

#ISLAM: Explaining Islam to Teens and Tweens



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Islam

Starting in the “tween” years (age 11-12), children can be quite inquisitive about many things, including our belief system. So what is the best approach to take for explaining Islam to them? I suggest the rational one. After all, the Quran claims that it is a Message grounded in Reason which educated people understand best:

12:108: “Say, ‘This is my way, resting my call upon insight accessible to reason, I am calling you all to God...’”

3:190-1: “In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alternation of night and day, there are signs for men and women of understanding who remember God standing, sitting, and lying down, who reflect on the creation of the heavens and earth: ‘Our Lord! You have not created all this without purpose...’”

29:43: “And so We cite examples for mankind, but the ones of knowledge will make best use of their intellect.”

Now keep in mind the sobering reality that by 6th grade, your child will know more Science and History than you. The good news is that you can use the child’s insight to your advantage by explaining Islam using concepts from their school curriculum. In this way, you will connect the Message with their minds and hearts. You will shortly see that so rational is the Quran that no leaps of imagination are required to make these connections.

First of all, explain Islam to your child as “Deen”, not simply religion. The closest translation of Deen in English is “way of life” or “system of governance”. Secondly, note that according to the Quran, all of Creation has been submitted (except humankind, which has a choice) to a system of Divine Laws called “Islam” since the Universe began:

24:41: “Do you not realize that Allah, He it is Whom all beings in the heavens and the earth glorify, and the birds, with their wings outspread, as they fly in columns. All of them know their salat (mission) and tasbeeh (strife). Allah is Aware of what they do to fulfill His Plan.”

55:5-7: “The sun and moon run by mathematical design, the stars and trees do sajdah (submit) to

Him, and the sky has He raised high and He has kept perfect balance.”

*Take careful note of these terms salat, tasbeeh, and sajdah. Usually considered religious functions, here in these verses referring to Nature, they have obviously been used figuratively. Salat means “following closely” or “connection”, tasbeeh is related to the word sabh, and means “to swim with great strides” or “to strive”, and sajdah means to “adore” or “submit”. Hence, all of Nature is connected to, striving in, and submitting to a set of Divine Laws known as Islam (Submission). And that is why the Universe runs in such harmony.

With this understanding in mind, your child will appreciate all scientific laws of Physics, Biology, Chemistry, etc. as God’s purposeful handiwork. He will also realize a dynamic circulation of resources to wherever there is need in diverse processes such as the water cycle and food chain.

But, the question still remains, “Why?” Why the need for this balance and circulation of resources in the Universe? The following verse after 55:7 gives us the answer:

55:8: “(He has kept perfect Universal balance) So that you, too, never violate balance (justice) in your lives.”

Based on this verse, it seems that God has created the Universe as an immense demonstration project showing us how to achieve harmony: by establishing a just, balanced system similar to the one He has created in Nature. Ever since humankind became civilized, this basic message of Islam has been delivered repeatedly in various books, until its final codification in the Quran. This Message can be understood as establishing Justice at different levels listed below (along with relevant recurrent themes of the Quran):

1) Personal Level: all good actions, beliefs, and certain rituals promote the nafs (personality) and all actions and beliefs that degrade the personality (such as ascribing partners to God: whether idols, other people, or even one’s ego [45:23]) are an injustice and degradation of one’s nafs (3:135, 7:23, etc.).

2) Societal Level: a balanced society promotes and upholds interpersonal justice (ethics), such as fair business practices, responsibility, and courtesy. Such a society enjoins the good and forbids the bad.

3) State Level: just governments establish rule of law, uphold human rights, and promote circulation of resources by providing equal opportunity and welfare systems.

*Note: as your child studies History in parallel with the Quran, he will realize that those nations and individuals which best upheld these values succeeded, whereas those who opposed these values suffered the consequences.

In summary, this approach should provide a framework for explaining Islam to your child in a manner which not only connects rationally, but also stimulates a positive relationship dynamic. It requires that you take a deep interest in their school curriculum as well as read the Quran regularly with them. Emphasizing understanding is the key. (Note: although Arabic is important, regular Quranic discussion in a language which your child understands is crucial). It is best to start this journey with them when the learning curve is still exponential...but remember, it’s never too late to review the basics!
