign of the will of Allah in driving them to Mecca. She said: "I was purely granted by the Almighty Allah to undertake the *hajj*. We had a dream in which we encountered the Prophet and we were driven to Mecca by the divine plan of Allah."

Indeed, it was this nuance of suddenness which made this experience of *hajj* extraordinarily valuable to Aa Gym himself, his mother, the rest of his family, and his future followers. This idea of a sudden occurrence gave rise to an impression fundamental to the emergence of Daarut Tauhid and its initiator. As were the dreams of the Prophet, this sort of impression facilitated in Aa Gym a fundamental confidence that he would become an agent of Allah in the mission of *i'lai kalimatillah* (upholding the law of Allah) amongst the recent generation of Muslims. This was why, it is believed, Allah granted him an unexpected opportunity to do the pilgrimage to Mecca, an expensive chance that costs so much.<sup>12</sup> Thus, Aa Gym saw a divine message from the sudden *hajj*. This sudden occurrence of Aa Gym's *hajj* also inculcated a significant trust in his family and the followers of the divine agency personally entrusted to Aa Gym. He is, to them, the 'delegate'—not to say the 'messenger' which might be misconceived of as the prophet—of Allah to bring them back from any deviance to the *shirat mustaqiem* (straight path) of Islam. Thus this suddenness in conducting the *hajj* made its own considerable contribution to building the image of the *kyaiship* of Aa Gym and, it follows, of his competency to found a kind of pesantren. This is because, unlike in the past, simply being a *haji* (pilgrim)<sup>13</sup> no longer means being a *kyai* or religious leader. In the past, the early generation of Indonesian

*haji* used to be, as soon as they returned from the *haji*, a leading Muslim or a *kyai* (Geertz 1969:205, 1995:81). Now, this is no longer the case with Indonesian *haji*. The returning *haji* tend to remain ordinary in that they become neither a *kyai* nor in any sense a religious leader. So, what facilitated Aa Gym's position of *kyaiship* was not merely his being a *haji* but also the inherent notion of divine instruction to fulfil it, evident through its sudden occurrence without Aa Gym's initiative.

Such an impression of divine "intervention" always accompanied the occasion of Aa Gym's performance of either the *haji* and *umrah*. At the time I was doing fieldwork, he had already undergone the *haji* five times and the *umrah* three times, the most recent was at the time I was there. This high frequency was striking to everyone, including myself because he and his parents do not seem rich enough to afford such a frequency. This of course gives rise to the "suspicion" of some sort of "outside" intervention. Inevitably, such an "outside" intervention has been reckoned to be a divine one, partly due to divine instruction, partly because Aa Gym is valued as an extraordinarily pious Muslim, even a *kyai*, and partly based on the guiding dreams.

This belief is justified by the narrative concerning the cost of the *haji*. I was told by Aa Gym himself and his mother that for some the divine plan is tangible in terms of the cost of doing the *haji*. "The money to pay ONH always comes so smoothly without any trouble as though it comes from nowhere," said his mother. It happened that an anonymous person paid the ONH as soon as Aa Gym had booked. His mother said: "We did not have any idea at all who he was but he rang us to say that the ONH was paid. And not long afterwards we were delivered, again from the anonymous sender, all the equipment necessary to undergo the *haji*, such as bags and *pakaian ihram* (special clothing worn during the *haji* to Mecca)." Although this phenomenon can be understood as a matter of a social gift, presuming that such an anonymous "kind" person might be either Aa Gym's closest friend or a member of his adherent *jamaah*, the overwhelming notion here remains of divine intervention. That is due to the belief that, even if the case is one of a gift, it is no more than Allah's way of applying His absolute will. If Allah wished, Aa Gym believes, He can absolutely prompt the anonymous person to pay the costs of the *haji*.

While on his first *haji*, Aa Gym with his mother stayed in Mecca and Madina for forty days. Despite the particular *haji* rituals, what Aa Gym did during his stay in those holy places more or less resembled what he did during his one-month of *i'tikaf* time in Bandung. Indeed, doing *i'tikaf* at *Masjid al-Haram* (the Great Mosque) in Mecca is, as one might certainly imagine, remarkably more advantageous than at any other mosque in the world.

Aa Gym therefore spent most of his days in Mecca at *Masjid al-Haram* in *i'tikaf*. He spent only a few moments at his home-stay. In the Great Mosque, he observed



such rituals as *shalat*, both the obligatory five and, even more excessively, the optional ones. He did a lot of *dzikir* and *shalawat* as well as the recitation of the holy Qur'an. He also made a considerable attempt to do *istigfar* (ask for Allah's forgiveness) and *taubat*, under the belief that *istigfar* and *taubat* are most acceptable if done in the holy place of Mecca, more particularly next to the *ka 'bah* (cubicle shrine in the centre of the Great Mosque). Reflection was also an immensely important part of his businesses during the *i'tikaf* in *Masjid al-Haram*. In short, Aa Gym's activities in Mecca, besides the specific rituals of *hajj*, were a further intensification of what was done during the *i'tikaf* in Indonesia.

There are of course some distinguishing features between performing similar rituals in Mecca and that in one's own home-country. Mecca itself is held to be the holy place where the divine rewards for any performance of *ibadah* is not only doubled or tripled but increased thousands and thousands of times. The *Masjid al-Haram*, the *ka 'bah* at the centre of it, the *multajam* (a certain part of the Great Mosque) next to it, and the *maqam Ibrahim* (Abraham shrine) beside it, to name some features, are firmly believed to make any *ibadah* performed there profoundly valuable, one's *istigfar* and *taubat* most likely accepted, and one's *do'a* most possibly heard. The *multajam* is, most particularly, held to be the most sacred place where nearly all Muslims' *do'a* is fulfilled by Allah. These features brought about the principal transformation of Aa Gym's personality and religiosity.

The particular *hajj* rituals had immense importance in such a transformation. Performing *hajj* is, to Aa Gym, *perjalanan ma'rifatullah* (a voyage of gnosis), meaning that all *hajj* rituals comprise certain symbols for purifying one's self, as a way of approaching Allah in order to know Him well and thus at once love and obey Him. When stopping at *Miqat*,<sup>14</sup> for example, pilgrims replace their daily clothes with *pakaian ihram*. Here the pilgrims, according to Aa Gym, intend the replacement of any *pakaian maksiat* (irreligious behaviour) by *pakaian taat* (religious conduct); such bad characteristics as *riya* (showing off), *nifaq* (hypocrisy) are to be replaced by such good ones such as *ikhlas* (sincerity), *jujur* (honesty) and so forth. Taking the bath at the *Miqat* means freeing oneself from any previous sins. Declaring *niat* in performing the *hajj* at *Miqat* extends to the pilgrims' intention in their lifetime to stop doing any *haram* (forbidden) acts, in accordance with Islamic teachings.<sup>15</sup> The pilgrims' performance of two-*raka'at* (cycles of prayer)<sup>16</sup> in *shalat* symbolises their intention of *taqorrub* (approaching) Allah because, to Him, *shalat* is the most favoured *ibadah* (dedication) a Muslim does. After the *Miqat*, a pilgrim's concentration on *hajj* rituals symbolises his sincere dependence and reliance on none other than Almighty Allah. Saying *talbiyah*<sup>17</sup> symbolises not merely a pilgrim's fulfilment of Allah's call in performing *hajj* but the fulfilment of the totality of Islamic teachings. The ultimate goal is not merely the fulfilment of an obligation but the achievement of Allah's

*keridoan* (favour). Likewise, performing *thawaf* (the ritual of circumambulation of the Ka'bah seven times) and reenacting *sa'i* (slow and desperate running back and forth between Shofa and Marwah) symbolise a pilgrim's effort to run closer to Allah to achieve His *keridoan*.

For Aa Gym, to touch the *Hajar Aswad* symbolises hand shaking with Allah, by which Allah does the pilgrim honour and blesses him with mercy. In consequence, he/she has to keep himself pure from any sin and disobedience against Allah's law, otherwise Allah will withdraw the divine honour and blessing gained through the "hand shaking". *Wukuf* (the ritual of gathering on the desert of Arafah during the *hajj*) is a field where the pilgrim can intensively improve his/her *ma'rifat* by means of reflection focusing on the almighty power of Allah symbolised by the large area of Arafah and the large number of pilgrims gathering there. At the same time the pilgrim reflects on the omniscience of Allah that He knows perfectly all that one does, all that one feels, and whatever one has in mind.<sup>18</sup>

Aa Gym did his best in performing all these *hajj* rituals and they deeply affected his personal behaviour. The transformation of his personal religiosity after the *hajj* was much greater than after the *i'tikaf*. He became more intense in performing Islamic rituals and more strict in reinforcing Islamic law in his day-to-day life. Here it is evident the degree to which the *hajj* is a rite de passage as suggested, for one, by Michael Wolfe who writes: "The Hadj [*hajj*] is a shared rite of passage. I saw it through the eyes of others as much as through my own..." (qtd. in Eaton 1995:291). This is most tangibly shown in the case of Aa Gym. After fulfilling the *hajj*, Aa Gym who had no background of Islamic education, such as one would receive in a *pesantren*, later became worthy of being a *kyai* and capable of founding a *pesantren*.

To mark this immensely significant change, Aa Gym renamed himself by adding a more "Islamic" name to his former one.<sup>19</sup> Before performing his first *hajj*, his name was just Gymnastiar.<sup>20</sup> Now, his full name became Abdullah Gymnastiar, the Abdullah being added in Mecca when performing his first *hajj*. The first name was proudly given to him by the *imam besar* (great leader) of the Great Mosque in Mecca. There is an interesting story concerning the process by which the name was given.

It was on a Friday that Aa Gym asked an *asykar* (security guard) to help him obtain a name from the *imam*. As there is a hierarchical procedure, made up of several *asykar*, to reach the *imam*, the *asykar* then asked another *asykar* to tell the next *asykar* and so forth till the request reached the *imam*. In portraying this hierarchical procedure, his mother told me: "There are layers of safeguarding *asykar* around the *imam* as though the *imam* is more difficult to reach than a president would be." Surprisingly, while he usually simply gives a name for a pilgrim through his *asykar*,

the *imam* called Aa Gym personally. Then he whispered to Aa Gym giving the name; Abdullah. More startlingly, the *imam* publicly announced Aa Gym's new name so that all the pilgrims who were present, including the *asykar*, repeatedly echoed the name. At the same time, the *asykar* rushed up congratulating and kissing Aa Gym. While coming home, Aa Gym cried in front of his mother when he told her the story.

This story epitomises the honours Aa Gym was beginning to receive. Abdullah was the name of the father of the Prophet Muhammad. The name Abdullah, etymologically meaning the '*abd* (servant) of Allah, indicates Aa Gym to be a fully pious '*abd* of Allah, a high honour that every Muslim would wish to obtain. Next, the personal encounter with the Great *Imam* of *Masjid al-Haram* was another honour, legitimising Aa Gym as a future leader of Muslims. This was further demonstrated by the salute and congratulations from the pilgrims and *asykar*.

Aa Gym came home to Indonesia with a remarkable transformation of his personality and religiosity even more than what he had obtained from the *i'tikaf* in Ramadhan. The *i'tikaf* and its outcome, the dreams involving the Prophet and their interpretation, and the *hajj* with its transformative results altogether convinced Aa Gym of his representation of divine agency—particularly his *kyaiship*. This was a culmination of an awareness he had felt earlier during Ramadhan. One day in Ramadhan, he surprised his father, who was fixing a car in front of the house, by saying: "*Pa* (Dad), I wish to be an *ulama*."<sup>21</sup> Given goal, compounded with awareness of his lack of the Islamic knowledge necessary to be a *kyai*, Aa Gym began doing the so-called *Shilaturrahmi*.

## 2.5 The *Shilaturrahmi*

Aa Gym knew he ought to seek deeper Islamic knowledge through such competent sources as the *ulama*. He therefore started visiting Islam's leading *kyai*, those whom he considered representative of.

Aa Gym began his visits with some of *ulama sepuh* (elderly *ulama*). The first was a *kyai* of advanced age in Garut, a town to the east of Bandung. After introducing himself and explaining his lack of Islamic knowledge and his recent strange experiences, Aa Gym asked the *kyai*'s assistance to instruct him in Islamic matters. The *kyai* transmitted his knowledge to Aa Gym in a brief encounter only, further guiding him to see K. H. Khoer Affandi, the leader of the pesantren Miftahul Huda at Manonjaya, Tasikmalaya, a neighbouring town to Garut. This latter *kyai* then became Aa Gym's primary instructor until he passed away in November 1994. His influence on Aa Gym is evident, marked by the major orientation of Aa Gym's Islam with the emphasis on *tauhid* (oneness of Allah) and *akhlaq* (morality) and the choice of the very name of the pesantren; *Daarut Tauhid* (the hamlet of *tauhid*). Pesantren throughout Indonesia, while trying to cover all

aspects of Islamic teaching, still have their own specialisation, each focusing on certain branches of Islamic studies such as *Nahwu and Shorof* (Arabic linguistics), *Tafsir* (Commentary on Qur'an), *Hadith* (Recorded traditions of the Prophet), *Tauhid*, *Akhlaq*, *Mantiq* (Logics) and so forth. *Tauhid* and *Akhlaq* are the "trademark" of K. H. Khoer Affandi's pesantren, Miftahul Huda, as are they of Aa Gym's pesantren, Daarut Tauhid.<sup>22</sup>

Aa Gym was in a sense the *santri* (student) of K. H. Khoer Affandi. However, he was an extraordinary *santri* in that instead of *masantren* (staying at pesantren) at Miftahul Huda for years as *santri* usually do he simply visited K. H. Khoer Affandi for some hours at a time during which he acquired his knowledge. These visits were irregular and simply followed the "mood" of Aa Gym; he visited the *kyai* whenever he felt the need to, although he most frequently did it on Wednesday nights.

What is the nature of the knowledge transmission involved, for it is inconceivable that during such brief encounters the knowledge transmission would be as conventional in nature as the ordinary educational systems? Private instruction might well go on at those times during which Aa Gym had a private meeting with K. H. Khoer Affandi, but no source has so far suggested such an occasion. What usually went on, so far as I was informed, were ordinary conversations between K. H. Khoer Affandi, often accompanied by his family, and Aa Gym, usually accompanied by his family, disciples, or *ajudan* (guardian).<sup>23</sup> The conversations were therefore both ordinary and open in nature, without any sense of privacy. K. H. Khoer Affandi convinced Aa Gym and companions, during their visits, that he did not need to teach Aa Gym anything because "the knowledge you [Aa Gym] are seeking is available in your self, granted by Allah. Or, otherwise, it will sooner or later come to you." Then, is it the case that this strange transmission of knowledge was related to the personal quality of Aa Gym?

Indeed, Aa Gym believed that these visits were naturally rich sources of knowledge. What he saw, heard, or felt during such visits were an immensely valuable training providing he was capable enough of apprehending the lessons. *How* a *kyai* acts, speaks, and generally behaves is, to Aa Gym, a most valuable lesson applicable to any Muslim's daily life. This does not yet take into account *what* a *kyai* says, which is another part of such a lesson. Aa Gym even extended the possibilities of such lessons by suggesting that they could quite possibly be taken from other ordinary people, not just *kyai*. He exemplified this, in a public sermon I attended, as follows.

I [Aa Gym], on a way to visit a friend, saw two people talking to each other. I heard that one of them was expressing his feeling of regret following his loss of a certain amount of money, stolen by a pick-pocket. He moaned and told the other what happened, crying for help or any

suggestion on how to get the money back. The other's response was more advanced than my thinking at that time. He readily said: "Money is rubbish. Nothing to regret." The man who lost the money was dramatically calmed down by this "advice." I took an unexpected lesson from this phenomenon. The point I noted was the phrase "money is rubbish." Maintaining this attitude towards money and all other kinds of wealth is important in keeping ourselves calm especially during those times of financial troubles. This is an important lesson in self-control that is frequently needed in many tense situations. Furthermore, while we consider that money is important to our lives, this "money is rubbish" attitude must be incorporated into our character so we do not fall to serving money and thereby forgetting Allah who provides us with any wealth.

The above example demonstrates how Aa Gym seeks knowledge. And so his knowledge acquisition during his visits to the *ulama* occurred in a similar fashion.

Benefiting from this manner of knowledge acquisition, Aa Gym continues to visit as many *ulama* as possible. He calls such visits part of the *shilaturrahmi*.<sup>24</sup> He visits both those who lead pesantren, mostly well known as *kyai*, and those who lead Islamic activities at universities. He also visits both modernist and traditionalist *ulama*. This is in accordance with his inclination to "reconcile" various groups of Muslims, which are often trapped in religious disputes. For this, his orientation of Islam is known as *mazhab shilaturrahmi* (*Tempo* April 3, 1993).

This tradition of *shilaturrahmi* visits to leading *kyai* is critical to Aa Gym being credited as a *kyai*, particularly because of his lack of Islamic training. Further, this *shilaturrahmi* tradition can be seen as an elaboration of the concept of *wasilah* (chain of knowledge transmission), a common feature in the *ziarah* (visit) tradition among Muslims (Jamhari 1995:2). To visit a *kyai* or a *wali* (saint), either alive or dead, is a means by which to link the visitor to the visited and ultimately to the Prophet who is regarded as the closest one to Allah (van Bruinessen 1992:75). Using different terminology, Zamakhsyari Dhofier, labelling such visits as *rihla ilmiya* (study tour) and *wasilah* as *isnad* (intellectual chain), found such visits as a prominent practice among *kyai* and *santri* in Java. They thus acquired *isnad* to legitimate the authenticity of their knowledge (1982:79). Although Aa Gym did not intend his *shilaturrahmi* tradition to gain such formal *isnad*, his visits to leading Muslim leaders provided a profound contribution to his *kyaiship*. That Aa Gym visits many *kyai* has become, among his followers, a public discourse that strengthens Aa Gym's status of *kyaiship*. Some followers told me, for example, that Aa Gym also has a "guide" in Demak, a *ziarah* centre of *wali* tombs (see Fox 1991).



**Left: Photograph 3 Aa Gym after the performance of the *hajj*: devoutly pious. Right: Photograph 4 Aa Gym is known for promoting the *shilaturrahmi* orientation (taken from *Tempo* April 3, 1993).**

Another aspect of this *shilaturrahmi* tradition at Daarut Tauhid is to visit non-religious institutions, where people can learn such useful knowledge as the activities and overall management system needed in organising the pesantren, in particular its economic activities. Therefore, Aa Gym's *shilaturrahmi* covers both religious and "secular" figures, so that it contributes both religious and "secular" knowledge. At this point, the *shilaturrahmi* becomes a sort of comparative study, useful both to the improvement of Aa Gym's knowledge personally and to the overall development of Daarut Tauhid.

In conclusion, the *shilaturrahmi* has become a means by which Aa Gym improves his knowledge both religious (Islamic) and non-religious. With his mental capability he finds the *shilaturrahmi* fruitful as a means of knowledge acquisition so that he does not feel it necessary to *masantren*. These visits contribute so much to the improvement of Aa Gym's knowledge, particularly Islamic knowledge, that he felt himself qualified to found an Islamic centre such as a pesantren.

## 2.6 The Foundation of Daarut Tauhid

The embryo of Pesantren Daarut Tauhid began when a couple of teenagers, who were high school students, asked Aa Gym to deliver a *ceramah keagamaan* (religious speech) at their school, SMA-3 of Bandung. These teenagers would never have asked Aa Gym to do something like that before Aa Gym had done *i'tikaf* and undertaken the *haji*. They recognised the authority of Aa Gym to give them religious advice since they witnessed the radical changes in Aa Gym's personality and religiosity. They also heard of the revealing dreams of the Prophet Muhammad, experienced by Aa Gym himself and his family, which contributed to their confidence in Aa Gym.

Aa Gym's speech was so successful in impressing his audience, who were all SMA-3 students, that they asked him to come there on a monthly basis. Yet this frequency was not satisfactory to some of the audience. They then set up a weekly *pengajian* at Aa Gym's home, during which they listened to Aa Gym's advice concerning religious matters. Those attending steadily grew week by week, occupying only a small room in Aa Gym's house, then its main room, next its garage, and later its front yard and even the street. From no more than ten attendants at the beginning, in late 1987, it drew a following of about 400 people by 1989.

Initially the *pengajian* was informally organised by those pioneering SMA-students. Then, as the number of *jemaah* grew, it was formally organised by the so-called KMIW (*Kelompok Mahasiswa Islam Wiraswasta*, Islamic Student Group for Entrepreneurship). This group, as the name suggests, was in fact set up by Aa Gym and some of his friends to develop economic activities, under the banner of Islam and thus implementing an Islamic system of economy. The group was active in silk-screening and printing services. It consisted of Aa Gym, his brother and sister, and a few friends. The group then found the weekly *pengajian* to play an important part in their activities, which were viewed to serve the spiritual and ethical needs of their businesses ventures.

Aa Gym began to find the space for the weekly *pengajian* at his parent's home in Gegerkalong Hilir limited. They then took the initiative to look for a larger and more strategic place. These were some rooms in Gegerkalong Girang whose surrounding yards were wide enough for a huge gathering. They rented the rooms to live in as well as a centre for their activities.

As time went, the *pengajian* became more popular and about eight hundred Muslims attending. The *pengajian* itself was by then popularly known as the *Pengajian Tauhid*; a religious sermon that focused on intensive comprehension and application of *tauhid* as the basis for the enhancement of Islamic morality.



**Photograph 5** Tents were built to accommodate the massive number of followers.

Given the massive following, Aa Gym felt it necessary to set up a formal institution and organise the *pengajian*. On September the fourth 1990, Aa Gym and the KMIW therefore founded a *yayasan* (foundation) called *Yayasan Daarut Tauhid*, with Aa Gym as its chairman. The foundation of the *yayasan* was accordingly the official foundation of Pesantren Daarut Tauhid, formalising the *pengajian* activities that had been ongoing since late 1987. The *yayasan* form was chosen because it encompasses both religious and economic activities and provides the legal and formal requirements for those activities.<sup>25</sup>

The foundation of Pesantren Daarut Tauhid was viewed by Aa Gym and his companions as the Will of Allah. Asked about the emergence of the pesantren, he replied:

There is great curiosity about Daarut Tauhid, and many people have asked me how we have accomplished so much. They said that they find Daarut Tauhid very amazing in its rapid development. According to them, not all pesantren grew as rapidly as Daarut Tauhid. Others were also amazed by the fact that Daarut Tauhid achieved this success of rapid growth but never begged for donations or any other forms of funding from others. My answer to these kinds of question is always, and will always be, one: all these things happen by the Will of Allah. I and my friends here are merely His Creatures which He sets in His motion to operate these things.



People at Daarut Tauhid point to many occurrences that prove this is the Will of Allah. Aa Gym's spiritual progress since 1987, involving *i'tikaf*, true visions, and pilgrimage to Mecca, is an often mentioned proof. Another proof is the emergence of KMIW. The establishment of this group implies that, in the first place, Aa Gym did not think in terms of a pesantren. At the time he just thought to form a group that puts together Muslims with similar interests, that is entrepreneurial activities, under the spirit of Islam. Therefore, that Aa Gym and his fellows came to the decision to found a pesantren institution in 1990 was perceived as their being led by the Will of Allah. The final proof is the bizarre funds Daarut Tauhid enjoys in funding its development. Donations came anonymously. They came either in the form of money or building materials. It is believed that these bizarre funds were sent over by pious Muslims, who donated in the name of Allah. This truly demonstrates the Will of Allah in developing Daarut Tauhid.

In deciding its direction, Daarut Tauhid has formulated the philosophical principles that have become the bases for its activities and have served as its main objective. Daarut Tauhid is set up to produce a Muslim community with three main characteristics:

- 1) *Ahli Dzikir*. A Muslim who always strives to do *dzikir* (remember Allah) in the ways taught by Islam. By doing so, the Muslim will certainly have the closest relationship with Allah, a stand that makes him strong, stable, and calm in facing any situation in life because of his confidence in Allah's promises of supporting and helping His beloved people. The Muslim will always be enthusiastic and never give up because of his belief that doing his best is part of the *ibadah* that Allah likes so much.
- 2) *Ahli Pikir*. A Muslim who pursues the custom of reflection and contemplation of every phenomenon he faces. By this, the secrets of life will be unveiled, hidden potential unleashed, and *hikmah* (lesson, wisdom) of problems and happenings revealed. Given these advantages, the Muslim will always be in the best position to face any challenge and solve any problem, either personally with himself or communally with the wider Muslim *ummat*.
- 3) *Ahli Ikhtiar*. A Muslim who follows the custom of hard work while living in this world, as a result of *dzikir* and *pikir*, through the actions allowed by Allah the Almighty. In this way, the Muslim will be a productive and creative person with credible achievements.

The foundation of Daarut Tauhid drew both positive and negative responses although the former was immensely stronger. The positive response was clearly demonstrated by the *pengajian* attendants. The massive number of *pengajian* attendants made large donations to support the financial necessities of building

the pesantren. No less than four hundred thousand rupiahs would be collected at each single *pengajian*. Besides, many individuals made their own separate donations in the form of either money or materials. These certainly accelerated the development of Pesantren Daarut Tauhid.

Negative response came mainly from neighbouring religious specialists, particularly because they doubted the piety of Aa Gym and his capacity and competence to be a *kyai*. Such doubt was prompted by their claim that Aa Gym once belonged to an *anak kolong* gang, a group of ABRI-children who acted superior and were thus often considered troublemakers. Although not explicitly, Aa Gym himself seemed to confirm this when telling me that such distrust “might be related to my past.” He often confesses his lack of Islamic authority either at public talks or personal encounters. For example, when Aa Gym and I were having a conversation in the mosque and a follower approached him to ask that Aa Gym wish him good luck, Aa Gym told the follower: “Unlucky you are to attend Daarut Tauhid, a pesantren led by an unqualified leader like me.” Thus, Aa Gym sees the negative response as partly arising from his own weaknesses.

Aa Gym also sees these negative responses as a predictable form of tension that his rapid emergence as a *kyai* would engender. The negative response is said to be most notable from the religious functionaries at the closest mosques. A functionary of the biggest mosque in KPAD complex, for example, felt overshadowed from his position since people now tended to pay more attention and thus respect to Aa Gym than to him. In facing this situation, Aa Gym tried to be wise in avoiding any conflict by making every attempt to maintain a good relationship. Aa Gym often praised him on many public occasions, acknowledging him as his religious teacher—as indeed he was. On many personal occasions, Aa Gym also tried to convince him that what he had been doing was his way of *ibadah*, purely for the sake of Allah. Aa Gym was eventually successful in convincing this functionary, who has since supported the development of Daarut Tauhid.

Pesantren Daarut Tauhid continues to grow amazingly, enjoying a profound support from Muslims locally and from a wider area. Its current form is only a strand of its continuum of rapid change. This portrait of the pesantren might be considerably different from that in the near future. Yet, regardless of this probable change, the nature of the relationships between the *kyai* and his followers will certainly shape these changes. Therefore, I would like to construct in the following chapter the pattern of these relationships. In so doing it is of course necessary to depict first the nature of both the leader and his followers.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Aa* is a Sundanese term used intimately to address a respectable, usually young, man or boy of an honourable family. When calling or naming the person, the Sundanese usually add the word before, often shortening, the actual name. Gymnastiar is therefore respectfully called *Aa Gym*, the second word standing for Gymnastiar.

<sup>2</sup> *Teh* is *Aa Gym*'s intimate word to call his mother. It is, as a matter of fact, unusual to call one's own mother by the word *Teh* because it is actually a Sundanese word commonly used in calling any respectably elder woman other than one's mother. This misusage might be due to the influence of the surrounding people who call *Aa Gym*'s mother by this word. And such due-to-the-surrounding usage is not in fact uncommon in Sundanese society.

<sup>3</sup> It is common in Bandung, and all over Indonesia, that for the *SIPENMARU*, SMA-graduates tend to do the so-called *BIMBEL* (*Bimbingan Belajar*, an intensive short-course) which focuses heavily on the strategy for facing *SIPENMARU*. *Aa Gym*, however, did not attend this course and did his own study instead.

<sup>4</sup> Note that Arabic-origin Indonesian words *shalat* and *do'a* are translated in English dictionaries equally as 'prayer.' The verb 'to pray' means either *melakukan shalat/sembahyang* or *berdo'a*.

<sup>5</sup> As is widely known, there are only five obligatory *shalat* each day. These are *shalat shubuh* (the dawn prayer), *shalat dhuhur* (the noon prayer), *shalat ashar* (the afternoon prayer), *shalat maghrib* (the sunset prayer), and *shalat isya* (the evening prayer).

<sup>6</sup> The period before the coming of Islam in Arabia is believed by Muslims to be the *masa jahiliyah* (period of ignorance) because of the common practices that were considered irreligious.

<sup>7</sup> The Prophet Muhammad said: "The ulamas are the heirs of the Prophets."

<sup>8</sup> It is worth noting that "gaining" the *lailatul qodar* has been the dream of many, if not all, Muslims. In the world very few Muslims gain *lailatul qodar* each year so that it is very special and valuable opportunity.

<sup>9</sup> The history of Java is rich with this kind of story. For example, Prabu Brawijaya, the last ruler of Majapahit, later well-known as Pandhanarang, devoted the last dozen years of his life to praying and meditating, before he emerged as a Javano-Islamic figure known as Sunan Tembayad (Fox 1991; Jamhari 1995; Pemberton 1994:279).

<sup>10</sup> This belief in *hikmah* and *baraka* disseminated through Agung is related to the Islamic ethic of facing illness. Illness is conceived of as either a divine "test" to the quality of the faith of a sinless Muslim or a divine "warning" to a sinful one. In either case, illness is a means by which Allah may either upgrade the quality of the faith or forgive the sins of any ill-suffering Muslim provided he is *sabar* (patient) enough in facing the illness, in such a way that he becomes more pious instead of *ngarasula* (grumbling and blaming) Allah. Agung was viewed as very *sabar* in facing his paralysis so that, being free from any sin, he had a special position in the "eye" of the Almighty Allah. In such a position, Agung was considered appropriate to be the passive medium for both generating *hikmah* and transmitting *baraka*.

<sup>11</sup> The Sundanese text on the picture reads: *Aa Gym* and his followers often wear a distinctive form of dress, yet he obliges neither himself nor his followers to wear it. They talk little but work hard. *Aa Gym* does everything without any sense of exaggeration. H. ABDULLAH GYMNASTIAR WAS VISITED BY THE PROPHET IN DREAMS SO THAT HE FOUNDED THE *BENGKEL AKHLAQ DAARUT TAUHID*.

<sup>12</sup> The ONH (*Ongkos Naik Haji*, costs for undertaking the *hajj*) for Indonesian Muslims was by 1987 five millions rupiah and is now seven millions rupiah for each individual. This is an all-inclusive cost that covers the cost of administrative management, transportation, accommodation, and catering in Mecca and Madina.

<sup>13</sup> *Haji* is a Sundanese, even more widely Indonesian, title given to any Muslim who has done the *hajj* to Mecca. It is commonly abbreviated as the initial H, standing for *hajji*. When, say, Ahmad has done the *hajj*, his full name would be H. Ahmad.

<sup>14</sup> *Miqat* is the starting point where pilgrims formally start their *hajj* rituals. It is symbolised by declaring *niat* (intention), putting on specific *hajj* clothing, and performing optional *shalat*.

<sup>15</sup> Note that the *niat* to perform *hajj* itself is called *niat ihram* (intention of forbidding), originally meaning that a pilgrim has to intend leaving behind any preconditionally forbidden acts during the *hajj*, such as husband-wife intercourse.

<sup>16</sup> An essential cycle of *shalat* ritual consists of bows and prostrations performed a prescribed number of times.

<sup>17</sup> The phrases are “*Labbaika Allohumma Labbaik. La Syariika Laka Labbaik*” meaning “At Thy service, O Allah. No ally to You and, again, at Thy service O Allah.”

<sup>18</sup> Aa Gym’s views on the *hajj* were summarised from Qolbun Salim No. 010/Thn II. 28 May 1993.

<sup>19</sup> As a matter of fact, changing one’s name after making the *hajj* had been the tradition of Indonesian pilgrims but it is less common now.

<sup>20</sup> I was told by his father that the name “Gymnastiar” is partly derived from ASEAN GAME (Asia’s Olympic) since Aa Gym was born at the time that ASEAN GAMES were on going.

<sup>21</sup> The word *ulama* was the very word that Aa Gym used at the time. In fact, Arabic *ulama* is the plural form of ‘*alim*’ so that the article *an* there does not in fact agree with the word. It is however common in Indonesia to apply the word *ulama* as either plural or singular. In this case, the word *ulama* has become Indonesian.

<sup>22</sup> See Mastuhu (1994:19) for further discussion of this specification of the pesantren tradition.

<sup>23</sup> Since *ajudan* is in fact an ABRI-term, one might well be struck how it was so readily taken up the tradition of Daarut Tauhid. This will be discussed when I deal with the structure of interrelationships within Daarut Tauhid in Chapter Four.

<sup>24</sup> An Arabic-origin phrase, *shilaturrahmi* means the ties of familial relationship including both consanguinial relatives and affinal families. In a wider sense, the phrase has been conceived of to mean bonds of Muslim brotherhood in the light that Muslims, anywhere of the world, are of one big family. In its widest understanding, the phrase has been understood to mean bonds of any friendship, thus including harmonious relationships even with non-Muslims. This term is used by Aa Gym in this widest meaning and so it has been practically applied at Daarut Tauhid.

<sup>25</sup> The *badan wakaf* (the donation board) was part of the old pesantren tradition, the *yayasan* reflects a modern way of social organising, recently adopted by many pesantren. In practice, both the *badan wakaf* and the *yayasan* play a more or less similar role in the pesantren tradition.