

Anecdotes from Ten-Day Madrasa Administrator Workshop



A Generational Insight: Returning from the salt mine trip, our bus stopped at a lake where a few of the younger madrasa participants and I rented a boat. These participants did not know how to swim (notice them holding each other's hands). When we were some distance from the shore, one madrasa teacher, who had voiced particularly hardline views over the course of the two weeks, asked me if I liked to sing Pakistani and Indian songs; I said yes, whereupon the other teachers in the boat insisted that I sing them a song. Soon we all joined in singing songs from Indian movies.

All of this abruptly stopped when a boatload of older madrasa teachers came within earshot.



The Rational and the Less So: As our discussion in a ten-day workshop moved to American policy towards Muslims, madrasa participants carried on a conversation about their dislike of what President Bush had said about Muslims. After about twenty five minutes of venting and arguing; I (in my capacity as the facilitator) intervened in the heated discussion by saying "Boy if I were President of the

United States and knew that my words have such power that you'll spend days and nights thinking and arguing about them...I would keep talking all the time just to keep you spinning in circles." They got it.

Four Lives Saved: One madrasa leader indicated his new-found resolve (as a result of having attended an ICRD workshop) to challenge the preliminary decision of village elders to kill a girl who had been caught talking to a young man on her cell phone at 2:00 am, in addition to having the boy's nose and ears cut off. This madrasa leader said that before the workshop, he would have gone along with the verdict, but as a result of the ICRD workshop discussions on human rights, he felt compelled to challenge it on religious grounds. Although he felt fortified to present this challenge, it was not without a degree of trepidation. In a contest between religious

and tribal imperatives, it is by no means a given that religion will carry the day (especially since tribal customs often date back 3,000 years while Islam only goes back 1,400 years). We are happy to report that the madrasa leader succeeded in his quest. By pointing out that there are no prohibitions in that Qur'an against women talking to men and by emphasizing the principles of forgiveness found in that same Holy Book, he was able to get the families on both sides to forgive one another and to reconcile their differences peacefully. A small beginning, but one that has already established a new precedent for that village—and one that could grow elsewhere over time.

Relevant Quotes

“The increased isolation and ghettoization of Islam is the result of a reactionary, rather than precautionary stance taken by the ulema.... Closing the doors to the wider aspects of learning, which were the hallmark of advanced Muslim civilization, has pushed Islamic education into an abyss. When faced with utter defeat and disgust, Muslim leaders have often called for aggressive means of making their point.”

Islamic Scholar

Before the Workshops

“Islam is threatened and needs protection by real Muslims, not the Muslims who talk from both sides of their mouth.” The very idea that Islam is threatened is a major cause of concern for the Madrasa leadership and drives them to develop materials for their students that will convince them of the fact that “Islam is under attack.”

Madrasa Administrator

From the madrasa leadership's perspective, making these students “ideal Muslims who will not hesitate to sacrifice their lives for the cause of Islam” is yet another reason to focus primary education on religious texts.

Madrasa Leader*

“We have the power to mobilize masses that can make our government shake in their boots, these people trust us and will follow what we tell them, not what the politicians want...you can tell that to {the} Americans”

Madrasa Leader*

“We must regain our culture and identity. We will have to keep fighting the foreigners who have taken advantage of us because we trusted them. We must never trust their intentions.”

Madrasa Leader*

*Member of a Madrasa Oversight Board

After the Workshops

On new ways of thinking

“We feel motivated to think in innovative and creative ways. We have started looking at ourselves and our system. We have learned here how to plan things for a better future...what was our past...how are we faring today and what kind of planning do we need to do for the future? We have learned here that we need to help bring changes in our environment and our society.”

—Ten-day workshop evaluation comments from madrasa teacher in Islamabad

On modernizing curriculums

“The importance of getting contemporary education has become all the more clear in our minds, thanks to this program. I personally feel it is essential to start teaching modern subjects in our madrasas”.

—Ten-day workshop evaluation comments from madrasa teacher in Karachi

On the desire for peace

“We feel motivated enough to realize that it is our duty to come forward and work for peace and stability in the world.”

—Ten-day workshop evaluation comments from madrasa teacher in Karachi

“We need to change ourselves in many respects for the sake of reaching reconciliation in the society.”

—Ten-day workshop evaluation comments from madrasa teacher in Karachi

On integrating tolerance

“Tolerance and understanding are what is required when it comes to dealing with other religions. Every religion is good in its place.”

—Ten-day workshop evaluation comments from madrasa teacher in Karachi

“There are some ulama (religious leaders) who issue wrong fatwas against the common wisdom that demands us to keep good relations with the modern world.”

—Ten-day workshop evaluation comments from madrasa teacher in Karachi

“We must keep relations with non-Muslims and create opportunities to meet them more often. They are our brothers as well. Responsibility lies with ulema to make people understand this point.”

—Ten-day workshop evaluation comments from madrasa teacher in Karachi

On America and the West

“Before coming here we had apprehensions and suspicions particularly about the West and its culture. Now I think we can look beyond our prejudices and biases after attending this workshop.”

— Ten-day workshop evaluation comments from madrasa teacher in Karachi