

MODULE 1

Class Title: What is Islam? – Part 1 of 2

Aim of Lesson: To see that Islam is a complete way of life, not just a set of religious beliefs

Category: Aqeedah:

Lesson Format: Activity-based class and discussion

(Greeting to students) *Assalam alaikum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh*

(*Taooz*) *Aoodhubillahi min AsShaytanir Rajeem*

(*Tasmiyah*) *Bismillahir Rahmanir Raheem*

(*Du'a*) *Rabbish rahli sadri wa yassirli amri wahlul uqdatum millisani yafqahu qawli*

(Surah At Ta-Ha 20: Verse 25-28)

Material needed:

- White board on stand
- White board markers

I want three volunteers please. There is only one drawing board so you have to stand in such a way that you give each other some room.

Take these markers. I am going to say a word and I want you guys to draw it in five seconds. Ready? Mouse.

(Each student draws a mouse)

Time's up. Let's have a look at these mice.

Student: This doesn't look like a mouse. It looks like a chicken with a tail!

Teacher: This mouse here has four legs! I want to draw a mouse as well. (Teacher draws a "computer mouse")

And what is this? This one looks like a centipede – sweetie, have you drawn a mouse or a centipede? Okay, that's fine, it's your mouse.

Thank you. Please go back to your places.

Three more volunteers please and whoever comes next, please make the pictures a little bigger so everyone can see them properly. Ok here we go. Quickly, now you have five seconds, open the markers and be ready to draw. Don't disturb these mice over here.

Now I am going to say another word – Peace.

Don't copy each other you have to work on your own. Two seconds are already gone. (Two students draw peace signs and one student draws peaceful scenery)

Teacher: Three more volunteers please. Come quickly. One person in the centre and two on the sides, and don't look at each other's drawings.

Ready? The word is.... Food

Time's up. Thank you, thank you, and thank you.

Okay, so three people came here and I asked them to draw mice. One made something which looks like a centipede, one made something like a chicken and another one made— a balloon? But do they look the same to you? No, right? Even though I asked them to draw the same thing. I said the same word: mouse. Something else comes to mind when I say “mouse” these days – a computer mouse. My mouse is that.

Peace – that is a difficult concept to draw, isn't it? Two of you made the boring peace sign and the third is creative. Please explain how this scenery means “peace” for you?

Student who made the scenery: To me this is peace. If I go to the beach and if it is deserted and if I see the sunset, it's peaceful for me.

Teacher: For you this is peace, wow, lovely.

Student: Isn't Islam also peace?

Teacher: Yes. Islam does mean peace, you're right; the meaning of Islam is peace. So if you were up here, how would *you* draw Islam?

Student: I would have drawn a person without eyes praying

Teacher: Come on up and quickly draw that and write peace and your name with it. So she is talking about Islam when I say the word peace. Last year when I took this class and said “peace” somebody heard “peas” and they drew peas!

Student: That's what I thought as well.

Teacher: All right, let's look at “food” now. We have a slice of pizza or is it a cone without the ice cream in it?

Student: It's a slice of pizza

Teacher: Okay, we also have a healthy eater who has made fruit - grapes, an apple and.... what is that round thing?

Student: An orange.

Teacher: And, finally, we have a cake. Right? It's cake, right?

It's very interesting, isn't it? You say one word and different people think of different things in their head. Does that happen? It just happened right here. Some people tend to copy and follow what the other person is doing while others have such originality, like the student who has drawn scenery for peace. Some people make a mouse look really funny while the other is even worse, and the third one is not even a mouse!

And then I said food, and it seems like they've drawn whatever food they like. If you ask me to draw food I'll be drawing for two hours.

Now if I say another word –I said peace and one of you thought 'Islam', so if I say the word Islam what comes to your mind?

Student: It's a religion.

Teacher: I know it's difficult to represent a concept through a picture or as one comprehensive form. So can you think of something that comes to your mind when I say Islam?

Students: *Allah*. Praying mat. Man praying.

Students: Hazrat Muhammad (pbuh).

Students: Prophets, Qur'an, *Ka'aba*, a mosque, *Ahadith*, Holy Qur'an, righteous deeds.

Teacher: Nobody said pillars. If someone said Islam to me, I would be thinking of pillars. So, how many different versions of Islam did we get? More than ten. So, the whole point of this exercise is that when we need to understand a concept we need to learn it from somebody or from something.

Were we all born Muslims over here?

Students: Yes.

Teacher: Born into Muslim families. So tell me how do you know about Islam?

Student: From what our parents and our elders told us. And even at school we learn about Islam through Islamiyat.

Teacher: Okay, what about you?

Student: I used to go to a *madrasah* {religious school} and then I started reading Qur'an on my own.

Teacher: So you used to go to a *madrasah* where you started learning, right? You were not born reading the Qur'an, were you?

Teacher: Anybody else?

Student: From TV and books.

Teacher: Okay, *alhamdulillah*.

So, we are born Muslims but we are not born with the knowledge of Islam, are we? We have to learn about our religion and there are only two sources of learning about Islam. Two authentic sources: one is the Qur'an and the other is the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (pbuh).

However, when we don't learn about Islam first hand, we form our own notions about what 'Islam' is and different people may have different notions. To be on the same page, to be able to work together as a group of Muslim people and as a group who understands what is being said in the Qur'an and the Sunnah, one has to **go to the** Qur'an and Sunnah. If it is a little complicated for you please ask questions.

So the same thing that happens with concepts happens particularly with our religion; there are so many different versions floating around. You must have heard; you are smart kids. So, have you heard that there are different versions of Islam? Some people say something and somebody is saying something else, while other people are saying something else... does that happen?

Student: Yes.

Teacher: The whole idea is that until and unless we have first hand knowledge about what Allah (swt) is saying in the Qur'an, what the Prophet (pbuh) is saying to us, how he is explaining the Qur'an to us, we will always be getting into this confusion of 'he said, she said.'

The reason I keep bringing up the name of the Prophet (pbuh) is because the interpretation of our *Deen* was given to the Prophet (pbuh). So, his interpretation is **the correct** interpretation and the chances of us getting a complete and clear picture of our *Deen*, by learning from his interpretation, are much higher.

Then we will not be making mice like these, you know what I mean? So, if we have a clear picture... for example, when I say 'apple', you have a clear picture in your head. Do you have a clear picture in your head?

Now I am thinking of an Apple computer because in today's world things are becoming more and more complicated. Things were easier when apple and blackberry were just fruit. But it's not like that anymore, is it? No. As things get more complicated, the versions of Islam get more complicated also. When words representing fruits are being used for things that are mechanical then we really need to pay more attention to understanding what Islam is all about.

I want five volunteers now, quickly. So we have five pillars of Islam right here. Come on you guys pretend to be pillars... haven't you done any pretend exercises in school?

(Teacher walks in between the students who are pretending to be pillars)

So, if there are five pillars, there has to be something else in between as well to make a complete building or house. Do just pillars make a complete building?

Student: They make half the building.

Teacher: Do they make half the building? I don't even see half the building; there is no roof, things will be falling all over the place and there are so many openings, I mean the whole world could come in and go out before you even know it. It's all open and exposed, isn't it? So we need to fill in the blanks over here, there have to be some bricks, there has to be a roof, you could put a door in or you could put in a window as well. There is a lot of work to be done around these five pillars, right? Go sit down now.

So, what are the five pillars of Islam?

Students: Faith, *salah*, *zakah*, *hajj* and fasting— *al saum*.

Teacher: So, many times when asked about Islam people just mention the five pillars. But, you just saw the girls making the pillars... did it seem like a complete structure to you? So, how can we think that the five pillars are a complete picture of Islam?

Somebody said that it's half a building; is it really half a building? This is not even half of a building, so what comes between the pillars? Any guesses?

What comes in between these pillars to make it a complete house of Islam?

Students: Bricks.

Teacher: What are the bricks?

Students: Effort, knowledge, belief in them, following them, hard work, not doing wrong things.

Teacher: *MashaAllah*.

In between these five pillars comes all the knowledge from the Qur'an and the Sunnah that makes a complete house. These will fill in the blanks and make the roof on top and make the complete house of Islam. Pillars never make a complete house. They support a structure but they are not the complete structure.

So, *inshaAllah*, in the next class we will try to stop this guess work. The whole point of the exercise today was to try to explain to you students how easy it is to get muddled up in a simple thing like a mouse and how easy it is to get muddled up in a concept as basic as peace. Peace can mean different things to different people, right? Similarly, Islam means different things to different people, but there is a definitive explanation of it, right?

Just like two plus two equals.... what? Four. Two plus two will always equal four but you can also make four by adding three with one or adding four ones. These different variables will still bring you four. So, we're going to try to see what Islam is all about. The meaning of Islam is something we are going to try and understand in perhaps one class or maybe even two classes.

We call ourselves Muslims, what does that mean? We say that our religion is Islam, right? When you fill out a form what do you write in the column of religion? Islam. So you need to

know what you are talking about. So that is what we will try to understand in great detail, *inshaAllah*.

Let's have a quick recap of what we did today.

When someone says that Islam means peace, what do you understand by that?

Student: It is a pure and simple religion that helps us in solving our difficulties.

Teacher: And how does that translate into peace?

Student: Because if you've got the solution to your problems, it gives you mental peace, you can relax, you are at ease.

Teacher: *Alhamdulillah* – what a beautiful explanation. Thank you.

Student: It's something you can use to get away from it all.

Teacher: What do you want to get away from?

Student: Stress of everyday life, competition etc.

Teacher: How can you use Islam for that?

Student: I think of Allah's names.

Teacher: And does that give you peace?

Student: Yes it does. The conviction that there's someone that you can ask anything from, who you are sure will fulfill it if it's good for you is pretty comforting.

Teacher: *Alhamdulillah*. Anybody else? Yeah?

Student: In Islam the idea is for people to unite and there is not much unity in the world and you feel this unity through Islam. That is how Islam is peaceful or Islam stands for peace because it stands for unity.

Teacher: *MashaAllah*, you guys are cerebral.

We are going to stop here because we are out of time. *Insha'Allah*, we will meet in the next class and then we will be talk some more about what Islam is all about.

(Du'a for end of a gathering) *Subhana Rabbika Rabbul Izzati 'amma yasifun wa salamun 'alal mursaleen, walhamdulillah Rabbil 'alameen*

(Parting salutation to students) *Assalam alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh*