

MODULE 5

Class Title: Volunteering

Aim of Lesson: To understand how volunteering is beneficial for the volunteer himself

Category: Personal Development

Lesson Format: Power point presentation & narration. Discussion

(NOTE to teacher: this class was conducted by a volunteer/social worker who is involved in several projects in Karachi, Pakistan. If you do not have personal volunteering experience and/or cannot find such a person, you can use the “theory” of volunteering as basis of your class)

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

(*Ta'awwudh*) *Aodhubillahi 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)

(Slides 1 – 4)

How many of you have done any volunteer work? Is it a requirement from your school; to do some hours of Community Service? Why do you think it is a requirement from your school? Do you think it benefits by your volunteering? Why is it so important for college applications? Do you think Harvard, Yale, Stanford, Cambridge etc. benefit when you do volunteer work in Pakistan?

(Slide 5 - 7)

What is the most important reason for doing volunteer work? To please Allah (swt), to show our gratitude by sharing with those who are not as privileged as us. Volunteering gives us the opportunity to change lives – including our own; you can help make a difference.

(Slides 8 – 12)

Have you heard the story about a spindly little sparrow & the horseman who was passing by? Well, this sparrow was lying on its back in the middle of the road. The horseman asked him what he was doing lying upside down like that. The sparrow said that he had heard that the sky was going to fall. The horseman asked, “Do you think your skinny little legs can hold it up?” The sparrow replied, “One does what one can.”

That is what it is all about; to put in our effort. That is all that Allah (swt) wants from us. If we would all put in our best, the world would be a different place. Even if others don't, at least we should have the satisfaction of knowing that we put in our best, *Insha'Allah*.

(Slides 13 – 15)

Benefits of giving:

- Finding a purpose; Research over the last 10 years has suggested that giving your time and energy by volunteering can give you a different perspective about life. This in turn will

help reinforce that you have a place and purpose in this world. In the book entitled *'The Healing Power of Doing Good: the Health and Spiritual Benefits of Helping Others'* written by Allan Luks and Peggy Payne, the authors provide medical documentation that volunteering strengthens one's sense of identity, improves insomnia and strengthens the immune system.

- Creating an Identity; It shows that you stand for something. You stand out from the crowd
(Slides 16 – 17)
- Building a Social Network; You get the opportunity to meet people you wouldn't have met under different circumstances and thus enhance your social network, which can be extremely rewarding and necessary during different stages in your life. Having this network of support provides you with people to turn to in times of need or for just some plain old fun.
- Improving Communication; According to the 'Canadian National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating' conducted in 2000, those questioned stated that volunteering helped them understand people better and improved their communication skills as well. The data from the survey also suggested that volunteering could be associated with improved job opportunities compared to those who did not take the time to volunteer. Further, the data supported the fact that volunteering leads to learning new skills which can be useful in a new job.

(Slides 18 – 20)

- Reducing Stress; In 2006 researchers at 'Johns Hopkins University' concluded a clinical trial testing the health benefits of older adults participating in a volunteer program called *'Experience Corps America'*, that volunteering has been shown to reduce stress and build self esteem. Researchers determined that older adults who volunteered in "troubled" urban schools had improved mental and physical health. The researchers even went so far as to say that while the older adults were improving the educational outcomes for teens, they were slowing their own aging process as well. A study in 'Ontario of volunteering' also suggested that volunteering improves self-esteem, reduces social isolation and stress. The researchers concluded that by volunteering, the volunteers actually lowered their blood pressure, strengthened their immune system, and increased the production of endorphins.
- Building Self Esteem; Volunteering makes you feel that you can help make a difference; that you have some worth. It helps you realize your potential.

(Slides 21 – 24)

- Being selfless; It makes you feel that I can help make a difference. I figure somewhere, I have some worth. Makes you realize your potential.
- ✓ "Giving liberates the soul of the giver." --*Maya Angelou*

- ✓ “Volunteers aren't paid, not because they are worthless, but because they are priceless.”
Anonymous

- ✓ "Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on Earth."
--Muhammad Ali

(Slide 25)

- ✓ Someone asked the anthropologist Margaret Mead (1901-1978), "What is the first sign you look for, to tell you of an ancient civilization?" The interviewer had in mind a tool or an article of clothing. Ms. Mead surprised him by answering, a "healed femur"; when someone breaks a femur, they can't survive by hunting, fishing or escaping from enemies unless they have help from someone else. Thus, a healed femur indicates that someone else helped that person, rather than abandoning him and saving themselves. Isn't that what we in philanthropy are all about; healing femurs of one sort or another?

Let me share with you all how all how I got into doing volunteer work:

As far back as I can remember; my kid sister wanted to open an orphanage. I wanted to make pots & pots of money so that I could travel, buy all the stuff I wanted & basically just have FUN! I decided to follow my dreams & my kid sister, hers. My first desire was to become a stewardess but that dream was shattered when my aunt pointed out that I would be like a glorified maid in the skies who would have to serve, clear up etc. All of a sudden, it didn't appear glamorous anymore. The next career on my wish list was beautician/makeup artist; I figured that I wouldn't have to study for that, would get to buy & use all the makeup I wanted & basically have a blast whilst making money! How cool was that!

Meanwhile, my sister started working towards her dream career - to become a teacher & set up a Vocational Training Centre for the kids on the streets. She thus joined a Montessori Course and I went for my Makeup Artistry Course in downtown Toronto at a prestigious Modelling Agency.

Whose career sounds more exciting, more fulfilling? Whose career would you want to follow to find happiness, peace & satisfaction? Don't tell me the answer; just make a note of it, along with your reasons as to why it would be so. For example, you would be happy because you would have lots of money/ get to travel, etc.

Anyway, I came back from Canada, started doing freelance work, then worked in salons, did fashion shows, makeovers, magazine layouts etc. I followed my dream some more & went for more courses, but after a while it wasn't exciting anymore! It became boring, unfulfilling. Hang on! What happened here? I wasn't getting the spiritual satisfaction/inner peace/nirvana I was supposed to. But wait a minute! What did I know about spiritual satisfaction/inner peace/nirvana? How can one tell if they are not getting any spiritual satisfaction? What are the signs or symptoms? Does your tummy ache? Do you wake up with cold sweats? Or, if you are getting spiritual satisfaction, do you start seeing stars or rainbows in the day? Or does one walk around with the halo around one's head?

For me, my symptoms were that in spite of making all the money, getting overtime, being praised for my work, getting recognition, hanging out & being with the bold & the beautiful, I came back at the end of the day feeling empty, like I hadn't really achieved anything. The models with their tantrums were starting to get on my nerves, the girl who had come for her makeover before the KGS May Queen Ball was frankly, irritating. They all seemed so shallow, so full of themselves, so mean but yet so lonely! They looked great; one would think the world was their oyster, or the world moved around their axis, but they didn't have any true friends. Sure, they had tons of acquaintances but none that they truly trusted. I didn't feel like I had accomplished anything by making the glamorous look even more glamorous, thus adding to their conceit & vanity!

There were times when I would envy their figures, popularity, etc. So, what was I feeling? Envious, unfulfilled, irritated, angry and ungrateful....all this after following and achieving my dream? There was obviously a problem here. *Alhamdulillah*, Allah (swt) being All Merciful, showed me a path without my realizing it. If someone had asked me to leave the so-called world of glitz & glamour and work with the poor & downtrodden instead, I would have said, "Who me? No, you have the wrong sister; go ask my kid sister, this is her department." Instead, I was invited to join a group of people who were working towards building a hospital for the treatment of Kidney diseases. Boring!!! Honestly speaking, I first had to enquire as to where the kidneys were, how many we had & what their function was. I learnt how to pronounce words like "Nephrologists" and "Lithotripter". All this was actually fun as I was helping to arrange fashion shows, walks, plays, variety programmes, *melas* etc. The glamour was there again, but now it was for a cause, so the "feel good" sensation started somewhat.

After a while, dissatisfaction set in again! Seeing my fellow fund raisers' 'Fendi' bags, 'Chanel' glasses, 'Bruno Magli' shoes, 'Louis Vitton' brief cases, 'Valentino' pens and 'Cartier' watches, the "Poor me" syndrome started again. I felt deprived, envious, irritated, and angry but *Alhamdulillah* with all this, I unintentionally found God! I guess I must have been on a journey of finding myself & in the process I was introduced to the Qur'an through these wonderful women. It was the first time I realized that all those Arabic words that I had read like a parrot with the *Qari sahib* actually meant something; they were words of guidance, like a self help book on how to attain peace, contentment & nirvana.

Thus, my journey with the Qur'an began. It was like a gentle friend, with words of encouragement sometimes tenderly & sometimes not so tenderly nudging me on. It made me realize that I was not sent to this world to just play & enjoy myself, I had a responsibility; if Allah (swt) has bestowed His blessings & bounty on me, I will be held accountable for them. I will be questioned about how I used them; whether they are my faculties, my education or my abilities. I wondered if I showed appreciation for whatever He had gifted me with. How does one show appreciation for all of one's blessings? By using them in His way and by benefitting mankind.

So, how did I translate it into my life? By doing volunteer work. This time however, it was with a difference; I got my hands dirty. I was not on the outside; without intending to, I jumped right in. *SubhanAllah!* A friend of mine suggested to her husband (who is a doctor), to use my help in his clinic in an under privileged area of Karachi. This was about 11 years ago, when my introduction to the field of counselling began. Along the way, I felt that I needed help. Most of the ailments of the women who came to me had their roots in financial problems; so we had to find a solution.

Giving them money on a monthly basis was not a solution. Most of these women could not leave their homes to work as maids as they had young children or it was frowned upon in their community. So, Allah (swt) sent a helper for me & we started a small cottage industry for these women. We started by getting them to stitch & embroider children's clothes. Initially they messed up big time, but *Alhamdulillah* a friend's husband gave us a large sum of money to start, so we could afford the losses & yet buy more fabric for the women to work on.

What I am trying to get across is that if you really want to work for Allah (swt) & His pleasure, He sends opportunities your way; you just have to grab them. You never know what your niche is, until you walk down different roads. He sends the means, the helpers. Now *MashaAllah* we have many women working for us from their homes. They manage to make money and help support their families; this gives them a feeling of self worth & helps with anxiety & depression, because they are not getting handouts, it is *halaal* (lawful in Islam) money that they earned through their labour.

Alhamdulillah, Allah (swt) then gave me more opportunities to work in His way; when we had the massive earthquake in the Northern areas of Pakistan in 2005. It was 8th October & I was in Makkah & it was *Ramadan*. I had gone for *Umrah* with my parents. I remember going for the 'Asr Salah & I met a girl from the UAE. We were talking while waiting for the *adhan* & she mentioned the earthquake in Pakistan. I rushed back to the hotel after the *salah* & switched on the television. I felt so helpless while watching all the devastation and I guess I must have prayed to be able to help them. When I got back to Karachi, my friend's husband (whose clinic I was working in) was in Muzaffarabad (where the earthquake had struck). He said that I was needed there for earthquake relief. A group of us was quickly formed & we set out in the last 10 days of *Ramadan*. I was quite nervous as there were tremors with landslides still going on every day. The living conditions were obviously inadequate. We had been warned that we would probably not be able to bathe at all in our 10 days there, would live in tents, use the *desi* (Eastern) toilets, and have smelly blankets which the previous relief workers had used. To top it off, we could only take one back pack & it was winter! We were 5 women & about 5 men. I don't know where those days went! We would be down at the medical camp all day & come back to our tents for *maghrib salah* & *iftaar*. Since it was the last 'Ashara of *Ramadaan* & they contained the blessed nights of *Laylatul Qadr*, we did not want to lose any opportunity for our *duas* to be accepted. We would thus pray *tahajjud/taraveeh* at about 3a.m. out in the cold, do our *suhoor*, pray *fajr salah* & then sleep for a bit before heading down to the medical camp again. We were assisting in the women & children's wards. It was fantastic! There was no concrete structure; the wards were in tents. I counselled the women & children, most of whom had undergone post traumatic stress disorder. Just imagine! In the blink of an eye, they lost their loved ones, homes, cattle and all their belongings. They were in a state of shock. The children were totally freaked out. Every time there was a tremor, they would cry as they thought that it was another earthquake. I vividly remember a boy of 6; he had become very quiet and would not respond to anyone. He just clung to his father. My son; who was 14 then, took time off from school & accompanied us. *SubhanAllah!* He managed to get this child to respond. He spent time with him, drew for him & made paper aeroplanes. I'm sure it must have had an impact on my son too, because *Alhamdulillah* he is now studying medicine & so far plans to go into psychiatry.

There was so much pain & suffering around us; I remember a pretty young girl called Nasreen who I used to counsel. She told me that she loved to wear high heels. She had hurt her leg & it was only joined together with one membrane. The doctors were quite certain that she would lose her leg. I think we all prayed with all our heart that her leg be saved & she lead a normal life after that. I pray that Allah (swt) answered our *duas*, because she was whisked off to Lahore in a helicopter to undergo intensive surgery. We also assisted in dressing the wounds of the injured, the post-op. care & once we were even summoned to deliver a baby. None of us had done this before, but this was a state of emergency, so we were briefed & told to wear the gowns and masks, scrub up & get ready! *Alhamdulillah*, the baby decided that it was not ready to come into the world; it probably sensed that there were all these novices waiting to assist it's mum & must have said, "I'll just wait till a doctor comes." Phew! That was a close call for us.

We also had a lot of wonderful moments there; we spent a few days of *Eid* there and went for *Eid salah* out in the open! It was awesome, surrounded by enormously high mountains, in the cold crisp air. I think this is where I felt Allah (swt)'s Majesty the most, ever. I felt so tiny, so worthless & insignificant; probably how an ant feels. We served the women & children who had come for the *salah* a very early lunch & then went back to the camp to greet the patients. *MashaAllah*, our volunteers put *mehndi* on the women's palms. Some kind soul had sent artificial jewellery for the women & toys for the children. It truly felt like *Eid*; it was probably the most meaningful *Eid* I have ever spent. The patients were touched that we had opted to spend *Eid* with them rather than with our families in Karachi.

Since then, I have been working with the '*Jinnah Hospital Oncology Ward*', the '*Children's Cancer Hospital*', '*Kaarigar Vocational Training Institute*', & also with a group of doctors who are trying to create an awareness about Mental Health & all the issues related to it; promoting communication skills between doctors & patients etc.

The reason for my long tale is to try & make you understand where I started from & where I have landed; in my sister's dream career! O my God! Social Work! Mother Teresa! Vocational Training Institute! All the stuff that I used to mock! Besides that, I had also dragged my poor son down this path! Where did I end up finding my spiritual satisfaction/inner peace/nirvana? In giving of myself. When I am with those that are less fortunate, I am grateful for my '*Panache*' slippers, my lawn *joras*, my *Cultus*, my health, my family, my security, my EVERYTHING! Thank You, thank You, thank You Allah.

I hope I have been able to inspire you guys in some way.

(Slides 27 – 29)

Where can you help? Where to Volunteer?

If you want to volunteer for a small non-profit organisation, your work may have more significance; larger organizations have a lot of volunteers. That's not to say though, that they don't need them, but your time will have more impact on a small organization. That small organization will also probably appreciate it more because you can make a huge difference to them. Most small non-profit organisations operate on a shoestring budget without cash to pay employees and having people volunteer might be the only way they can exist.

There are plenty of places & opportunities in Pakistan. Some of the ones I know are:

- *Darul Sukoon*
- The Kidney Centre
- SIUT
- *Behbood*
- The *Baithak* Schools
- The Citizens' Foundation

I haven't been involved with most of these, but you all are welcome to volunteer & get certificates for your time where I am involved in right now, which is '*The Children's Cancer Hospital*'. Some of the girls from your lot have already accompanied us there.

(Slides 30 – 31)

What can you offer?

What is really needed from you is your time, consistency, ideas, good spirits & love & affection. You can volunteer one Saturday a month or more when you have the time. The idea is to spend about 2 hours at the hospital. Tell the children stories in Urdu, play Ludo etc. with them, draw & colour with them; just spend fun time with them. These children come from poor homes; they have cancer & are undergoing treatment which can be painful, uncomfortable & exhausting. You all can be like rays of sunshine that will bring some joy to their lives. These children are away from their siblings, families and homes and how much can you do lying in bed when you're sick? You all will be a wonderful distraction *insha'Allah*.

(Slides 32 – 35)

Remember that in order to do volunteer work, you don't have to wait to join an organization or an NGO. You can take the initiative if you find that something needs to be done & no one is doing it. Besides that, random acts of kindness, like volunteering to teach the lady who works in your home how to read the Qur'an when you find out that she doesn't know how to do so, are also a part of volunteering.

Since you all have to spend some hours doing community work for your school/college, why not make the *niyah* (intention) of doing it for Allah (swt) to show your gratitude? In the process you will *inshaAllah* earn a reward in the *Akhirah* & also in the *duniya*; in the form of a certificate.

Remember I had asked you earlier on as to whose career would you want to follow to find happiness, peace & satisfaction? Now tell me....mine or my sisters'?

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

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