

## Chapter 3: The Leader, the Followers, and the Pattern of Relationships

Chapter Two has traced the process by which the pesantren Daarut Tauhid initially grew. We have seen that the foundation of the pesantren Daarut Tauhid was not the result of a solo effort by either its leader, Aa Gym, or his followers, but the fruit of their relatively equal contributions. Both were equally important driving forces in the foundation of the pesantren, although they would not explicitly claim this because, to them, it was nothing but the implementation of the will of Allah.

In this chapter, I will examine certain aspects of the relations between the leader and his followers. I shall in the first place examine the leader in terms of his personal qualities and popularity. The miraculous power of Aa Gym, as an important part of social recognition, is also raised here. I will then examine the followers in terms of their number, diversity, identity, and reasons for devotion before I attempt to construct the interrelationships between the leader and his followers; cognitive-rational, affective-emotional, and entrepreneurial.

### 3.1 The Leader: Personal Qualities and Popularity

Aa Gym, as the leader of the pesantren Daarut Tauhid, is both a *kyai* and a manager. On the one hand, he is the *kyai* of the pesantren in relation to its religious activities and, on the other hand, he is the manager of it in relation to its thirteen entrepreneurial activities. His role as both a *kyai* and manager is not only made possible but also plausible by his personal qualities. It is these qualities which I will now examine.

While Geertz oversimplifies the term *kyai* as roughly comparable to the Middle Eastern *ulama* (1960:134), I tend to follow Dhofier (1980:68), who describes it as “a title for Muslim scholars in Java who generally lead pesantren institutions.”<sup>1</sup> Inherent attributes of a *kyai* are Islamic scholarship and pesantren leadership. Other related attributes supposedly possessed by a *kyai* include *ahli ibadah* (totally devout), and *muballigh* (Islamic preacher). They may also act as a kind of consultant on religious matters. These ideal attributes of the *kyai* will serve as important elements in discussing the personal qualities and popularity of Aa Gym.

Aa Gym became a *kyai* without following the stages through which Javanese *kyai* usually progress. In describing the usual progression, Dhofier (1980:72-73) writes:



Photograph 6 Aa Gym: a young *kyai* with extraordinary qualities though without pesantren education.

To become a *kyai*, a novice...is usually a close relative of a *kyai*. After completing his studies at various *pesantren*, the older *kyai* train him to establish his own *pesantren*. Sometimes, the older *kyai* leads and finances the new project... [Then] the old *kyai* will find him a spouse...from the place where the young *kyai* [is] to develop [his] new *pesantren*.

As was made clear in the previous chapter, Aa Gym is not a relative of any *kyai* but is instead from an army-family.<sup>2</sup> He did not attend any *pesantren* in the usual way, which would involve living in and studying there for years, but simply visited a number of *kyai* for a few hours. He was not a wanderer who sought Islamic knowledge from a number of *pesantren* over a period of several years, as is usually the case with the *kyai* of nearly all *pesantren* (Bailey 1986:197; Dhofier 1982:24; Pranowo 1991b:41-42; Zulkifli 1994:63,87). Nor did any established *kyai* “intervene” in the matters of Daarut Tauhid’s finances or Aa Gym’s spouse. The question is, then, why he has become and has been called by the people a *kyai*?

Aa Gym is considered to be an *ulama*, a prerequisite for being a *kyai*. Since *ulama* means “learned Muslim scholar”, one might well wonder how one can become an *ulama* without ever receiving adequate Islamic-oriented education, such as would be acquired in a *pesantren*.

Although without adequate *pesantren* experience, Aa Gym has his own ways of acquiring Islamic knowledge. First, he exercises the tradition of *shilaturrahmi* (described in the previous chapter) as a means of improving his Islamic-knowledge. Second, he reads large numbers of Islamic reference materials. His living room is filled with a huge number of Islamic books and reference materials. After telling me that even his bedroom walls are covered with various books (Islamic and general), Aa Gym said:

I will always make the effort to seek wider knowledge. But notwithstanding this, there is “other knowledge” which is unconsciously [divinely?] transmitted to support my *dakwah* (proselytization) activities. I actually am reluctant to tell anyone about this kind of knowledge transmission to which I have access. All I can say is what has been the fact that the knowledge I gain is usually much more than the time I can spend to read. This is in no way a rational matter and should actually be off the record. I can not explain to you any further. It was my wife, in fact, who told me this phenomenon because she knows well how much time I spend in reading and other ways of seeking knowledge.

This phenomenon reminds us of the notion of *ilmu ladunni* (bestowed knowledge) that has its origins in Sufistic tradition and often colours the *pesantren* tradition. Of the former tradition, Trimingham (1971:304) notes that *al-‘ilm al-ladunni* (Sundanese, *ilmu laduni*) is knowledge that comes from Allah directly into the

hearts of saints.<sup>3</sup> Of the latter, Dhofier (1980:94-5) records it as Islamic knowledge mastered without study which, instead, comes directly from Allah as the fruit of *ilham* (personal inspiration). Indeed, it has been said that Aa Gym gains knowledge partly in the form of *ilham*, believed to be from Allah.

This leads to the speculation about the best way and time to gain *ilmu laduni*. His followers believe that Aa Gym has a special status which has led to tremendous increases in his Islamic knowledge without the usual ways of acquisition. They are also obsessed in achieving this kind of Allah-bestowed knowledge since they believe that all Muslims have the chance to gain it provided they are close enough to Allah. The following *do'a* (prayer) is thus commonly said at Daarut Tauhid:

Allaahumma zidnii	O my Lord, increase in me
ilman ladduuniyya	ilmu laduni
wa fahman waasi'a	and comprehensive understanding.
Ya kaasyifa al-musykilah	O Allah, who is able to unveil any abtruse subject,
iksyif'an wujuuhi	show [knowledge] behind the surface
hadzihi al-ma'aani	of these concrete things
hattaa athla'a	so that I can know [what is behind the scene]. <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> All *santri* can say this particular *do'a* by heart.

The most probable moment for Aa Gym to receive the divine *ilham* is during his reflective meditation periods. Since the *i'tikaf* experience in 1987, such reflection has become one of his routine activities. It is done mainly at night following the performance of *shalat tahajjud* (optional night prayer). It is also said that Aa Gym is usually supplied with *ilham* each time he needs instruction in order to advise others. People around him believe that he is being guided by Allah, via *ilham*, each time he delivers a public *pengajian*. That is why, a follower told me, Aa Gym never makes any preparations before the *pengajian*.

According to Aa Gym, acquiring *ilmu ladunni* is very simple. The key to it is the readiness of human beings to make themselves worthy of gaining it, by having the right condition of heart and mind. For this, he provides us with an analogy:

Let me show you an analogy of a glass to portray this kind of knowledge acquisition. A glass, anytime it catches light, will look bright inside and will illuminate its surroundings, providing the glass is *bening* (clear) and clean and the water in it is *bening* as well. So, whenever we try to be pure—I say *try* because I do not claim that I am pure already—we will

have good feelings. Everything we see, hear, read, and feel will become useful sources of knowledge. So, all the time we undergo an extraordinary acceleration of knowledge.

Thus, *ilmu ladunni* can be bestowed by Allah on those Muslims with purity of heart and mind, a quality that makes one close enough to Allah in such a way that Allah is pleased to bestow on him/her certain knowledge beyond the conventional ways of learning. This is not, however, to say that *ilmu laduni* requires no way of knowledge acquisition. A *santri* said that such self-purification to get close to Allah involves a good deal of endeavour.<sup>4</sup>

Through these three ways of acquiring knowledge: visiting leading *kyai*; reading various sources; and acquiring *ilmu ladunni*, Aa Gym has appeared to his followers as an *ulama*. However, I should note Aa Gym's definition of *ulama*, which is slightly different from the common one. In common usage, *ulama* are those Muslim scholars who command advanced knowledge in Islamic matters. To Aa Gym, mastering a wide range of advanced Islamic knowledge is not the main point of being an *ulama*:

Nowadays, the word *ulama* is commonly understood to refer only to those Muslim scholars of religious matters (*faqih*), whereas in the past it included those Muslim mathematicians, medical experts, economists, and other experts on general matters. Muslim people today tend to trivialise these latter scholars by not regarding them as *ulama*. To me, they are also *ulama* as long as their field of study can facilitate their Allah-fearing and consequent closeness to Him (QS. 35:28). One whose profession is only *tukang sablon* (silk-screening service), for example, may look like an *ulama* in the eyes of Allah as long as his professional work makes him close to Him; while his hands are busy working, his heart and tongue are busy doing *dzikir* remembering Allah and, in the meantime, he is thoroughly convinced that Allah is watching his every movement. He thus always tries to do his best in order to satisfy both Allah and his customers. If, say, the customer is thereby induced to follow his religious style of life, this *tukang sablon* has surely performed the function of *ulama*; that is, to be a medium of others' *keselamatan* (salvation) here in the world and the hereafter.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, to Aa Gym, the main point of *ulama* is not knowledge *per se* but how much it facilitates fear and closeness to Allah and how much it is exercised as a means of spreading the blessings of Allah. The kind of the knowledge possessed, whether religious or not, and its depth are not the question. The emphasis is on its impact on an individual's relationship with Allah.

One might well assume that Aa Gym's definition of the meaning of *ulama* seems to be intended to fit with his personal conditions. The elimination of the central

importance of high Islamic knowledge and the inclusion of general, non-religious knowledge in defining *ulama* clearly fits Aa Gym's own situation. However correct this assumption may be, Aa Gym's definition of *ulama* has its justification in the Qur'an, as referred to by Aa Gym in the above quote.

Besides his "*ulamaship*," the second factor that facilitates Aa Gym's "*kyai*ship" is the fact that he is a convincing preacher. Apart from his regular public *pengajian* at Daarut Tauhid, he is extremely busy in fulfilling invitations to preach in many parts of Bandung and beyond. Almost no day passes without such engagements. Often he has to preach at three to four different places on a day, ranging from mosques to schools, offices, and universities. In other words, he preaches as often at schools, universities, and other places as at mosques. The underlying reason for Aa Gym's popularity as a preacher is clear from the followers' reasons for joining, below. The point to make here is that being a good preacher, who is a source of wisdom and advice on religious matters, is another essential attribute to Aa Gym being a respected *kyai*.

### **3.2 *Ma'unah*: the Miraculous Power of Aa Gym**

When I first arrived at Daarut Tauhid, I was initially welcomed by Abdurrahman Yuri, who I later learned was Aa Gym's brother. He then told me that Aa Gym was delivering a talk somewhere in Bandung. In the middle of our talk, Aa Gym came in looking very tired. When I asked Yuri to let me see Aa Gym so that I could introduce myself and ask his permission to do fieldwork at Daarut Tauhid, Yuri replied: "Aa Gym looks very tired, I am afraid. He usually has a break at this time because he has to deliver the weekly *pengajian* here in less than an hour. In fact, he already knows of your intention to do fieldwork here. You may see him later on after the *pengajian*."

I do not know if Aa Gym really was aware of my intention to do fieldwork. This event illustrates how people surrounding Aa Gym believe in his extraordinary abilities. There are other examples of this kind of belief by the followers of Aa Gym.

Hakim is said to often see a shining light emanating from Aa Gym's *emunemunan* (crown of the head) while he is delivering religious talks. At other times, he sees a similar light shining from the roof of Aa Gym's house. Sometimes, when he sees this light, Hakim calls upon others to share what he is seeing: "Have a look there at Aa Gym's house. There looks to be a brightly shining moon." Some of the other people could see what Hakim was witnessing, others could not. It is thought that whether or not one can see depends on one's spiritual intensity. Hakim is said to exercise so much *dzikir* (remembrance or recollection of Allah's name) that he can often see what others may not be able to. A disciple once told me, "*Hakim mah sae dzikirna* (Hakim is good at performing *dzikir*)."

Another follower also told me of his strange experiences concerning Aa Gym. One day he and his mosque-mates invited Aa Gym to give a *ceramah* at the mosque. When everything was finished and Aa Gym wanted to go home, the car which was to transport Aa Gym was not available. While the team nervously waited, Aa Gym calmly said: "Do not worry. The car is over there. Let us go." And the car was where he said it would be. This may be an example of what Aa Gym's mother once told me: "Aa Gym often *kengeng ilapat* (foresees with the inspiration of Allah) what will happen."

K. H. Khoer Affandi, Aa Gym's counsellor, has also had extraordinary experiences with Aa Gym. He was amazed by the fact that each time Aa Gym came to visit him, other people always arrived before Aa Gym. They usually came with food which K. H. Khoer Affandi then served to Aa Gym and his accompanying followers. Aa Gym's mother quoted K. H. Khoer Affandi, "When many people send food in the morning, *Si Aa* [Aa Gym] is coming." So, according to K. H. Khoer Affandi, Aa Gym always came with a visible *barakah*. This *barakah* came into being in an extraordinary way, typical of Aa Gym as a *kyai*.

On another occasion, K. H. Khoer Affandi was delivering a *ceramah* to a wedding party, when he suddenly felt like going home. He stopped the *ceramah* before the due time, saying: "There is a guest from Bandung at home. I have to go." When he arrived at home, Aa Gym was waiting for him and was about to leave for Bandung to give a *ceramah* there.

These miraculous events which surround Aa Gym are referred to by his followers as *ma'unah*, miraculous gifts bestowed by Allah on an *ulama* or a *kyai*. This reference to *ma'unah* is based on a differentiation of miraculous gifts possessed by Islamic specialists in accordance with their status. The miraculous gifts of a prophet are referred to as *mu'jizat*, those of a candidate to prophethood are *irhash*, those of a saint are *karamah*, those of an *ulama* or a *kyai* are *ma'unah*, and those of infidels are *istidraj*. (Compare Mastuhu 1990:89, Zulkifli 1994:76.) When Dhofier refers to the *kyai*'s miraculous acts as *karomah* (1980c:53), perhaps this is because Muslims tend to attribute to the *kyai* some characteristics of sainthood, since sainthood is an overwhelming aspect of the history and the present practice of Javanese Islam (Fox 1991).<sup>6</sup> This is noted by Prasojo (1974:41), who writes: "Almost all *kyai* and great '*ulama* are believed as [to be?] *wali* [saint] who possess *kramat* [original italics]."<sup>7</sup> For example, Pranowo (1991a:33, 1991b:52) observes that *kyai* mBah Mangli in Magelang, and Pak Muh, the vice-leader of Tegal Rejo Pesantren, Central Java, are believed by the villagers to be a *wali* with a "mysterious" daily life.

### 3.3 The Followers: Numbers, Diversity, and Identity

It is difficult to determine the precise number of the followers of Daarut Tauhid, partly because the numbers are so large, and partly because, so far, no census

has been taken. However, during gatherings of the *pengajian*, they fill not only the double-storeyed mosque, which has a capacity of at least two thousand, but also flow onto the stairs, yard, and the street. This gathering, known as the *Taushiyah Penyejuk Hati*, is held twice on Sundays afternoons and Thursday evenings. It is the occasion for a large number of followers to come together and thus the best time to gauge the size of Daarut Tauhid's following. Here one can see over two thousand people.



**Photograph 7 The mosque was fully filled.**

The audience flowed out onto the stairs and the yard.

One can also see the number of followers on other occasions: at the women's *pengajian* on Wednesdays and Saturdays; the study of classical Islamic texts held on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays; and at religious workshops and courses held at Daarut Tauhid. The number of people attending these occasions ranges from at least two hundred to perhaps a thousand. Thus, as reported by *Mangle* (December 1993) and *Tempo* (April 1993), the number of Muslims attending Daarut Tauhid activities may reach three thousand.

This does not include Aa Gym's audiences at his frequent *pengajian* outside Daarut Tauhid. These audience, the great majority of whom are also to a certain extent loyal to Daarut Tauhid, are of course much more difficult to measure. Furthermore, Aa Gym is said to have some followers in other cities of Indonesia such as Jakarta, Semarang, and Denpasar and even abroad, such as in Singapore, Mecca, America, and Australia.



The vast majority of these followers are in their teens and twenties. I would estimate that the young comprise no less than 95 percent of the followers. There are even children of primary school age. Only rarely did I come across followers above forty years of age. In regard to gender, there are slightly more female followers than male. Based on the amount of space occupied at the gatherings, females appear to make up 60 percent of the followers.

Followers can be classified as either student or non-student. Given the youthfulness of the Daarut Tauhid membership, followers are predominantly students. These followers mainly attend either secondary or tertiary educational institutions. There appears to be relatively equal numbers of each. Put another way, there are more or less as many SMP and SMA students as university students. The latter are mostly undergraduate students of IKIP, Unpad, ITB, Unisba, and other surrounding universities, although there is also a significant number of postgraduate students. I recognised at least nine postgraduate student followers, although I suspect there are many others of whom I was not aware.

Apart from this predominance of student followers, there is a significant number of non-student followers. These range from public servants, merchants, workers and entrepreneurs to *beca* (pedicab) drivers and unemployed youths. As an example, *Kasoem Optical*, a famous optical dispensary in Bandung, regularly sends its workers to attend Daarut Tauhid's *pengajian* as a form of mental, in this case religious, training. The owner of *Kasoem Optical* finds it useful in motivating the workers and in fostering ethical behaviour. The owner himself regularly attends the *pengajian*.

The followers fall into two broad categories: *jema'ah* and *santri*. The former category, which represents the majority of followers, refers to those who do not stay at the Daarut Tauhid complex but still join in nearly all of its activities. The latter, the *santri*, refers to those followers who either stay at the Daarut Tauhid complex or work for the Daarut Tauhid, so that without staying there they spend almost all their time there.

There are three kinds of *santri* at Daarut Tauhid. The first is referred to as *santri mukim*, those who devote their time to the study of Islamic knowledge. They are thus like the *santri* of various *pesantren* throughout Indonesia, as noted by Dhofier (1980:61–62). This group is distinguished at Daarut Tauhid from the second type, *santri mahasiswa*. As the term suggests, they are university students who help Aa Gym manage and develop the *pesantren* Daarut Tauhid. This group originated among those people who were involved in the KMIW.<sup>8</sup> It is, I think, for this reason that this group is classified differently. This group could also be referred to as *santri pengurus* (managing *santri*), as it is in the *pesantren* tradition (see Geertz 1960:235–236). The third kind of the *santri* is called *santri karyawan* and refers to those *santri* who work for Daarut Tauhid's entrepreneurial activities.

While working, they have certain times in which to perform specific rituals in order to upgrade their spirituality.



**Photograph 8** The santri having dinner together.

### **3.4 The Followers: Reasons for Joining**

Notwithstanding that in some cases religious affiliation may be the result of political interest or social pressure, the main reason for people's participation in religious activities is that they believe the spiritual benefits they may obtain are necessary for their life in this world and in the next.<sup>9</sup> This appears to be the case with Muslims who join Daarut Tauhid. The usual reason for followers joining Daarut Tauhid is to improve their spirituality as a means by which they can cope with personal and social problems.

One of the spiritual benefits enjoyed by Daarut Tauhid's followers is the reinforcement of Islamic morality. As part of the Daarut Tauhid's "trademark," the *Bengkel Akhlaq* (Workshop of Morality), the followers gain a sort of religious energy and a set of ethical codes which help to order their lives. They feel easy and harmonious living in this world with the conviction of gaining salvation hereafter.

One might well ask why it is Daarut Tauhid that these people join, and not some other Islamic centres? After all, there are a great number of alternative Islamic centres which provide numerous Islamic activities for the Muslims of Bandung. Yet these attract only a few participants and these followers are generally elderly. What are the reasons why people prefer to join Daarut Tauhid?

Firstly, most followers claim that they gain what they call *ketenangan batin* (inner peace). Many frankly acknowledged their previous inner instability due to their *akhlaq jelek* (irreligious manners). During a time of uncertainty, they needed religious guidance, and, according to them, they found what they needed at Daarut Tauhid, and not anywhere else. According to one SMA-follower who had been a member for about a year:

Praise absolutely be to Allah who has by his might provided us with Daarut Tauhid, a locus of restless people looking for Allah's *kurnia* (blessing). Before joining Daarut Tauhid and Aa Gym in particular, my *akhlaq* was far worse than it is today. By the will of Allah, I have been feeling *sejuk hati* (inner comfort). For example, I am now certain of how to cope with anxiety, because I know whom to rely upon, and other things that make our problems easy to overcome.

With a similar tone, another statement was made by another follower, who is a worker for a private company:

I dropped out of SMP due to my involvement in *hura-hura remaja* (juvenile delinquency). I joined Daarut Tauhid because I wanted to replace the immoral part of my life with Islamic morality. And it works. I am now fully conscious of all the sins I committed before. I do my best in asking Allah's forgiveness by, for example, doing good deeds in the world.

These two similar statements show Daarut Tauhid's efficacy in carrying out its mission. The primary mission of Daarut Tauhid as a *Bengkel Akhlaq* is to provide moral, religious ways in which to make one's life both orderly and stable, as Luthfi, a Daarut Tauhid officer, once told me. How this works will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Secondly, Aa Gym is an exemplary figure at a time when there is a perceived shortage of such individuals in the Muslim world who are relevant to the young. Moreover, Aa Gym is a young man with a high personal degree of religious piety. This serves as another factor which draws the attention of young people. Aa Gym suggested this as a possible factor when I asked his opinion on why young Muslims have been gathering around him. "Perhaps," he said, "it is simply because I am of their age, so they probably consider me as a fellow."

However, my interviews with most followers reveal something more than a similarity of ages as a reason for following him. A 20 years-old female *santri* said:

Aa Gym functions as a good "father" for all. He can help us become mature by making our lives meaningful. His advice always facilitates us to change all the time, holding that a minute without change is a disadvantage. He is a living example of applied Islamic morality such as

modesty, sincerity, and discipline. We pay respect to him for his modesty. He never claims the status of a teacher for himself. He seems to feel as though he is also a *santri* without any tendency to be superior. Instead, he often claims that he is not so perfect a Muslim. These features of his make me salute him and I hope Allah maintains Aa Gym's *istiqomah* (consistency) in being so.

The young Aa Gym is perceived by this follower as a "father" who guides the ordering of her life by means of both oral instructions and behavioural examples.

Another aspect of Aa Gym's exemplary qualities is leadership. Many followers stressed this aspect.

Aa Gym is the best motivator and the most disciplined leader I have ever met, who works for the sake of his *ummat*, often neglecting himself.

Aa Gym is both authoritative and fully self-reliant. Besides, he is also effective in motivating his followers towards disciplined worship and good deeds.

As a leader, Aa Gym is also admired for giving precedence to the *ummat* (Muslim community). An SMA-student follower, for instance, said: "Aa Gym pays more attention towards his *ummat* than towards himself. In other words, his concern with *ummat* has priority over his personal interests."

Many followers are attracted by Aa Gym's personal charisma. A male follower, who is a worker at a private company, told me the experience of his first encounter with Aa Gym:

I spontaneously "fell in love" on first contact with Aa Gym. When his sharp eyes gazed into mine I could not make eye contact (*tak sanggup menatapnya*), but it really made my heart *sejuk* (comfortable). I do not understand why.

The third reason why followers join is that they enjoy the wisdom which Aa Gym provides through his *pengajian*, known as *Taushiyah Penyejuk Hati* (Comforting Religious Advice). According to them, Aa Gym's advice in the *pengajian* is different from that of any other *kyai* or Islamic *muballigh* (preachers). A follower pointed to this difference saying: "From the *pengajian* Aa Gym delivers, I feel that Allah is very close to me, so that I gain a sort of *kedamaian hati* (inner peace)." This satisfaction is confirmed by the following statement of an SMA-student:

While I see no concluding word to express my satisfaction generated from listening to Aa Gym's *pengajian*, I can just say that its themes and his style of wording *begitu menyentuh hati* (touch my deepest feelings). The first time I heard Aa Gym's voice was on Madina radio. I instantly

“felt in love” and have since come to Daarut Tauhid to attend the *pengajian*.

These quotes demonstrate the effectiveness of Aa Gym’s words in promoting a religious sense in listeners’ hearts and minds. Indeed, as will be discussed in Chapter Five, a *qolbun salim* (an orderly heart) is the primary target of Daarut Tauhid.

Another aspect of the *pengajian* that attracts followers is Aa Gym’s persuasive quality. A female university student suggested that

the way Aa Gym preaches does not sound *mendikte* (instructive). His *pengajian* is not delivered in a monotone because its themes are various and full of improvisations that are suitable to the current affairs of society.

This was confirmed by a high school student, who sees the effectiveness of Aa Gym’s persuasion that considers the varying age levels of the audience. This female student said: “Aa Gym is very keen on choosing themes and ways of delivering for every different age group in the audience. Besides, his words are so practical in nature.”

What is meant by ‘practical’ above is that what Aa Gym advises is easy to understand and is relevant to the practical interests of the listeners. Aa Gym often gives examples related and relevant to current affairs. Aa Gym’s language in his public talks is also a familiar one to the listeners. A man, who is a worker at a private company, commented on the language of Aa Gym: “His *pengajian* is attractive because he speaks in *bahasa murah dan sederhana* (popular, vernacular language); the language of the younger generation that is easy to catch, yet is emotionally sensitive.”

Given these advantages of Aa Gym’s *pengajian*, the followers find it distinctive. A high school student thus said that

Aa Gym is the first *muballigh* (preacher) I have ever met who gives so much useful advice. He is, to me, the only one who can change one’s life towards that which is in line with Allah’s blessing.

Many followers expressed views similar in meaning to the quote above. The quote thus reflects the general attitude of the followers towards the style of Aa Gym’s *pengajian*. To miss out Aa Gym’s *pengajian* is, in turn, felt by many followers as a big loss.

The fourth reason followers gave for joining is the effectiveness of Daarut Tauhid’s rituals in generating followers’ awareness of their sins and in convincing them of Allah’s forgiveness of their sins. The main ritual in this regard is the *wirid dan do’a*,<sup>10</sup> which is held after every *pengajian*. Most of the followers find this ritual as indispensable as the *pengajian* itself.

The words Aa Gym employs during the *wirid dan do'a* are almost always relevant to my circumstances. They bring to my memory all the sins I committed so that I cry regretting, repenting, and hoping for Allah's forgiveness.

This claim of a University student is confirmed by a high school student who finds that "the ritual lets me recall all the former *maksiat* (immoral manners) and *munkarat* (disavowals) I committed. I feel ashamed of myself before Allah because of breaking His law."

The key point of Daarut Tauhid's rituals is their effectiveness in raising its followers' awareness of their sinfulness. This can be further seen from the following experience of a follower.

I feel ashamed of myself when I am involved in the *wirid dan do'a*. I feel as though I am *ditelanjangi* (exposed); that is I realise all my abundant sins and I feel I have nothing to be proud of in the face of Allah. I feel as if I understand Aa Gym's Arabic *do'a* whereas I do not speak Arabic at all.

Another key point of the rituals is their offer of a way out from sinfulness to purity. This inheres in the *do'a* said to Allah. The *do'a* certainly bear some hope for a better future. The distinctive feature in reciting the *do'a* is the fact that Aa Gym most frequently says the *do'a* in Indonesian. As an officer told me, this is the reason why the followers, nearly all of whom do not speak Arabic, understand the *do'a* and are thus completely involved in the ritual. Otherwise, they could not follow the *do'a* and are thus less involved in it and gain little if anything from the ritual, something I have often witnessed in Muslim rituals elsewhere, whose language is commonly Arabic.

The fifth reason for joining is the harmonious combination at Daarut Tauhid between worldly and eschatological orientations. There is an equal emphasis at Daarut Tauhid on both spiritual and worldly activities. For example, they may have prayer sessions at one time, and go hiking and camping at another. Daarut Tauhid's recommendation to people to acquire as much money as possible while not forgetting to thank Allah, the ultimate source of wealth, is another example of this combination. In this way, Daarut Tauhid is therefore neither anti-wealth nor anti-modern styles of life. Being a pious Muslim does not mean being opposed to modern life but, on the contrary, the two are indispensable to each other. This combination<sup>11</sup> was summed up by a follower, a journalist in his early thirties, who said that "Aa Gym is a figure who is successful in combining *amal dhahir* (exoteric deed) and *amal batin* (esoteric deed)."

In addition to these five reasons, some followers say that Aa Gym's personal history resembles their own, in that Aa Gym previously had more or less similar experiences of juvenile delinquency as many of his followers had, or continue

to have. As described earlier, it was not until 1987 that Aa Gym was drawn to a more rigorous practice of Islam. As he frequently discloses in his public *pengajian*, he had been less pious then and was often involved in irreligious behaviour although he still practised the obligatory *shalat*. Aa Gym's earlier experiences parallel those of the great majority of his followers. They thus have a sense of *senasib* (sharing the same fate), which I think is essential to Aa Gym's exemplary status. The follower is inspired by Aa Gym's example in escaping from juvenile delinquency into a more religious life.

These six characteristics of Daarut Tauhid are less likely to be found at other Islamic centres in Bandung, and that is why people join.

### 3.5 The Patterns of Relationship

Given the characteristics of leader and follower, the interrelationships between them are quite different to those of either *kyai-santri* relationships at other pesantren, or social relationships in general. In this section I will describe three typical relationships between leader and follower to be found at Daarut Tauhid.

The first I call the cognitive-rational relationship. By this I mean the relationship through which knowledge is transmitted in Daarut Tauhid. There are two kinds of knowledge transmission at Daarut Tauhid: formal and informal.

In the case of formal knowledge transmission, which is common to any teacher-student relationship, Aa Gym functions as the source of knowledge while the follower (the *jemaah* and the *santri*) acts as his students. Aa Gym's knowledge is transmitted at the twice-weekly *Taushiyah Penyejuk Hati*, the *taushiyah* following every congregational *shalat*, and various workshops and training courses.

In this formal relationship, the followers tend to play a passive role in that they just listen and then practise what they have learned. They believe that what Aa Gym says comes from Allah and is thus absolutely true. Although followers did raise questions during the *pengajian*, I never heard any question that put Aa Gym's preaching in doubt. Most, if not all, of the questions simply asked Aa Gym's advice on problems faced by followers. One woman asked, for example, how to cope with her anger towards her unfaithful boyfriend while Islam, as Aa Gym often preaches, teaches Muslims not to hate anyone.

Informal knowledge transmission is more typical than formal transmission of knowledge. Here, the process of knowledge transmission is viewed as timeless, and both the Aa Gym and the follower become at once the "teacher" and the "student." Concerning this, Aa Gym said:

In this system, all of us play the role of the teacher and the student. There is no time without learning. I learn as many lessons from others as they from me. Similarly, the *santri* here always try to learn from each

other and from the system itself. Thus the learning process happens all the time.

Not all followers have access to the process of informal transmission of knowledge because not all of them have personal relationships with Aa Gym. This informal relationship happens exclusively with *santri* followers, because they live in or work for Daarut Tauhid. Thus only they have the relatively constant, close contact with Aa Gym necessary to evolve personal relationships. *Jemaah* followers are less likely to have this relationship with Aa Gym, because they only visit Daarut Tauhid either twice weekly, to attend the *pengajian*, or daily, to attend the *pengajian* and the study of classical Islamic texts, or periodically to carry out workshops and retreats.

The second interrelationship within Daarut Tauhid is what I would call the affective-emotional relationship. In discussing this, three notions are relevant: charisma, *barakah*, and fellowship.

As is almost always the case with local grass-roots leaders, such as the Javanese *kyai*, Aa Gym is highly charismatic. The dreams involving the Prophet Muhammad, the miraculous power of *ma'unah*, and his extraordinary ability to gain the *ilmu laduni* provide the core of his charisma. This is compounded by his managerial leadership and religious piety. Having those charismatic qualities allows Aa Gym to be conceived of as a channel for *barakah* (divine blessing), not the other way around, as Dhofier (1980c:53) suggests: "...being a source of *barakah* allow[s] *kyai* to develop charismatic leadership."

The relationship between Aa Gym and his followers is therefore similar to that between the *murshid* and the *murid* of the Sufistic traditions or between the holy men and the laity among tribal traditions. Besides being the source of religious knowledge and advice, Aa Gym is viewed by his followers as a channel of *barakah*. [Note that he is a "channel", rather than a "source" of *barakah* (see again Dhofier above), since, for them, only Allah can be the source of divine blessings, humans can only be a channel.] Followers kissing his hand, in the hope of receiving *barakah*, was a phenomenon I witnessed either following every *pengajian* or on personal encounters. Aa Gym once told his audience, in which I was a member, the same phenomenon occurred in Singapore after he delivered a *pengajian* there.

The notion of *barakah* also allows followers to ask Aa Gym for specific *do'a*, for it is believed that offering a *do'a* to Allah through Aa Gym is most likely, if not definitely, to be attended to by Allah. This is supported by the well-known recommendation of K. H. Khoer Affandi: "Go to Aa Gym as often as you can because I find his *do'a* to Allah highly attended."

This notion of *barakah* seems to be often spoken of by Aa Gym. That Aa Gym publicly told his audience about his experience in Singapore suggests this



inclination to highlight *barakah*. He also claimed that his extensive knowledge of Islam was partly gained via the *barakah* generated from his deep respect for the *ulama*, particularly those who personally guide him, such as K. H. Khoer Affandi. He seemed to suggest that his acquisition of *ilmu ladunni* is in part a result of *barakah*. At a *pengajian* I attended, he told the audience a story exemplifying this aspect of *barakah*.

A *santri*, it was said, of a great *kyai* used to serve and help the *kyai*. He went wherever the *kyai* went, helping him with everything such as bringing the *kyai*'s bag. He also washed his clothes and other items such as shoes and thongs. In short, he acted as the servant of the *kyai* instead of studying as a *santri*. This was all he did during his stay at the *kyai*'s *pesantren*. After several years the *kyai* asked the servant *santri* to leave the *pesantren* and found a *pesantren* of his own. When the *santri*, being aware that he had never studied and thus had no competent knowledge, did not believe him and told the *kyai* that it was impossible, the *kyai* replied: "Just go and rely upon Allah. I am convinced you have much Islamic knowledge to teach."

The knowledge of this *santri* is held to be Allah-given and generated from *barakah* by serving the *kyai*.

Needless to say, this kind of story has a considerable impact, intended or not, on his followers' attitudes towards him. This leads an observer to judge that some followers demonstrate a sort of *kultus individu* (the cult of the individual) towards Aa Gym (Karim 1993:63). While this judgement may be true to a certain extent, any cult of the individual tends to be the result of the follower's awe at the personal qualities of Aa Gym, and it is actually kept to a minimum both by the modesty of Aa Gym and by the friendly relations he promotes with his followers.

The third relationship I want to mention is therefore that of fellowship. Aa Gym tends to view his followers, particularly those of the *santri* category, as his colleagues in developing the *pesantren* and in orienting the *jemaah* and Muslims at large. They work together on the basis of give and take. Interestingly, this fellowship does not minimise the follower's respect for Aa Gym, perhaps because of Aa Gym's aweinspiring personal qualities. There is thus a balance between the tendency to create a cult around the personality of Aa Gym and the relational intimacy he promotes. In this way, the intimate fellowship is part of Aa Gym's charisma. (Compare Guinness 1986:180-181.)

In order to promote this intimacy, Aa Gym appears to feel free doing things that other *kyai* never do. For example, he has his weekly turn at sweeping the *pesantren* environment. Note that Daarut Tauhid has also taken the initiative to perform *opsih* (clean up activities) in the area around its complex. Daarut Tauhid

takes the initiative to place rubbish bins throughout the streets and to clean the streets daily. Aa Gym takes his turn at this every Friday. Another example is that Aa Gym himself once called *Adzan*, which other *kyai* never do, to mark *shalat maghrib* time. At that time, his followers, as well as myself, were breaking the fast since it was Ramadhan. After saying *Adzan*, he broke the fast with his followers, as though he were one of them. These examples illustrate the extent of fellowship relations.

Finally, there exists what can be termed an entrepreneurial relationship. As briefly mentioned earlier, Daarut Tauhid runs a number of businesses ranging from computer rental and selling handicrafts, to a mini-market and a mini-bank. The entrepreneurial relationship between pesantren Daarut Tauhid and its followers is vital to the economic endeavours of the pesantren.



**Photograph 9 A number of followers having their picture taken together with their beloved and much admired *kyai* (holding the microphone): an intimate relationship as part of the charisma.**

The followers, first of all, are the best clients of the pesantren's entrepreneurial activities. They are the best customers of Daarut Tauhid's mini-market, which provides daily needs and services, as are they of the rental services provided by the pesantren, such as sound systems, transportation, and so on. They are also the potential *nasabah* (customers) for Daarut Tauhid's mini-bank, *Data Baitut Tamwil*.<sup>12</sup> It was only founded in June 1994 and, within six months of development, it had gained national recognition as the best mini-bank run by a pesantren. Its fast growth owes much to the followers' perception: that taking part in it is, besides a way of saving, a form of charity because Daarut Tauhid

promises to spend the profit mainly in helping poor people develop ways of earning income, and that helping the mini-bank grow is a communal effort in developing the Muslim community. This perception applies to other aspects of Daarut Tauhid's economic ventures. Daarut Tauhid thus provides, and benefits from, an economic engagement with its followers that has religious meaning, an added value to other, more purely secular, economic activities.

Seen from another angle of economics, the followers function for Daarut Tauhid as a very effective instrument of advertisement. When returning home, followers bring with them oral, sometimes printed, information about what Daarut Tauhid has to offer and what is going on there. In fact, the distribution of information by followers on behalf of the *pesantren* applies to all sorts of activities of Daarut Tauhid. For example, the massive attendance at *pengajian* and short-term workshops and training courses also owes much to these distribution activities. The dissemination of information by the followers becomes an information network that spreads wider and wider in accordance with the increasing number of followers.

Finally, the followers are deeply concerned contributors of both ideas and critiques on the development of Daarut Tauhid. Suggestion boxes by which they can air their thoughts have been provided. Aa Gym said that Daarut Tauhid is a Muslim owned centre, and that they are all involved in making it better.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> However, when I mention *kyai* I will not restrict myself only to 'traditionalist *ulama*' as Dhofier did, because not all *kyai* belong to a traditionalist tradition, as, for example, is the case with Aa Gym himself.

<sup>2</sup> Horikoshi records that a number of the great *kyai* in Cipari, West Java, were the descendants of *Kyai* Zainal Abidin (1976:186-191). Bailey notes six *kyai* in Nangoh, West Java, were the offspring of *Kyai* Munasan (1986:170-171). And Dhofier found thirty great *kyai* throughout Java were the offspring of *Kyai* Sihah (1982:63-65).

<sup>3</sup> William Chittick, in his *Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination: The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (1989), offers a long description on this kind of Allah-given knowledge as an important part of the Sufi tradition.

<sup>4</sup> Dhofier (1980:95n) emphasises the role of parents in producing children with the ability of acquiring *ilmu laduni*. For this, a Sundanese *kyai*, Dhofier writes, told him eight practices and rituals the parents are to perform: "(a) during pregnancy, the parents must always be in harmony with each other...they are not allowed to quarrel,...; (b) immediately after birth *adhan* and *iqomah*...rituals must be offered; (c) honey must be the first food given to the baby, and before the honey is given, the feeder must pronounce *Bismillah al-rahman al-rahim*... 786 times; (d) the mother must not suckle the baby while she is angry; (e) as soon as the child reaches three years of age he must be taught tawhid; (f) when he is five years old, he must be taught to read the Qur'an and must learn the obligatory rituals; (g) when he reaches adulthood, he must practise *qanaah* (asceticism) such as fasting; and (h) the parents and the child should always *prihatin* (practice of an austere life)."

When I asked Aa Gym's parents whether they did these practices, they answered that they were ignorant of that kind of "recipe" for having a child with *ilmu laduni*. Aa Gym's mother just told me that indeed she used to practise *qanaah* and *prihatin* before marriage. What she did after marriage and during her pregnancy with Aa Gym was simply to practise Islam as properly as she could and to pray to Allah to have *shaleh* (pious) children.

<sup>5</sup> Qolbun Salim No. 088, Thn. III, 1995, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> *Wali* (saints) are believed to be the bringers of Islam to Indonesia (Geertz 1960:39). Some traditions argue that there were thousands of pious people, considered to be *wali*, who spread Islam in Java (Jamhari 1995:15). The most famous among them were *walisanga*, the Nine Saints. See Fox (1991) for further elaboration on the significance of these *wali* and the controversy about their existence.

<sup>7</sup> The various transliteration of *karamah*, *karomah*, *kramat*, and *karama* all come from the same Arabic root. This variation does not imply any difference in meaning.

<sup>8</sup> KMIW stands for *Keluarga Mahasiswa Islam Wiraswasta* (Entrepreneurial Group of Muslim Students). It was the embryo for Daarut Tauhid before it was set up as a pesantren in 1990. See Chapter Two on the foundation of Daarut Tauhid.

<sup>9</sup> Socio-political motivation is frequently of importance when we are speaking of conversion or affiliation to a religion. See, for instance, Hefner's "Of Faith and Commitment: Christian Conversion in Muslim Java" in *Conversion to Christianity* edited by Hefner (1993:99–125).

<sup>10</sup> The nature of this ritual is described in Chapter Five.

<sup>11</sup> A fuller description of this combination is given in the following chapter.

<sup>12</sup> *Data* stands for Daarut Tauhid, while *Baitut Tamwil* is an Arabic term for banking, literally meaning the store of wealth. *Data Baitut Tamwil* is Daarut Tauhid's bank that operates savings and loans, just like usual banks. However, it attempts to implement an Islamic banking system that is based on Islamic principles of cooperation. It offers, for example, an equal division of benefits, instead of offering interest that is considered to be forbidden *riba* (usury).