**MODULE 3**

**Class Title**: Reality or Illusion – make a choice

**Aim of the lesson**: To understand the difference between reality and virtual reality

**Category**: Personal Development

**Lesson Format**: Activity and power point presentation with discussion

(Greeting to students) *Assalamu ‘alaikum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh*

*(Ta’awwudh) A’oodhu billahi min Ash Shaytaanir Rajeem*

*(Tasmiyah) Bismillahir Rahmanir Raheem*

*(Du’a) Rabbish rahli sadri wa yassirli amri wahlul ‘uqdatum millisani yafqahu qawli* [Surah Ta-Ha 20: Verses 25-28]

Slide 1:

Today we are going to talk about something very complicated – yet extremely simple. Today we will figure out the definition of “reality” and the difference between reality and illusion.

Einstein – the greatest mind of the 20th century – said: “*Reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one.*”

What this means is that what we think is real is not actually real but just a figment of our imagination!

Confused? Yeah – hang in there. It will get simpler, I promise. You might be wondering why in heaven’s name should we talk about this confusing subject?

We need to discuss and understand this because we often confuse perception with reality.

That is, we mistake how we understand things for the way that they really are.  Our thoughts and feelings seem so real to us, that we conclude that they must be true. And we make very important decisions of our lives based on this conclusion.

But what if they weren’t – including even our most deeply held ideas and [beliefs](http://liveboldandbloom.com/02/health/how-to-kill-the-root-of-a-limiting-belief) about ourselves, about others and the world?

Allah (swt) has shown us in the Quran and Rasool Allah (pbuh) has shown us in his life how to separate reality from [perception](http://liveboldandbloom.com/07/career/the-big-fat-perception-deception) so that you can see things as they really are.

What we will do today is try to look at examples and situations from your life so it is easy for you to understand this.

Slides 2 - 6:

You see the thing is that we live in a world of information. Wow – it is a totally wired world. Our sources of information range from books – although unfortunately these days reading books is getting to be a rarity! – newspapers, magazines. Billboards – that stare straight at our face – screaming at us with all kinds of ads.

Movies – you guys go to the movies theatre now? So many new ones seemed to have cropped up in Karachi now.

Television – insane number of channels available. Hundreds, right? TV has literally invaded our homes.

Slides 7 & 8:

Last but not least, information technology has made it possible for us to get all of the above right in the palm of our hands – on our laptops and cell phones. You can read and watch everything, from Islamic lectures and Quran tafseer to the latest movies and TV shows and ridiculous junk – you name it, it is just a click away.

All this information, so freely and readily available is enough to make our heads spin! Don’t you think it is a bit much this constant whatsapping, instagramming, tweeting and God knows what else, day in and day out. Ping ping ping, ting ting ting – the phne goes constantly and we just cannot keep ourselves to give it a rest.

All of this information that we accumulate in our heads day in and day out plays a very important role in our lives. Don’t ever think that you watch a movie, see something on TV, read something on the net and that’s it, over and done with. No sir. That info plays a huge part in your life. Can anyone tell me what that role of information is in our lives?

Slides 9 & 10:

We form a picture of the world around us and we form a picture of our own selves based on that very information that we feed ourselves with through our eyes and ears.

Are you wondering how?

Who tells you whats cool and whats not? What is “in” and what is “out”. I am under confident because I am polite – for example.

And you see this picture of ourselves and of the world around us is what we call “reality.” We firmly believe that this how it is. I am like this. Period.

Slide 11:

However, if you sit back and think a little bit, you know use your noodles, you realize that hey, what I think and see and hear is not necessarily the way it is.

Confused?

I can understand why you may be confused by my statement. Because you see what we think is real is a lot of times not. There is a lot of confusion in reality.

Lets try to understand better with some examples

Slides 12 & 13:

What we hear can be misleading.

[Note: Have a quick exercise of the game “Chinese whispers”]

I said something else and by the time I reached to the back of the room it became something totally different. Confusion.

Slides 14 – 19:

What we see can be deceiving.

We see something with our own eyes and its not what I seems.

Look at this picture of camels. What do you see? Black camels? Well guess what. The black image is not the camel it is the shadow of the camel – he camels are these white things here.

This is a very famous picture of National Geographic magazine taken form high above.

Now look at these circles or wheels. Are they moving? But it is a static picture! How come we see these wheels moving? Hmm. This is an optical illusion. Where our eyes quite literally see something that is not actually there, but it seems so real to us and therefore we feel it is reality.

Have you ever seen a mirage? Sometimes in very hot weather, when you are driving down a road you see water further up. It happens a lot in deserts. Is the water there? No. But it seems so real.

Have you ever stood in front of those funny mirrors that make you look all weird?

Instead of a normal [plane mirror](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plane_mirror) that reflects a perfect mirror image, distorting mirrors are [curved mirrors](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Curved_mirrors), often using [convex](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Curved_mirrors#Convex_mirrors) and [concave](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Curved_mirrors#Concave_mirrors) sections to achieve the distorted effect. No one looks like that in reality – but that’s how they seems to look when they see themselves in a funny mirror.

Don’t our own eyes deceive us? Reality is something that we make up. Is that a camel or a Zebra?

Slides 20 & 21:

Confused again, right? What we feel because of all this can be confusing. But I saw it with my own eyes … you might think. Yes. You did see with your own eyes and I was not a magic trick but is it real?

Everything begins with a decision – decide now to be in charge of your own perception of reality. Because if you don’t, there are plenty of folks whose sole purpose in life is to craft that perception for you. Do you trust them to have your best interest in mind…?

Now that I have managed to thoroughly confuse you – let me clear up that confusion a bit

Slides 22 & 23:

You see, this thing we call our reality is made up of two things. The stuff that is apparent and we can see it with these eyes and hear it with these ears plus stuff that we cannot see or hear.

This unseen reality is what Allah (swt) calls *ghaib* in the Quran.

The “seen reality” is perceived and understood by our 5 senses. In other words we can say that the receivers of seen reality are our 5 senses. We are convinced that something is real because we see it with our eyes, or hear it with our ears, or taste it with our tongue or touch it and feel it or smell it with our nose.

Slides 24 – 26:

But keep in mind what we just talked about – if we rely **only** on our senses and make a picture of the world based on that alone we can be seriously deceived. We might end up believing in things that don’t even exist or not believing in very real stuff. Does the moon look what we see?

Simple example – if we use our senses alone, and believe what we see on TV or in the movies what will happen is we will get totally brain washed into thinking what we see on TV is real. And that is how we start to define our reality.

Long time back when I was in school, there was this TV show called six million dollar man. Where the hero was a super hero and could do ridiculously amazing stuff like jumping off buildings, running at the speed of a race car etc. One young kid, perhaps 5 or 6 year old, actually jumped off his roof thinking he was that six million dollar man! Poor child barely survived, broke his legs.

Now this was a small child. But older kids like you and even adults like me get taken in by “virtual reality” of the media if we rely on our senses alone, without any other guidance. How? By thinking that all the world is a stage, lights camera action. Our behavior becomes “filmi” our language, the way we dress, the way we interact with others is based on what we “see and hear” on the screen. Doesn’t that happen?

We can never have a complete and clear picture of what is truly real by using “seen reality”. If I give you a jigsaw puzzle, how will you complete the picture? By putting all the pieces together. What if some pieces were hidden away? Your picture would remain incomplete no matter what you did.

Slide 27:

Then with all this information coming from all these sources, we become like this poor donkey – overloaded with info and so over whelmed that he is stuck in mid-air! Looks funny but it is actually quite tragic, if you think about it.

Slides 28 & 29:

The one and only source of “unseen reality” or *ghaib* is the Quran. That’s it. Period. And we understand the Quran clearly with the help of the hadith of the Prophet (pbuh). He (pbuh) was the deliverer and teacher of the last testament of God to mankind and we need his (pbuh) help in understanding it.

Allah (swt) has the missing jigsaw puzzle pieces about ourselves, about our lives, about how things really work in the Quran.

Slide 30:

In order to complete my picture, to solve my puzzle I have to refer to the Quran. I have to get guidance from it along with what I see and hear and smell and touch – only then will my picture be based on reality. Only then will my picture be real.

So you see it is not an option for human beings to read, learn and study the Quran and what is in it. Not just the words, but the meanings. See what Allah (swt) is saying. It is our absolute, essential need.

Slide 31:

And the only receiver of this unseen reality, of this *wahi* – this revelation from God - is our heart.

Not our brain, not any of our senses, but this piece of throbbing flesh inside of us which we call the heart. Our physical heart pumps blood and what have you, but Allah (swt) has kept a spiritual heart there as well, which medical science cannot prove. And Allah (swt) has given this special ability to this spiritual heart of receiving and understanding His revelation, His signs, His communication to us. Isnt that absolutely amazing! Subhan Allah

You see, Allah (swt) is our Creator and He is the One who has given our senses the capability that they have. We can see with our eyes we cannot hear with them can we? We smell with our nose and so on. Allah has not given these senses the ability to process unseen reality the way the heart does.

We read the Quran through ur eyes, we hear it through our ears but if our hearts are not involved – we could be reading and hearing Latin or Shakespeare or some poetry, same same… no difference.

Slide 32:

That is why Allah (swt) says in the Quran:

…They have hearts wherewith they understand not, and they have eyes wherewith they see not, and they have ears wherewith they hear not. They are like cattle, even more astray; those they are the heedless ones.

(Surah Al ‘Aaraf: verse 179)

Are these people who are described here deaf and dumb physically? No. Their senses work, they see “seen reality” but because their hearts are not tuned into the “unseen reality” it is as if they were blind and deaf.

Seen reality on its own is something that animals live on. Like cattle – Allah (swt) says. They are nothing better than cattle who rely only on one part of reality and do not have the ability of understanding the complete picture. Cattle being cattle is ok, that’s how they have been created. But us human beings who have the ability fr so much more then becoming like those cows and buffaloes – that is sad.

Slide 33:

In another place Allah (swt) says:

Have they not travelled through the land, and have they hearts wherewith to understand and ears wherewith to hear? Verily, it is not the eyes that grow blind, but it is the hearts which are in the breasts that grow blind.

(Surah Al Hajj: Verse 46)

Slide 34:

The Prophet (pbuh) said: ….. Beware, in the body there is a flesh; if it is sound, the whole body is sound, and if it is corrupt, the whole body is corrupt, and behold, it is the heart.“ {Bukari & Muslim}

Slide 35:

And in another hadith the Prophet (pbuh) said: Indeed Allah does not look at your faces or your wealth. Instead, He looks at your hearts and your deeds. {Muslim}

Slides 36 – 39:

The fact that our heart is the centre of our emotions is universally accepted by all – Muslims, non- Muslims, atheists everyone.

Helen Keller – you know Helen Keller right? She was deaf and dumb yet did phenomenal stuff in her life. She said something so profound.

“The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt with the heart.”

So true. We always like people who make us “feel good”. In Urdu we say I am doing this because *dil chahta hai* (my heart wants it).

We can do such crazy, daring things because – *dil chahta hai* – who in their right mind would bungee jump! Or do any extreme sport or wear high heels…Good Lord. But when *dil chahta hai* we do it.

Does anyone want to share something you did simply because *dil chah raha thaa*?

And when the heart is not involved. When the heart is sleeping, snoring away somewhere inside the body, then what happens? Nothing. Zilch. Blackout. Nothing happens. Then we are in a comatose situation, almost sleep walking through our days, our weeks and our life … Ooh, such a scary thought.

Slide 40:

After sitting through all this seen reality, unseen reality, 5 senses, heart involved, heart sleeping – you might be wondering – so – what difference does it make if my reality is real or just an illusion.

I am pretty fine and dandy living in la la land. It is convenient. I don’t have to think much, contemplate on everything, understand the Quran, look at the sunnah of the Prophet (pbuh). I am pretty happy watching movies, hanging out with friends, just chilling.

Why bother with such a lot of philosophical, spiritual mumbo jumbo?

You might think that. And you know what? That is a very valid question and perfectly logical way of thinking. Yes it is. Why put ourselves through discomfort, hard work etc when we can cruise through life like a boss?

Slide 41 - 43:

The reason we must care. The reason we do not really have an option to sit back and live in “virtual reality” without making an effort to understand “reality” is nature of how life is.

You see, our life is a series of choices. Everyday we make thousands of choices - some consciously and some unconsciously.

And these days the choices are staggering. How many flavours of ice-cream do you have to choose from? Or paint or clothes or accessories? Whew… so many it makes your head spin. I always get a head ache when I go shopping – so many options of everything.

Few years back my daughter was choosing her subjects for O levels and we had long discussions for weeks that this option in combination with that has these pros and these cons etc. My husband started laughing and said when he was n school and time to choose subjects came his teacher walked in and asked the class, “so who wants pre-medical and who wants pre-engineering?” that’s it. Those were the two options.

The point is, you all have a lot of options in everything – whether it is your subjects in school, your career choices or your choice of ice cream or what channel to watch on TV.

Slide 44:

But remember. Every choice we make. Get up for Fajr or put the alarm on snooze. Mom is calling – go listen to her or pretend I didn’t hear. I am stuck with that one answer in the Math test, my friend’s paper is so visible – shall I peak or not?

Every choice you make takes you closer to your destination.

Allah (swt) has given you and me this freedom of choice. He (swt) does not hold our hand back if we are abut to do something bad. No. and He (swt) may not reward us instantaneously for doing something good either. But each choice we make – everyday, takes us towards our final end.

That reality is something we understand when we live our life according to our sense plus guidance from Quran and sunnah.

Slide 45:

And my dears, the reality is, that in the end there are only two places to go. No third option. No la la land out there. Stark reality of either Jannah or Jahannum. Heaven or Hell. That’s it. No more thousands of options like the TV channels of this world.

Slides 46 & 47:

So pick and choose wisely.

To help us make the right choices, choices based on reality not virtual reality, Allah (swt) has so clearly given us information about how things work, who we are, what are the consequences of our actions in this world, description of Jannah, description of Hell. Information that is beneficial for us. Information that helps us make choices that have long-term benefits for us, not just temporary hoo haa.

Here at Perceptions, we try to help not just you guys but each other too to make educated and informed choices. We talk about what Allah (swt) has told us in the Quran, not as an intellectual exercise but so that we get a chance of going to the right place in the end. We discuss the ways of Rasool Allah (pbuh) not just as time-pass – no, but so that we learn from him how to make the right choices that will earn us maximum brownie points with Allah (swt).

I will say Assalam alaikum instead of simply hi because I know Rasool Allah (pbuh) has said saying salam is the best of Islam and also whoever says salam first gets 30 rewards. Or I make it a point to eat with my right hand and smile because it is sunnah. How cool is that.

We make these apparently little little choices based on the info we get from the Quran and sunnah – but hey, these very little choices have huge consequences and *in sha Allah* these very little choices may be the reason to tip the scales on the right side for you and me, with Allah’s mercy.

Have any of you been for umrah or Hajj? When you are driving towards Makkah, you see this sign that says – for Muslims only. Gives me goosebumps! And who is a Muslim? A Muslim is the person whose heart has submitted to his Lord, who willingly accepts Allah (swt) as his Master and King. Who has found reality from the revelation and made a choice to please none but Allah (swt).

Slide 48:

And another reality is that Allah (swt) has reserved the road to Heaven and Heaven for Muslims only. Very exclusive, no riff raff allowed place.

Allah (swt) says:

“The day when wealth and children will not benefit anyone

except he who will come to Allah with a *Qalb-e-Saleem* (a sound heart).”

(Surah Ash Shu’ara 26: Verses 88-89)

Saleem – Muslim – sounds similar. Yup. The heart that said *dil chah raha hai* to please Allah (swt). A heart full of love for Allah (swt).

Slides 49 & 50:

Rasool Allah (pbuh) – being our amazing teacher and knowing the “reality” closely, taught us these two beautiful du’as. One to plead Allah for turning our hearts towards His deen, the way of life that He (swt) likes and has endorsed.

یا مقلب القلوب ثبّت قلبی علی دینک

O’ Turner of Hearts! Make my heart steadfast on Your Deen {Tirmidhi}

And the other to beg Allah (swt) for His love. Because as we have been discussing when we love something or someone we willingly do stuff that would be otherwise so heavy and difficult for us to do.

So let us all sincerely pray and make du’a to Allah (swt):

اللّھمّ انّی اسئلک حبّک و حبّ من یّحبّک والعمل الذی یبلّغنی حبّک

O’ Allah! I beg You for Your love and the love of the person who loves You and of that deed which would make me worthy of Your love {Tirmidhi}

Whenever you feel that your heart is not in your *salah* or in righteous deeds, make du’a to Allah and He will turn your heart *in sha Allah*. Whenever you feel *dil nahi chah raha* pray for Allah’s love and *in sha Allah* that will help.

May Allah (swt) help and guide us all in making the right choices in this world so we get the maximum benefit in the next world – ameen.

(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*