

Inspirational



Inspirational Verses

Miezaan

Many Muslims have embarked on fascinating journeys which encompass both the religious and the secular worlds. Here Prof Ebrahim Arnold, whose life thus far has been filled with knowledge, humility and excellence, writes for us about his particular journey.

Introduction

Hindsight certainly nurtures insight. A reflection of the past fosters the realisation that there are no coincidences in life. Either we bring incidences onto ourselves through our own actions, or Allah (SWT) grants us a ni'mah (bounty/favour/grace) or an affliction aimed at facilitating our personal growth and piety - the main quality needed for success.

We do not achieve success and honour in life because we consider ourselves 'wonderful' or 'great', but success and honour is the domain of Allah (SWT) alone, because He is Great, Magnanimous, Merciful, All-Knowing and Exalted. He is the King of kings.

Education tainted by apartheid

I wanted to be a teacher and I wanted to learn more about Islam. How this unfolded on the roller coaster of life was beyond my wildest imagination.

I registered at UWC for a B.Com degree with the aim of doing a postgraduate teachers' diploma. However, the academic environment was tainted by apartheid. I left before graduating and furthered my studies through UNISA.

Not knowing much about the accounting profession I landed up serving what was then called the "Articles of Clerkship" or traineeship with a small firm of Chartered Accountants. This would eventually lead me to become a Chartered Accountant (SA) in 1981.

As a qualified professional I worked for other Chartered Accountants in external auditing and accounting and also practiced as a sole practitioner, which included doing Forensic Auditing (investigating corruption). More importantly, I held various positions

in commerce and industry that engendered a substantive insight into the business world on a multi-national and national scale. These included Accountant at UCT, Internal Auditor at Mobil Oil, Marketing Controller at Johnson & Johnson (I was sent by them to Wharton Business School in Pennsylvania, USA, to do a course in Strategic Management and visit their offices in New Brunswick and in London), Financial Manager at Johannesburg Consolidated Investments Ltd (an Anglo-American mining house), Financial Manager at Lewis Stores and Financial Manager at L A Clothing (clothing retailer). All these experiences were to play a major role in my advancement in the academic world later.

Sheigh Sāliegh Abadie

I was thinking about becoming a sole practitioner in mid-1983, when I was called upon by the esteemed Sheigh Sāliegh Abadie to learn the essentials of Imāmah under his supervision. When Sheigh Sāliegh offers to teach you, you have no choice but to accept the offer! I spent the next

two and a half years until early 1986, every morning from Mondays to Thursdays, learning to recite the Qu'ran with Tajweed, learning various kitābs of Sheigh Ismail Haneef on Tauhid, Ahādīth, Fiqh and Tajweed rules. I had to recite and work through the translation of a Khutbah kitāb, learnt to recite the Barzanji Mawlid and the Rātibul Haddād, and various duas.

At the same time I studied Arabic Grammar (Nahw), Morphology (Sarf), Quran translation, grammatical analysis and explanation under Hadji Ebrahim Steenkamp (affectionately known as "Boeta Ebie" who was a student



On Hajj 2010 whilst in Jeddah. First time train was operational

of Imam Ismail Johnstone who in turn was a student of Sheigh Ismail Haneef).

Just being in the presence of Sheigh Sāliegh Abadie motivates one to recite the Qur'an. He lived the Qur'an. He was uncompromising when it came to the recitation of the Qur'an with Tarteel in his presence because it is a command of Allah (SWT).

I remember reciting a Riwāyah at some gathering once at which Sheigh Sāliegh was present. The next day he told me "Hadjie Ebrahim het nie daai riwāyah lekker ge-batcha nie". My response was that "Sheigh maak 'n mens nervous dan batcha 'n mens heel dwars". He had a hearty laugh at my expense.

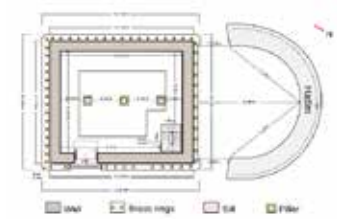
He knew how to teach and instill in his students a love for the Qur'an. The duas that he taught many of his students were so potent. I still use them every day. He urged me to recite at least one juz a day. I must admit that even though I study the Qur'an on a daily basis in order to deliver khutbahs and lectures, I have not really recited the Qur'an as I ought to. Now that I am not so busy I really need to get back into the discipline of recitation and more memorisation, Insha-Allah.

Community involvement

There is a lot of co-operation amongst the masaajid through the Masajied of the Bo-Kaap organisation. I am happy to be back in Bo-Kaap in these exciting times. I love the Bo-Kaap particularly during Ramadaan when the Noor (light) of Islam shines brightly. Whilst being faced with an increasing



*The Multazam.
At the door to the Kaa'bah*



Graphic of the Inside of the Kaa'bah

number of non-Muslims moving into the area, we ought to see it as an opportunity to convey the spirit of Islam through our neighbourliness and warm-heartedness.

My community involvement and experiences proved invaluable in navigating the treacherous seas of social interaction. I was a Founder member of the Muslim Students Association of South Africa in the early 1970s. I was the first external Auditor of the Muslim Judicial Council and Muslim Judicial Council Halaal Trust in the early 1980s.

I served as a professional member of the First Islamic Tribunal appointed by the Supreme Court in 1984 to resolve the Zakah Fund case, alongside Attorney (later Judge) Essa

Moosa, Sheigh Nazim Mohamed, Sheigh M Ameen Fakier, Sheigh A. Gamiel Gabier, Moulana Yusuf Keraan, and Moulana Khutbuddien Kajee. I served for a short time as a member of the executive of the Sheigh Yusuf Tri-Centenary Committee.

I lead the anti-drug march in Bo-Kaap during Ramadaan when the scourge was still rife. I was involved at the very early stages of the registration of the Voice of the Cape (VOC) Radio Station. I later served as a member of their Management Board, while also presenting some radio programmes. I initiated the Ahlan wa Sahlan Yaa Ramadaan Program – a Poverty-Relief Community Outreach Programme of VOC 16 years ago.

I am still conducting Khutbahs at various masaajid in Bo-Kaap as well as other areas. In all, these experiences were not only personally enriching, but also provided an opportunity for self-reflection. Rather than self-aggrandisement, these interactions uncover one's own shortcomings and vulnerabilities.

My desire to teach led me into the academic field in 1999, starting as a lecturer at Peninsula Technikon (now CPUT) and I later joined UWC as a Senior Lecturer in 2001.



On official college business with another educational institution



At the Student Graduation Ceremony



Graphic of College

I became the Departmental Chairperson of the Accounting Department at UWC in 2002 until 2008. It was rather ironic that I became the head of the academic department that caused to me to leave the university at that time without graduating! Had that not happened I may not have tread the path to becoming a CA (SA).

I also completed a Master's degree in Higher Education studies, specialising in policy-analysis, leadership and management in Higher Education. My supervisor for the M.Ed was Professor Enrico Uliana who is the editor of the South African Journal for Accounting Research, who later called on me on numerous occasions to review research papers for publication. I was appointed an Associate Professor whilst serving as the Departmental Chairperson of the Accounting Department.

Excursion to Turkey

During my stay at UWC, Prof Yasien Mohamed of the Department of Foreign languages (Arabic) approached me to join a group of academics on an excursion to Turkey at the invitation of the Fathullah Gulen group. The South African group included Prof Yusuf Dadoo (Arabic – UNISA), Prof Shabbir Wadee (Forensic Pathology – Stellenbosch University), Sheigh Igsaan Taliép (IPSA), Prof Yasien Mohamed and myself, all accompanied by our spouses.

This experience allowed me to reflect on the connection between Bo-Kaap (Cape Town) and Turkey through Sheigh Abu Bakr Effendi, an *Ālim*, who was sent by the Ottoman government in 1863 to teach and preach Islam and assist in settling some religious matters. Interestingly I recently (April 2016) delivered a Khutbah at the Nurul Hamedia masjid in Long Street, Bo-Kaap where Sheigh Abu Bakr Effendi was the Imam. The current Imam of this Masjid is Turkish and a Turkish group is playing a significant role in the Masjid affairs. The Star Schools founded by another Turkish group in 1998 provides high quality educational, cultural and social development all over South Africa. The

Nizamiye Masjid, a huge mosque complex situated in Midrand, Johannesburg, by Ali Katircioglu ('Uncle Ali') is another connection with Turkey that cannot go unnoticed. During our visit to Turkey we had the honour to be in the company of this unassuming man, rather small in size but great in stature, who has an intense love for Islam.

Vice Dean of College in Saudi Arabia

Without actively pursuing an opportunity in Saudi Arabia, I was at UWC when Mu'aath Gabier (Sheigh Gamiet Gabier's son) walked into my office and said "Uncle Ebrahim would you consider working in Jeddah?" I was sceptical and reluctantly sent him my CV. After a short time, I was made an offer to join the Prince Sultan College for Tourism and Business in Jeddah, which is a college of Al-Faisal University.

Within two weeks I was appointed the Head of the Department of Management (incorporating Management, Marketing, Accounting, Finance and Economics). Six months later I became the Vice Dean (Academic) of the college. This position extended my responsibilities to include the academic departments of Tourism and Hospitality as well as Management Information Systems.

Inside the Ka'bah

My stay in Jeddah was crowned with a Hajj in 2010 and numerous Umrahs and visits to Masjidun-Nabawi in Madina. But the event that was really surreal was the opportunity to enter inside the Ka'bah. This was facilitated by the Governor of Makkah (who was the Chairperson of the Al-Faisal University) on the application by the Dean of the College. I got the confirmation of the invitation on my birthday. I was overwhelmed! I was to discover later that this honour comes with much introspection as one confronts the Jihad-ul-Akbar (The Jihad of the Self).



The South African group in Turkey



Second from right "Uncle Ali" that constructed the Turkish-styled masjid in Midrand, Johannesburg



South African group in one of the masjids in Turkey

Raising standards

The challenges of the college were immense – students copying during examinations, weak examination standards and generally the poor quality of the academic effort. Fortunately I had the full support of the Dean and it became possible for me to re-organise the academic affairs and institute strict discipline in the college.

The Summer School that was used by students to have a quick pass for certain modules was also subjected to rigorous reform. I am still amused by my picture appearing on Facebook that had the caption "Please save the College from this man". I also taught on the MBA programme and raised the standard of education for the modules I taught. Alhamdulillah, by the time I decided to return to Cape Town after four years in Jeddah, the Dean, the academics and the students tried their utmost to get me to stay. However, it was time to go. I was happy to have made some positive contribution with the Qudrah of Allah (SWT).

Islam that guarantees the allegiance to Islam for many centuries to come.

Our role as Muslims in the new South Africa ought to be focussed on redressing the inequalities of the past through Public-Private Partnerships that operate beyond sloganism, endless yet fruitless rallies, political point-scoring, ethnocentrism, parochialism and self-righteousness.

We have the expertise and commitment to develop proper strategic objectives and goals directed at the transformation of this fragmented, disillusioned and socially battered society. Our forefathers were at the forefront of the liberation of the oppressed whilst still struggling with their own oppressed state.

Muslim professionals, academics, social scientists and every activist who longed for the liberation of South Africa should combine their efforts to chart a road towards a just and equitable society. I am confident that we are able to do it, Insha-Allah.

Rekindle the spirit of Islam

The early Muslims were the epitome of liberation through community welfare, assistance and general goodness. I believe that we must rediscover that history and share it amongst ourselves, our children and the community and embrace and then strive in an effective and efficient manner to rekindle the spirit of



Outside the masjid complex where Ayub al-Ansari, the Prophet (SAW)'s companion lies buried



Ahlan wa Sahlan program in Delft 2015