

A Process of Renewal

Article by Dylan Chown

Amanah Institute is undergoing and enjoying a process of renewal. Formerly the Kuraby Madrassah, the Institute has a rich history as a successful and well established centre for learning in our community. We are fortunate indeed to be able to work from this foundation of strength and success with an equal measure toward seeking to continually better serve the needs of our students. This demands an evidence based approach. That is, how does our tradition inform what we do and how we do it? What can we gain from empirical research on contemporary Islamic education? We begin asking ourselves, why do we do certain practices? Are they authentic? Are they educative? Are they working? In such a way, we draw inspiration from the words of Prophet Muhammed (SAW) reported by Abu Huraira¹, "Renew your faith." Just as it has been said that our faith can wear out, necessitating renewal, the approaches to Islamic education in our communities Institutions can also benefit from renewal. This process of renewal at Amanah Institute is characterised by our motto – 'Education for Transformation'. It is the commitment toward our Institute vision and mission that guides everything else that follows.

Servant Leadership in the Classroom

An example of our effort toward an education for transformation is an initiative in grade 7/8 class by *Mualimah* Suzan Turkman. Mrs Turkman is one of our longest serving and experienced *Mualimahs* who has developed an outstanding theme based unit on *servant leadership*. The servant leader is servant first, and this is characterised by the Prophet's style of leadership.

Mualimah has been engaging her students in an analysis of the servant leadership style modelled by Prophet Mohammed (SAW) and Abu Bakr (RA) as well as reflection as to how this can be applied both in the classroom and in one's life. As an example, students were asked to think about and present the characteristics necessary for leadership roles within the class. Some of these characteristics include knowledge, wisdom, firmness, accepting criticism and accountability. One of the motivating people that inspired students was the great companion Abu Bakr (RA). Students analysed his famous speech upon his election as *Khaleefa*. *Mualimah* Suzan states,

We viewed Abu Bakr (RA) as an excellent representation of leadership after Prophet Muhammad (SAW). We discussed in depth the characteristics of Abu Bakr (RA) which led both to his suitability and success as *Khaleefa*. Students identified that his outstanding speech on his election day captured many of his stunning personal qualities.

Dr Nezar Faris, a local expert on Islamic leadership commended *Mualimah* Suzan's approach, particularly the focus on studying the leadership example of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and Abu Bakr (RA):

The example of the Prophet (SAW) and the first speech of Abu Bakr (RA) indicate several interjections to our current school context. Firstly, servant leadership is about moral excellence and nothing less. The school environment depicts human actions and interaction that require moral excellence in dealing with each other. Servant leadership also depicts the qualifications of accountability and transparency by which servant leaders are open to be

¹ *Hadith*: Musna Ahmad, 8508

held accountable more often. This quality of accountability gives us as people and students the courage to be independent and responsible for our actions. The third remark is the humbleness and the humility that come with servant leadership.

The approach taken in this unit aligns wonderfully with Amanah Institute's vision and mission. Such an approach is less about teaching Islam and more about learning to live as a Muslim². This distinction is very important to the nature of teaching and learning in Islamic education where it has been said³, 'there is no worthwhile knowledge without action accompanying it, nor worthwhile action without knowledge guiding it'. It is Mualimah Suzan's efforts toward imparting worthwhile knowledge and then engaging students in analysis of this knowledge for application into their lives with careful consideration to *adab* that demonstrates the type of mutually transformative experience that can occur in our classrooms, *In sha Allah*.

May Allah (SWT) grant us *tawfiq* in this process of renewal at Amanah Institute. This path is indicative of the broader process of education in the Islamic tradition. That is, that an education is something progressively instilled in us⁴. We pray that lessons like the servant leadership lessons for these grade 7/8 students equips them for application and the benefit manifests itself in our communities and the *ummah*.

² Tauhidi, D. (2007). From Islamic Studies to Islamic Education: The Challenge of Making Education Whole Again. http://www.theisla.org/filemgmt_data/files/2007%20Tauhidi%20-%20Challenge%20of%20Making%20Education%20Whole%20Again.pdf: accessed 3rd June, 2015.

³ Al-Attas, S.M.N. (1979) *The Concept of Education in Islam: A framework for an Islamic philosophy of education*. Jeddah: Hodder & Stoughton.

⁴ Al-Attas, S.M.N. (1979) *The Concept of Education in Islam: A framework for an Islamic philosophy of education*. Jeddah: Hodder & Stoughton.