

MODULE 1

Class Title: Surah Al-Ikhlās

Aim of Lesson: To understand the key message of the *surah*.

Category: Scripture

Lesson Format: PowerPoint presentation with narration and discussion

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

(*Ta'oodh*) *A'oodhubillahi min AsShaytanir Rajeem*

(*Tasmiyah*) *Bismillahir Rahmanir Raheem*

(*Du'a*) *Rabbishrahli sadri wa yassirli amri wahlul uqdatum millisani yafqahu qawli* (Surah At Ta-Ha 20: Verse 25-28)

Slide 1:

InshaAllah, today we're going to talk about an extremely important *Surah* {chapter} of the *Qur'an*. This is a very popular *surah* with most of us. Can anyone guess which one? *Surah Al-Ikhlās*. We recite it often in our *salah*, don't we? I'm absolutely certain that everyone sitting in this class is very familiar with it, and knows it by heart.

Slide 2:

(Teacher recites *Surah Ikhlās*)

Slide 3:

To begin with, let's look at the historical background of this *Surah*. What was happening in Makkah when this *Surah* was revealed? What was the prevailing concept of God at the time of the Prophet (pbuh)?

Student: Idol worshipping.

Slide 4:

Idols. Yes, the Arabs used to worship idols. These idols were usually made in the human form; they were made of stones or wood. Sometimes, they were even made of gold or silver. Some idols even belonged to a whole family of idols. Some, it was believed, could become living humans, whenever they willed. These idols were devoutly and fervently worshipped. In fact, some devotees actually gave them food and drink. Can you believe that?!

Slide 5:

Next, we all need to understand that idolaters, or *mushrikeen*, {infidels} believe in God with the capital 'G', as well as in gods with the small 'g'. These idols were gods with the small "g". So, it's not that they didn't believe in Allah (swt); they were not unbelievers. They believed in Him, but they simultaneously believed in these minor gods. The idols were also gods, only smaller

versions; junior versions, you could say. So, they had a very good relationship with God with capital 'G' and the gods with a small 'g', simultaneously. They believed that if they pleased these idols, then Allah (swt) would in turn be pleased. They believed their idols could put in a good word with Allah (swt) on their behalf.

Slide 6:

Christians were also present during the time of the Prophet (pbuh). As today, though they weren't overt idol worshippers, they believed God has a son. Don't they believe that God has a son? So whom did they call "God's son"? Yes, Esa (as) or Jesus Christ.

Slide 7:

So there were idolaters, there were Christians and there were Jews. Now the Jews believed in one God too, but their God had human qualities: He could go for a walk, in human form; He could also wrestle with His slaves, in human form. So their concept of God was actually quite distorted. Wouldn't you agree?

Furthermore, similar to the Christians' belief, their God also had a son, named Uzair (as). So they believed Uzair (as) to be God's son. Thus, their concept of God was very different from that of the Muslims.

So we see, the Christians had a God, the Jews had a God, the idolaters had gods, but their concept of God was very different from the true concept of God, i.e. God with a capital "G".

Slide 8:

There were also Zoroastrians. They're also known as fire worshippers. They believe in God with a form.

Slide 9:

Besides these, there were also Sabians; they used to worship stars. They believed in God and gods; the small gods; the gods with the small 'g'; those were the stars. They also used to worship the angels, as God's daughters. So they believed in God but with daughters.

Slide 10:

Now, let's identify the concept of God in Islam. What do we believe about Allah (swt)?

Student: He has no family.

Student: Allah (swt) is the One and Only God.

Teacher: Allah (swt) is the sole, unique God, yes. Being unique, He doesn't have any human qualities, let alone a human form, or the form or qualities of any one of His creations. Nor was

He created. So clearly, the concept of God in Islam is totally different from that of God or gods in other religions. Is there even one common concept amongst Islam and the other religions? Can anyone identify it?

Student: They all believe in one major God.

Teacher: Yes so it seems, but is our concept of God with a capital 'G' the same as theirs?

Student: No.

Teacher: Not a bit. God with a capital 'G' has sons and daughters according to their religions. So this is a major difference. So then, what's common?

Student: They all worship their God or gods.

Teacher: They worship, and we also worship, true. But isn't the way we worship very different from their ways? So can anyone identify what the common concept is? Let me tell you: the only commonality is the word 'God' and nothing else! They use the word God and we use the word God, that's it!

Now, when the Prophet (pbuh) invited the people of Makkah towards Allah (swt), describing Him as the One and Only with no associates, the questions which arose in their minds were, "How is that possible? No associates? No idols, no sons, no daughters? How is that possible?" They were thoroughly confused, baffled. They found it strange and utterly unbelievable that God could be One and Alone, without any associates.

Slide 11:

The *Quraish* inquired of the Prophet (pbuh), "What is Allah's (swt) family tree?"

They insisted He had to have some kind of family tree asking, "Who were His fathers and who were His children?"

They were convinced that just as all human beings have family trees, Allah (swt) should also have a family tree.

Slide 12:

The Jews asked what He was made up of. They knew angels are made of light, humans of clay, *jinn*s of fire, and the sky from smoke, so they insisted that the Prophet (pbuh) had to tell them what Allah (swt) is made up of.

The Christian also wondered, and asked, "What is your *Rabb* {Sustainer} made up of?"

So, they both wanted some kind of form to be given to Allah (swt). They insisted He had to be made of something. Was it light? Smoke? Rock? As both groups had a tradition of materializing their gods, of giving them a material form, they couldn't fathom a god without one.

In contrast, what are the three principal doctrines of Islam? The scholars say that they are : Firstly, *Tawheed* i.e. God is One, Alone, Unique and has absolutely no partners. This is the foremost doctrine. Secondly, *Risalat* i.e. Allah (swt) has always sent prophets to guide humans. The third essential doctrine is *Akhirah* i.e. the concept of accountability of all humans on the Day of Judgment.

Thus, these three doctrines are the core beliefs of all Muslims.

Slide 13:

Naturally then, the *Qur'an* is essentially based on these:

1. *Tawheed*: oneness of God;
2. *Risalat*: divinely appointed prophets for all humans, throughout time;
3. *Akhirah*: accountability of all humans on the Day of Judgment.

Slide 14:

Surah Al-Ikhlās solely teaches the first doctrine of *Tawheed*. This *Surah* alone has been attributed to equal one third of the *Qur'an* by the Prophet (pbuh). He said it was equal to one third of the entire *Qur'an* [Sahih Bukhari, Volume 9, Book 93, Number 471]

Why do you suppose? Well, the scholars say that as there are three core doctrines in Islam, and this *Surah* deals with the first one in its entirety, it's equal to one third.

In the two *sunnah rak'ah* {unit of salah} of *Fajr* {obligatory morning prayer}, as well as the two *sunnah* of *Maghrib* {obligatory evening prayer}, the Prophet (pbuh) used to recite, firstly *Surah Al-Ikhlās*, and secondly *Surat Al-Kafirun* [Muslim]

Slide 15:

Surah Al-Ikhlās is actually a litmus test. What's a litmus test? It actually tells the difference between two things. *Surah Al-Ikhlās* is a litmus of belief. It's a test which checks whether we truly believe that Allah (swt) is the actual God or not. That's the litmus test: is our God the REAL God?

Slide 16:

Now, let's just analyze each and every *ayat* and try to understand this foundational *Surah* of the

Qur'an. Then, let's try to establish if we actually believe in the God that we are supposed to believe in. Let's begin:

(Teacher recites first *ayat* of *Surah Al-Ikhlās*)

In this *ayat*, the most important word is “*Ahad*”: One, Unique; absolutely no one is like Him. This is the first attribute of Allah (swt) stated in this *Surah* that we're supposed to believe in. He is One and Unique. Do we believe that Allah is: firstly, One; and secondly, Unique?

Slides 17:

Now, let me try and make you understand what Allah (swt) should mean to us, by way of some analogies. To begin with, let's say that you have a ring, a beautiful, beautiful, ring that no one else in the whole world has. How would you feel about that ring? How would you feel about this prized possession? You would be possessive, overprotective, and meticulous in caring for it. It would be extremely precious to you as you'd be aware that it's the only ring of this kind anywhere; that it's not some ordinary piece of jewelry; that it's unique. Obviously, there wouldn't be anything else dearer to you than that particular ring, which only you possess.

Similarly, the scholars say that “*Ahad*” is a quality unique to Allah (swt). He uses this attribute solely for Himself. By describing Himself thus, Allah is telling us that He should be the most precious to us, of all things.

Slide 18:

As a result, it's only but natural that passionate emotions, such as love, adoration, longing, fear, etc. should be linked with Him.

When Bilal (ra) was being tortured, what did he keep repeating? Does anyone remember?

“*Ahad, Ahad*,” was all that he persistently cried. Clearly, he was able to bear the painful torture meted out to him because of his strong, emotional bond with Allah (swt). To him, Allah (swt)--the One, the Unique--was extremely precious. Despite the fact that his tormentor, Ummayah bin Khalf, put large, hot stones on his chest while he lay on the scorching desert sand, with the sun's inferno burning down on him, all he could cry was, “*Ahad, Ahad!*” Obviously, it was his emotional link with Allah (swt) which sustained him through this painful ordeal. Thus, as true believers, we should have just such an emotional link with our Creator.

Slide 19:

In the second analogy, I want you all to imagine, for just now, that you're servants. Let's just imagine that all of us are servants, to understand this next analogy. Now each of you imagine that you have two masters. Not one master, but two. Okay? Now, how difficult would it be for you to please both of them, all of the time? What kind of problems do you imagine you'll confront? One might request one thing; the other might request something entirely different.

One may say, “Oh! Come and clean my part of the house first.”

The other one may say, at the same time, “No, no, come clean my part of the house first!”

The first one might instruct you to attend to her at 7 o’clock; the other one might instruct the same. So who will you attend to, then? If you were to serve two masters simultaneously, your life would become extremely difficult, frustrating, and, full of conflicts and turmoil; you might not be able to function at all!

So, it’s certainly a blessing for us that God is One: Allah (swt). We have just One Lord. We only have to listen to Him. We just have to do what He says. No conflicts, no arguments, no turmoil, no frustrations! Imagine having two Gods, how difficult would that be? Very, very, difficult indeed! But with only one God, no matter what commands are given to us, we know we just have to follow those. However, if we had two gods, one may have commanded us to do one thing, and the other something entirely different! Then what?! It would be very, very difficult! Without doubt, it’s a great blessing and mercy for us that we don’t have more than one god.

In Hinduism, there are many, many gods; a whole pantheon of them. They are just like their slaves (people) in emotions and behaviors. In fact, they even fight with one another! Yes, and sometimes they’re jealous of each other, angry at others, and often times, full of spite and hate. They put themselves in lots of problems, even going to war with one another!

Slide 20:

As Muslims, all we need to do is just obey Allah (swt). Focus, focus, focus! Our focus should be one entity alone, and that is Allah (swt). We don’t need to worry about what anyone else says! Why? Because He has no partners; He is just One. No conflicts, no turmoil, no frustration; just order and peace!

Slide 21:

Are we all aware that only Allah (swt) can pull us out from any kind of difficulty? We should all firmly believe this, especially whenever we are met with hard times. If we want to have a deep, emotional link with Allah (swt), we should depend completely on him for everything, and be convinced that He alone can pull us out of tough times.

Slide 22:

Then, after He’s pulled us out, who are we supposed to thank? Of course, Allah (swt). He is, after all, the one who helped us. So we just need to focus on Him, thank Him and show our gratitude by trying our outmost to keep Allah (swt) happy. Do we mere humans, really have the ability to make Him happy? Yes, by obeying Him! It’s just that simple! Our lives can be very, very easy if we can fully grasp the concept of the Oneness of Allah (swt). Don’t you think so? Don’t you think your lives would then become much simpler?

Slide 23:

Let me give you an example of how complex life was for the *Quraish* because of their belief in multiple gods. Do you know what they used to do when they wanted something? They used to ask one god for it, first. If he wasn't able to grant their prayer, do you know what they did? They'd just break the idol! As the god was useless, they had no need of him! Then, they'd turn to another with the same need; they used to start worshiping him, instead. Imagine the uncertainty and frustration the *Quraish* went through. They couldn't really turn to a single god with complete and utter trust. But, *Alhamdulillah*, we need not feel any such feelings. We know that there is just one Allah (swt) who alone hears us, listens to, and can help us. Right?

What if sometimes He doesn't give us what we want, or asked for? Should we be angry with Him? Can we blame Him, angrily? No? Why not? Firstly, we can't, and we don't, as we should have firm faith in His power to help us. We also believe He knows what's best for us, in this world and the next; even though we may not understand His Wisdom. Finally, there isn't anyone else we can turn to, who can help us. We don't have the privilege of condemning and breaking our God, nor of leaving one for another. So it's Him and only Him, or absolutely no one! Then we'd surely be lost!

Slide 24-26:

In the second verse, Allah (swt) says "*Allah hus-Samad*".

As-Samad is a very important attribute of Allah (swt); it's the second attribute in this *Surah*. Self sufficient; He is enough. What does this mean?

We're all dependent on Allah (swt), but He's not dependent on any of His creations. He is fully self-sufficient. He doesn't require you or me for anything. This is the meaning of this attribute. He isn't dependent on anyone, for anything. He's *As-Samad*. So, what was the first attribute mentioned? Unique and One, or "*Ahad*". The second attribute? "*As-Samad*", or the Self Sufficient, the Absolute.

As *As-Samad*, the whole universe is in Allah's (swt) hand.

Let me give you an example of this. If I say that I have a pigeon in my hand....look at this image. What does it mean? I can do anything with this pigeon, as it's mine. Right? The pigeon cannot fly away; it can't eat; it can't do anything because it is entirely in my control. I can do whatever I want with this pigeon.

Similarly, the whole universe, and all that is in it is in Allah's (swt) grasp. He can do whatever He wants to, to any and all parts of it, whenever He wants to. This is the absolute power He possesses. This is just a simple example to help us understand that Allah (swt) can do absolutely anything He wants to. He can do anything.

Moving on.

Slides 27-29:

Teacher reads third *ayat*,

“He begets not, nor was He begotten.”

So what’s the third attribute of Allah (swt) being described here? Allah (swt) is clearly telling us that He is neither the parent of anyone, nor the offspring; He has no descendents, nor ascendants. At the time of this *Surah*’s revelation, the *mushrikeen* used to ask the Prophet (pbuh) who Allah (swt) inherited His kingdom from. They asserted that there had to be someone before Allah (swt). So Allah (swt) replied by declaring that neither does He have any children, nor did He ever have any parents. He is absolutely alone, the One or, as He’s already stated, *Ahad*.

Does Allah (swt) even need parents or children? Does He depend on them, as we His creatures do? No, absolutely not! Why not? Because He is *As-Samad*, the Self-Sufficient, He doesn’t depend on anyone (parents or children). Can you all see the link between all of these attributes? Can you see the link?

Now let’s look at verse four.

Slides 30-31:

Teacher read fourth *ayat*.

“There is no one comparable to Him”. What does this mean?

We can never say, “Oh Allah! He’s a thousand times stronger than Superman and Arnold Schwarzenegger put together!”

We can’t ever say that. We can’t even compare Allah (swt) to anyone of His creations, living or non-living, such as with idols, or the sun and the moon, or humans and animals. This is exactly what the *mushrikeen* have always done. Remember, He is *Ahad*. Since He’s unique, we can’t ever compare Him to anything at all. There is no comparison with His Being. That’s the meaning of this last verse.

Slide 32:

So now do we have an image of Allah? If I ask you to close your eyes and imagine Allah, what comes to your mind? Honestly speaking, what comes to your mind?

Student: Light.

Student: Nature.

Student: Peace.

Teacher: When I was young and I would think about Allah (swt), I used to get a picture in my mind of a speckled old man with a long, white beard, who was very gentle, huge, but very gentle. But what we need to understand is that we must actually never have any kind of image connected with the Being of Allah. Nothing at all! If we did, do you all know what that would be? It would be *shirk*. What exactly is *shirk*? Yes, the greatest sin! How can one do *shirk*? Well, comparing Allah (swt)—His Being and His Attributes- to His creations is *shirk*. For instance saying He has a son, or that He's like Superman is *shirk*.

Slide 33:

How about asking something from someone else? Is this also *shirk*? For example, asking a pious person for a child or going to saint's tombs and asking them for cure from an illness are all forms of *shirk*.

Student: But pious people are closer to Allah.

Teacher: Yes, they're closer to Allah. So if you go to your *dadi* {paternal grandmother}, who's very pious, and ask her to pray for your exams, is that *shirk*? No, it's not. You see, the thing is that we cannot ask people for what they aren't capable of giving. If we believe they can do it, then it would be *shirk*. So, if a woman goes to a pious man asking for a child, well that person isn't capable of giving a child; only Allah (swt) can give children; so this would be *shirk*. But yes, if she goes and asks him to pray for her, then that's okay.

So this is the difference between *shirk* and asking. It's not that we cannot ask people for things. Of course we can. But while asking, we have to be very clear: are we asking for what that person is capable of giving? There are certain things that only Allah (swt) can give us.

So when we think about Allah (swt), we must not have any kind of image in our mind. I know some of us have lots of images in our head. How do we get rid of them? Well, we just have to stop ourselves from imagining, or giving a picture or image to Allah (swt). We just have to work on it; it will go away. But we have to work on it.

Slide 34:

Now, what do the Christians say about Esa (as)? They claim he's a god, as he's Allah's (swt) son, *na'udhobillah*. The easiest way to show this as a false claim is to see if he passes the litmus test in this *Surah*.

Was he one? Was he alone? Was he one of a kind? Can anyone debate and argue that he was unique, that he was not like any other man? Was there absolutely no one like Esa (as)?

Was he self-sufficient? No, he was like all humans: he needed to eat and drink; he needed rest and sleep. When he was young, he needed to be taken care of by his mother. Right?

Was he capable of having kids? Yes, he was. He didn't have any because he was lifted up before he married. But he was capable of having kids. What about parents? Did he have parents? Yes and no. He didn't have a father but he certainly had a mother.

Was Esa (as) comparable to other men? Did he look like them? Yes, of course; he had two eyes, a nose and a mouth, as well as arms and legs. Those were just his physical features. Emotionally, also, he was just like other men; he laughed, cried, talked, felt pain, and so on. Clearly then, he failed to match the criteria of a god. So it's straight forward, according to Allah's (swt) criteria. Anyone who meets the criteria, who possesses these specific attributes, can be qualified to be called God with a capital 'G'.

Slide 35:

Now the question that has probably come to your minds is, "Why do I have to know this *Surah*, as I don't worship idols, anyway?"

Alhamdulillah, we don't worship other gods. So why then is this *Surah* so important for us? We don't worship idols of stone and wood like the *Quraish*, so how do we connect to this *Surah*?

The problem with our current lives is that we have got a lot of worldly things which are, if not equal to Allah (swt), then quite important enough in our lives to create conflicts and confusion. We're torn because of these things between doing what we should i.e. obeying Allah (swt) or disobeying Him. The solution to this conflict is for us to use the litmus test in our own lives, with ordinary, everyday things. Let me point out some examples.

Slides 36-39:

Today, our family and friends have become our gods. Sometimes, out of love for our sisters, brothers and children, we disobey Allah (swt); we displease Him, without even caring. For instance, parents may allow their daughter who is getting married to have a mixed get-together, with lots of music and dance. Who has been displeased for the sake of pleasing their daughter? Whose wishes have become more important than Allah's (swt)?

Slides 42 and 43:

Their gods had passion. They used to be very passionate towards each other. They would do wrong things because of their emotions. They had affairs with one other. In Hinduism, there are lots of stories about gods having affairs. What's happening today? People's inner desires and passions have become their gods. They're willing to displease Allah (swt) in order to fulfill their inner desires. So, passionate, inner desires have become gods today, over the real God.

Slide 44:

So what is the test for us? What's the test for us? Anything that stops us from obeying Allah (swt) is our god.

We need to constantly assess ourselves, “If I call myself a Muslim, do I actually behave like one? Do I deserve to be called a Muslim? Do I only have one God? When I say, “*Qul huwa Allahu Ahad*,” do I actually believe it?”

We’re not worshipping these things way the *mushrikeen* did back then. We don’t put these things on pedestals as they used to, of course. But we have our own gods, too. And we have to check ourselves; each one of us.

We have to check ourselves and ask ourselves, “Do I have one God or other small gods?”

Remember, we never believe or say that they are equal to Allah (swt). The *Quraish* never said that the gods with the small ‘g’ were equal to Him, either; they never claimed that. However, these lesser gods were very, very important to their lives, nevertheless. Further, in order to please those lesser gods, they constantly displeased God. Isn’t that exactly what we’re doing? That’s exactly what these small lesser gods are making us do. It could be music, it could be friends, it could be family, or it could be possessions, wealth, or fame. So these are gods with small ‘g’ in our modern lives.

I want you all to close your eyes and think of the gods that you have got in your lives and count them. I am not going to ask you what these are. But at least count them; how many gods do you actually have in your lives?

Okay, open your eyes. How many do you have? How many gods do you have? We’re, *inshaAllah*, going to break all of them today, so the number doesn’t matter.

Student: Five.

Student: Three.

Student: Four.

Student: Two.

Student: One.

So all of us, *Alhamdulillah*, have taken the first step: we’ve accepted the fact that just because we don’t worship idols, it doesn’t mean that this *surah* doesn’t apply to us. Right? That’s the first lesson that we learnt today. What’s the second lesson that we’ve learnt today?

How are we going to break our gods?

Well, we have to stop giving them the importance that we do. We have to understand that when we give them so much importance, we’re actually displeasing Allah (swt). Furthermore, they become, pretty much, living gods in our lives. Wouldn’t you agree? Anyone else? Any suggestions as to how can we break these gods?

Student: Try to avoid them.

Yes, good, we must actively try to avoid some of them such as music. We can also try to keep away from situations which may cause us to disobey Allah (swt); for instance mixed parties. We have to kick these lesser gods out of our lives! They really need to be kicked out. Not all of them, obviously; we can't get rid of our families and friends. Friends are good, families are great. But we can't give them so much importance that we displease Allah (swt) for their sake.

Slide 45-46:

So what's the important lesson for today? The important lesson is that, from today, we're going to cross out all the lesser gods from our lives by, *inshaAllah*, breaking all of them. In this way, we obey only and only Allah (swt).

Any questions? Is this Surah very clear to all of us? *InshaAllah*, when we recite it in our *salah* next time, we'll actually understand it. Every time we recite it, we'll be reminding ourselves that Allah (swt) is *Ahad*, and we must obey only Him. It should also remind us, each time we read it, that we need to break all the lesser gods in our lives. We all need to make sure that we have only one God in our lives.

(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*

Reference for teacher:

- Tafseer-UI-Qur'an by Huma Najmul Hassan [Urdu], www.al-ilm.com
- Tafsir Ibn Kathir
- Tafseer Surah 112 – Ikhlas by Nouman Ali Khan, www.noumankhan.com/podcast/category/nouman-ali-khan/