

Salmah's Entrepreneurial Journey with Passion, Faith, and Community Support

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ABSTRACT

Salmah, a young entrepreneur from Batu Gajah, Perak, showcases a compelling journey of passion, resilience, and community collaboration rooted in Islamic values. Despite achieving academic excellence, Salmah chose entrepreneurship over further studies, supported by her mother. Together, they began selling traditional Malay snacks, embodying values like ta'awun (cooperation), taqwa (piety), and tawakal (trust in Allah). Encouraged by customers and friends, Salmah expanded into baking pastries, encountering initial struggles but persevering through patience and gratitude. Her business eventually flourished through community support and participation in local markets. Salmah's story illustrates the power of faith, mutual assistance, and sustainable growth, inspiring others to pursue their entrepreneurial dreams with integrity and dedication.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Islamic Values, Community Support, Sustainable Growth, Resilience

Background and Early Passion

Salmah, a spirited young woman from Batu Gajah, Perak, had always been passionate about entrepreneurship. Living in a low-cost terrace house with her parents, Salmah grew up surrounded by prestigious educational institutions such as University of Technology Petronas, UiTM Perak, Kolej Profesional MARA, and SMKA Sultan Azlan Shah. Despite achieving 7As in her SPM, Salmah wasn't interested in further studies, much to her father's disappointment. Her mother, understanding her daughter's passion, supported her decision.

Salmah started helping her mother sell traditional Malay snacks like cucur pisang, cucur bawang, and pisang goreng from a small roadside stall near their home. The stall operated

from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. daily and earned around RM200 each afternoon. Encouraged by their supportive neighbors, Salmah's mother obtained a business license, and a business permit from the local council to legitimize the small business.

Salmah's entrepreneurial journey was deeply rooted in Islamic values. She embodied ta'awun (cooperation) by working closely with her mother and neighbors, creating a supportive and collaborative environment. Their business was a collective effort, with each neighbor contributing in some way, whether by providing raw materials, helping with preparations, or promoting the stall within the community.

Her commitment to taqwa (piety) was evident in the ethical way she conducted her business. Salmah ensured that all their ingredients were halal and sourced from trusted suppliers. She also maintained high standards of cleanliness and quality, reflecting her devotion to operating her business in a manner pleasing to Allah.

Salmah practiced tawakal (trust in Allah) by relying on her faith to guide her decisions and actions. Despite the initial uncertainty and challenges of running a small business, she placed her trust in Allah's plan. She consistently prayed for guidance and success, believing that her hard work and sincerity would be rewarded.

Embracing New Opportunities

One day, a customer named Mr. Ahmad suggested they expand their offerings to include pastries like cupcakes and birthday cakes.

"Salmah, have you ever considered baking pastries? Cupcakes and birthday cakes could really sell well," Mr. Ahmad suggested while picking up his order of cucur pisang.

Salmah's eyes sparkled with interest. "I've always loved the idea of baking pastries. What do you think, Mak?"

Her mother smiled warmly. "I think it's a wonderful idea. You have the talent, Salmah. You should learn more about it."

Encouraged by her mother's support and the customer's suggestion, Salmah decided to take the plunge. She enrolled in a pastry course organized by a local government agency. The course provided her with knowledge from experienced pastry entrepreneurs, as well as financial aid and equipment.

During a neighborhood gathering, her friend Aisyah approached her. "Salmah, I heard you're taking a pastry course! That's amazing. I've always wanted to learn baking too."

Salmah grinned. "Yes, Aisyah! It's so exciting. The course is really helpful, and I've already learned so much. Maybe we can bake together sometime."

"Definitely! I can't wait to taste your pastries," Aisyah replied enthusiastically.

Another neighbor, Kak Ros, who often visited their stall, joined the conversation. "Salmah, if you need any help or ingredients, just let me know. I have some extra baking tools that you can use."

"Thank you so much, Kak Ros. Your support means a lot to me," Salmah said, feeling grateful for the community's encouragement.

As Salmah honed her baking skills, she began introducing cupcakes and small pastries at their stall. The new products were an instant hit, attracting even more customers. Salmah's father, who had been skeptical initially, now proudly supported her expanded business.

"Salmah, your cupcakes are delicious. I think we should start taking orders for birthday cakes as well," her father suggested one evening.

"I agree, Ayah. I've already received a few requests from our regular customers," Salmah replied, excited about the new opportunities.

Initial Struggles and Perseverance

Salmah and her mother had always shared a deep bond, strengthened by their mutual love for baking and their unwavering faith. When they decided to expand their small roadside stall, they believed it was the right step forward. Salmah had recently completed a business course provided by a local government training agency, and she was eager to apply her new knowledge.

Salmah: "Mak, we've rented a small shop nearby to accommodate the new equipment. You can continue selling traditional snacks at the roadside stall while I produce and sell pastries here."

Salmah's eyes sparkled with excitement, but her mother, with her years of wisdom, gently reminded her of the importance of their intentions.

Mother: "That sounds like a good plan, Salmah. But remember, we must keep our intentions pure and trust in Allah's plan. Our hard work will be rewarded, Insha'Allah."

Days turned into weeks, and despite Salmah's best efforts, the customer turnout at the new shop remained disappointingly low. She shared her frustrations with her mother one evening.

Salmah: "Yes, Mak. I've applied all the business knowledge gained from the local government training agency, but customer turnout is still low."

Her mother placed a comforting hand on her shoulder, her face serene.

Mother: "We must have tawakal, Salmah. Put our trust in Allah after putting in our best efforts. Let's not lose hope."

Salmah nodded, trying to draw strength from her mother's unwavering faith. However, she couldn't shake off the worry about their dwindling sales.

Salmah: "You're right, Mak. But it's disheartening that our neighbors, who were our initial supporters, can't buy pastries regularly as they prefer traditional meals."

Her mother pondered for a moment before responding, her eyes reflecting her thoughtful nature.

Mother: “This is where we practice ta'awun, cooperation and mutual support. Let's engage more with our community and understand their needs. Perhaps we can find a way to integrate our products with their preferences.”

Salmah felt a glimmer of hope at her mother's suggestion.

Salmah: “That's a good idea. I tried selling at your stall and through other local vendors, but it was unsuccessful.”

Her mother's expression softened with understanding.

Mother: “We need to have patience and taqwa, fear of Allah and awareness of His presence. Let's focus on building strong relationships with our customers and providing excellent service. Maybe we can offer samples or have special promotions to attract more people.”

Salmah's spirits lifted a little as she considered these new strategies.

Salmah: “Yes, Mak. I believe we should also pray for guidance and continue to work hard. With Allah's help, we will find a way to succeed.”

Her mother smiled; her faith as strong as ever.

Mother: “Indeed, Salmah. Keep faith in Allah's wisdom. Every challenge is an opportunity to grow and strengthen our iman. Let's continue our efforts with sincerity and trust in Allah's plan.”

Feeling reassured, Salmah hugged her mother.

Salmah: Thank you, Mak. Your words give me strength. Let's start by reaching out to our neighbors and understanding their preferences better. Insha'Allah, we will find a way to make this business successful.”

Mother: “Insha'Allah, my dear, Salmah. With hard work, faith, and the support of our community, we can achieve our goals.”

As they sat together that evening, planning their next steps, Salmah felt a renewed sense of purpose. With her mother's guidance and their shared faith in Allah, she believed they could overcome any challenge.

Overcoming Challenges with Patience and Gratitude

Facing financial difficulties, Salmah struggled to pay the shop rent, and the initial deposit provided by her mother was already exhausted. Her father, a municipal council worker, was frustrated as he had urged her to pursue further studies instead of business. Feeling disheartened, Salmah considered closing her shop and storing the equipment.

One evening, as Salmah was closing her shop, her mother arrived. Seeing the worry etched on her daughter's face, her mother took Salmah's hands in hers and said gently, "My dear, Salmah. Remember the value of patience (sabr). Allah tests those He loves, and with patience, you will find a way through this. Have faith and trust in His plan.”

Salmah sighed, "I don't know, Mak. It's so hard. Ayah was right; maybe I should have continued my studies."

Salmah's mother shook her head. "Your father loves you and wants what's best for you. But remember, in Islam, it's not only about what we achieve but how we achieve it. Your perseverance and hard work are part of your ibadah (worship). We must have tawakkul (trust in Allah)."

Inspired by her mother's words, Salmah decided to seek guidance from the local community leaders. There, she met Haji Ahmad, an elderly man known for his wisdom. Salmah poured out her troubles to him. Haji Ahmad listened patiently and then said, "Salmah, in times of difficulty, we must also show gratitude (shukr) for what we have. Reflect on your blessings and remember that Allah is always with you. Sometimes, what seems like a setback is a step towards something greater."

Salmah nodded, feeling a sense of calm. She began to pray more diligently, seeking Allah's guidance and strength. She also reached out to the community, sharing her struggles and asking for support. To her surprise, many came forward with advice, resources, and even offers of partnership.

One day, a customer named Aminah, who had heard about Salmah's situation, visited the shop. "Salmah, I believe in your vision," Aminah said. "Let's collaborate. I have some savings, and together we can expand your business. We can support each other and grow together, Insha'Allah."

Salmah felt a surge of hope. She thanked Aminah and accepted her offer, feeling grateful for the unexpected support. Together, they worked tirelessly, and gradually, the business began to thrive.

A Turning Point

One day, a former school teacher visited Salmah's shop to buy a birthday cake. As they chatted, the teacher noticed the determination in Salmah's eyes and inquired about her business. With a heartfelt sigh, Salmah candidly shared her challenges, mentioning the struggle to expand her customer base and sustain her income.

The teacher, inspired by Salmah's resilience, gently advised, "Salmah, do not lose hope. Remember, in Islam, Allah loves those who are patient and strive with sincere effort. Why not seek guidance from government agencies? They can provide valuable support and resources."

Salmah took this advice to heart, embodying the Islamic value of tawakal (trust in Allah) as she reached out to these agencies. Her sincere efforts and reliance on Allah's guidance bore fruit. With their recommendations, she started selling her products at night markets, morning markets, and participated in sales festivals organized by local and state governments.

Her business began to flourish. Each sale and interaction at the markets were not just transactions but opportunities to practice ta'awun (cooperation) and taqwa (piety). Salmah engaged with customers and fellow vendors with a spirit of cooperation and mutual support, reflecting the core values of her faith.

Seeing her success, the former teacher visited again, this time with a wide smile. "Salmah, your journey is truly inspiring. You've shown that with faith, perseverance, and a willingness to seek help, one can overcome any challenge. May Allah continue to bless your endeavors."

Salmah, with gratitude in her heart, replied, "Thank you for your encouragement and wise counsel. I have learned that in every hardship, there is ease, and with Allah's help, we can achieve great things. I am committed to upholding Islamic values in my business and continuing to grow with integrity and faith."

Exciting Developments and Breakthroughs

It just so happened that a well-known food blogger in the area spotted Salmah's stall at one of the other night markets. Intrigued by the inviting aroma and the vibrant display of her pastries, the blogger decided to give them a try. After tasting a few samples, she was not only captivated by the exquisite flavors and delicate textures but also moved by Salmah's inspiring story.

The blogger learned about Salmah's journey—how she had started from humble beginnings, facing numerous challenges, but always held on to her faith and principles. Salmah's dedication to using high-quality ingredients and traditional techniques resonated deeply with the blogger. Struck by this compelling combination of a heartwarming narrative and mouthwatering pastries, she decided to write an outstanding review that she titled "Sayang Salmah Pastry."

The review was a beautifully crafted piece that highlighted Salmah's skill, creativity, and resilience. It detailed the rich, buttery layers of her pastries, the subtle yet profound flavors, and the meticulous care she put into each creation. The post quickly went viral, garnering attention not just from the local community but from people all around the world. Comments and shares flooded in, with readers eager to taste these pastries themselves.

With the newfound fame, orders started pouring in from near and far. Customers were drawn to the story behind the pastries as much as they were to the pastries themselves. Salmah's kitchen buzzed with activity as she worked tirelessly to meet the growing demand, all the while maintaining her commitment to quality and authenticity.

Collaboration and Support

Through various agencies' initiatives, Salmah received entrepreneurial guidance, financial support, promotional opportunities, and digital business training. These resources helped her navigate the challenges of running a business. Over time, her sales improved significantly, and she began receiving bulk orders. Her perseverance, guided by the principles of patience (sabar) and gratitude (syukur), transformed her struggling shop into a thriving business hub.

One day, while discussing her journey with a fellow entrepreneur, Salmah shared her story with a sense of accomplishment and humility. "It's incredible how much support I've received," she began. "From learning to manage my finances better to promoting my business online, each step has been a blessing. The financial guidance helped me understand how to budget and invest wisely. The promotional opportunities expanded my reach beyond my expectations, and the digital business training opened up new avenues I hadn't considered before. It wasn't just about the financial support; it was about learning how to sustain and grow my business."

Her friend, inspired by Salmah's journey, responded, "Your story is truly inspiring, Salmah. It shows how important it is to combine passion with the right guidance and resources. Many people have dreams, but without the proper support, those dreams can fade. You've demonstrated that with determination and the right tools, even the most challenging situations can be overcome."

Salmah smiled, reflecting on her journey. "Indeed," she agreed. "It wasn't always easy, but with each challenge, I reminded myself to stay patient and grateful. Patience helped me endure the tough times, and gratitude kept me focused on the positives. This mindset, along with the support I received, made all the difference."

Their conversation highlighted the significance of community support and the power of perseverance. Salmah's success story became a beacon of hope for many aspiring entrepreneurs in her community, proving that with the right mix of determination, patience, gratitude, and support, anyone could transform their dreams into reality.

Community and Sustainable Growth

After Salmah's remarkable achievement, her contemporaries began to see her as a beacon of hope and inspiration. "Salmah, you've shown us that mere desire is insufficient," remarked Fatimah, a close friend and colleague. "It's your unwavering dedication, commitment to collaboration, and pursuit of ongoing education that truly make a difference."

Salmah smiled, appreciating the kind words but quick to shift the focus. "It's not just me, Fatimah. Taqwa, or 'God-consciousness,' has guided me in every step, ensuring my actions are aligned with my faith."

Ahmad, another contemporary, nodded in agreement. "And it's clear that tawakal, meaning 'reliance on God,' has given you the strength to trust in divine support and wisdom even in challenging times. I've seen how you handle adversity with such grace."

"Indeed," Salmah replied. "But it's also about ta'awun, or 'mutual assistance.' Engaging with others and fostering a spirit of cooperation and collective effort has been crucial. We achieve more together."

Her deep sense of syukur, meaning 'gratitude,' kept her grounded and appreciative of every blessing. "Every step of this journey has made me realize how much I have to be grateful for," Salmah said, her voice full of sincerity. "Gratitude keeps me grounded."

"Your patience, or sabar, is also something we all admire," added Siti, another friend. "You persevere despite obstacles, maintaining calm and resilience."

Salmah nodded. "Sabar is essential. Without it, we lose our way."

Salmah also embodied sejahtera, which translates to 'well-being,' as she sought to promote holistic health and harmony in her community. "Promoting well-being in our community has always been a priority. Sejahtera means creating a balance and harmony that benefits everyone," she explained.

Lastly, her commitment to lestari, meaning 'sustainability,' underscored her efforts to ensure that her actions today would benefit future generations. "Sustainability, or lestari, is about

ensuring our actions today benefit future generations. It's our responsibility," Salmah emphasized.

In every aspect of her journey, Salmah exemplified these core values, leaving an indelible mark on all who knew her. Her friends and contemporaries were not just inspired but also motivated to embody these values in their own lives.

Engaging the Community and Sharing Values

One evening, Salmah organized a small gathering at her shop, inviting customers, community leaders, former teachers, and friends. She shared her journey, emphasizing the importance of Islamic values in her success. She recounted how taqwa (God-consciousness) kept her grounded and focused, even during challenging times. She highlighted the role of tawakal (reliance on God), explaining how placing her trust in God's plan gave her the courage to take risks and embrace new opportunities.

Salmah's former teacher, Ustazah Mariam, praised her student's determination and the embodiment of ta'awun (mutual assistance) in her business practices. "Salmah's willingness to help others and share her knowledge has truly created a ripple effect in our community," Ustazah Mariam remarked.

A long-time friend, Aisyah, shared how Salmah's practice of syukur (gratitude) and sabar (patience) inspired her to start her own small business. "Whenever I faced difficulties, Salmah's words of encouragement reminded me to be grateful for what I have and to patiently work towards my goals," Aisyah said.

Building a Brighter Future

As the evening progressed, Salmah announced her plans to launch a series of workshops aimed at empowering aspiring entrepreneurs in the community. These workshops would not only cover practical business skills but also incorporate lessons on Islamic values like sejahtera (well-being) and lestari (sustainability). She emphasized that true success is not just about financial gain but about contributing to the overall well-being and sustainability of the community.

The gathering ended with a collective prayer, led by a community leader, asking for continued blessings and guidance. Salmah's story and the shared experiences of her supporters painted a vivid picture of how deeply ingrained Islamic values could lead to sustainable success and community upliftment.

Business Growth and Expansion

Salmah's pastry offerings include a variety of products such as tarts sold at RM45 (Tart Salmah Manis), RM48 (Tart Salmah Amboi) (in a box of four tarts), RM11 (Tart Salmah Comel), RM13 (Tart Salmah Mole) (Single 3 pieces tart), RM59 (Tart Salmah Ayu), RM65 (Tart Salmah Mulus) (Single 6 pieces tart), RM75 (Tart Salmah Manja), and RM95 (Tart Salmah Meletop) (Single 9 pieces tart). These are her hot-selling tarts, with many repeat purchases.

She also offers fruit tarts at RM25 (four pieces) (Salmah Gerak), RM50 (nine pieces) (Salmah Gemalai), Mini Tarts at RM28 (nine pieces), RM48, RM50 (16 pieces), RM75 (25 pieces, mix and match), and RM108 (36 pieces, mix and match). These are also popular hot-selling fruit tarts.

Additionally, Salmah offers mixed Berry Almond Tarts at RM70 (6 pieces) and RM92 (9 pieces), as well as local pastry products, both ready-to-eat and frozen, such as Samosa Ayam (pack 350g) at RM13.50, Karipap Kentang (15 pieces per pack) at RM12, and Samosa Serunding Ayam (packed at 500g) at RM19.

Learning from various agencies and street-smart individuals, Salmah realized the importance of directly reaching her customers. Practical avenues for her to introduce her products include pasar malam, pasar tani, pasar minggu, pasar sehari, pasar pagi, and various other marketplaces in Batu Gajah, Ipoh, Jelapang, Greentown, Lahat, Meru Raya, Teluk Intan, Bota Kanan, Sitiawan, Seri Manjung, and Taiping.

Apart from street sales, Salmah also utilizes her own digital platform to sell directly to customers.

Strong Product Line

Salmah's diverse range of pastry offerings, especially her hot-selling tarts, shows a strong product line catering to different customer preferences. The various price points allow for both affordable and premium options, attracting a wide customer base. For example, the Tart Salmah Comel at RM11 offers an entry point for budget-conscious customers, while the Tart Salmah Meletop at RM95 caters to those willing to spend more for a larger, premium product.

Revenue Projections

Given the popularity of her tarts and the high rate of repeat purchases, Salmah can project steady revenue growth. For instance, if she sells an average of 100 Tart Salmah Manis (RM45) and 50 Tart Salmah Meletop (RM95) each month, her monthly revenue from these two products alone would be RM11,750. Expanding this calculation to her full range of products and incorporating seasonal sales spikes during festivals or special events can provide a comprehensive revenue projection.

Business Direction and Strategy

Salmah's strategy of leveraging both traditional and digital sales channels ensures broad market reach and customer engagement. Her presence in local markets (pasar malam, pasar tani, etc.) allows her to capture the spontaneous buying behavior of customers, while her digital platform caters to the convenience of online shoppers. This dual approach not only maximizes her market penetration but also creates multiple revenue streams.

Sales Strategy

To further boost sales, Salmah can implement targeted promotions and discounts during peak times, such as festive seasons. Offering bundle deals, like a mix-and-match option for her mini tarts, can encourage customers to purchase in larger quantities. Additionally, collaborating with local cafes and restaurants to supply her tarts can open new B2B revenue streams.

Community Engagement and Islamic Values

Salmah's business model aligns with the Islamic values of ta'awun (cooperation), taqwa (piety), and tawakal (trust in God). By participating in local markets and engaging directly with her community, she fosters a sense of cooperation and mutual support. Her commitment to providing quality products reflects her piety and dedication to excellence. Trust in her

products and business practices builds a loyal customer base, enhancing her reputation and ensuring sustainable growth.

Way forward

Salmah's pastry business, with its diverse product offerings and strategic sales approach, is well-positioned for sustained growth. By leveraging both traditional marketplaces and digital platforms, she can maximize her reach and revenue potential. Her alignment with Islamic values further strengthens her connection with the community, ensuring long-term success and customer loyalty.

Conclusion

Salmah's journey from a small roadside stall to a thriving pastry business is a testament to the strength of combining passion with faith and community support. Her commitment to Islamic values like ta'awun, taqwa, and tawakal has guided her through challenges and successes. The collaboration with her community, the advice from mentors, and the support from local agencies have been crucial in her growth. Salmah's story emphasizes that entrepreneurship is not just about financial gain but also about building relationships, maintaining integrity, and contributing to the well-being of the community. Her resilience and dedication serve as an inspiration for aspiring entrepreneurs, demonstrating that with hard work, faith, and support, success is achievable.

Discussion Questions

1. Explain two ways Islamic values like ta'awun, taqwa, and tawakal influence Salmah's business decisions and practices.
2. Discuss the role of community support play in Salmah's entrepreneurial journey.
3. Explain two ways aspiring entrepreneurs balance the challenges of starting a business with maintaining personal and spiritual integrity.
4. Discuss two ways government agencies and local councils could support small businesses in rural and sub-urban areas
5. Explain two ways entrepreneurs could use both traditional and digital sales channels effectively to expand their market reach.