

RECREATION AND RELAXATION
WHICH WAY SHALL WE SEEK ?

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Relating to me a thrilling incident that he had experienced during his life time, an elderly friend of mine once told me how one evening he was keenly playing with his friends a game of cards. It was not at all for the purpose of gambling but rather for a pass time and pleasure. In the middle of the game, suddenly his servant comes to inform that a guest of his was seriously ill and needed urgent attention. In reply he told him that he was coming but as he was mentally so deeply overtaken by the pleasure of the game that he decided to continue with it for some time.

After a while, the servant comes again to report that the condition of the guest was worsening and needed his immediate attention. Again he felt unwilling to disrupt the deep pleasure and mental engrossment in the game of cards. By the time he left some moments later and arrived at the place of his guest, he found him to be already dead. This incident had shocked him so much that thereafter he decided to discard this game once for all and he played no more.

This incident is an example of what tragic consequences such a mode of relaxation and pleasure can cause. It also explains the philosophy of the rule of Islam which forbids the game of cards.

Islam has permitted only those games and plays which build the strength of one's body like outdoor games. The indoor games are generally devoid of any ^{reasonable} benefit and are a waste of time for the sake of temporary mental pleasure. The mind gets deeply engrossed and one tends to forget his religious, social and domestic duties.

Islam has particularly forbidden to play those games which are commonly played for gambling even if the purpose is not for gambling. The game of cards during evenings and holidays has become an addict to many respected members of our society. It is not realized that it is a sheer waste of their valuable time. The game arouses tendency to ignore our daily duties and may also ultimately lead to the gambling stage, the evil of which is wellknown.

It is also a matter of regret today that theatres, night clubs, dance and musical parties are considered essential places for relaxation and enjoyments. Perhaps it is not realized that it is these places which lead to indecency, poor character and immoral ways of life.

One of the problems of our present day society is how and where to seek relaxation and recreation after a period of hard mental or physical work. More so with our youths is the question of how and where to pass time during holidays and off hours.

That Man by nature needs some form of relaxation is an undeniable fact. Islam has recognized this need as can be seen from a tradition

of the Eighth Imam Ali Raza a.s. He is quoted to have said: "From the pleasures of the world, select some for your goodselves and meet your lawful desires so that your existence and personality do not suffer. Refrain from exceeding limits and with that (lawful pleasure) seek assistance for your worldly tasks."

Lest Man adopts immoral ways of pleasure seeking to the detriment of his material and spiritual well-being, Islam has also prescribed how to control and set certain limits. The First Imam Ali a.s. is reported to have said " The day and night of a faithful should be divided and spent in three parts: one part to be spent in prayers and remembrance of God; the second part in earning one's daily bread, and the third in enjoyment of lawful pleasures.

What a splendid guideline for a wise allocation and useful passing of our daily twentyfour hours? This should certainly take care of our basic needs of our day to day life.

Imam Ali a.s. had forewarned that "There is no goodness in a pleasure which brings repentance and in a sensual enjoyment which is followed by a suffering."

Islam has encouraged certain meaningful ways of relaxation to promote physical and mental well-being of individuals and the progress of societies. Some of these are as under:

READING & RESEARCH

Reading books on useful subjects could greatly influence our thoughts and be the cause of considerable mental relaxation. It can change our entire outlook to life enabling us to improve our ways of living.

The Prophet of Islam was in deep meditation in the cave of Mount Hira. Suddenly he was visited by Angel Gebrael who revealed to him the following verse of the Qur'an:

"Read in the name of thy Lord who createth" (Sura Al-Alaq - 1)
This is wellknown as the first verse of the Qur'an revealed unto Prophet Muhammad. That it should be in the form of a command to read certainly enhances the value and importance of reading. Of course, it is the sensible reading of the words of God and His apostles that can cast true and lasting effect over our minds.

Said the First Imam Ali a.s.: "By pleasant new words of wisdom, seek fresh energy in your life as mind like body also gets exhausted".
Obviously words of wisdom are obtainable through reading besides listening to lectures and sermons of the wise and the learned.

We need to habituate not only ourselves but also our children to read selected good books thus providing for not only mental relaxation but also useful time pass.

It is wellknown that Islamic literature is full of interesting stories and history of the past great men, whose remarkable bravery, wisdom and great sacrifices for noble causes have left lasting foot-prints on the sands of times. Western writers have published books on great contributions of Muslim scholars in the field of science, art, philosophy etc. It behoves us to obtain such rich treasures and pass our valuable time in their study. That would be a wise and most beneficial mode of relaxation.

However, to indulge in reading sensual books and magazines with nude pictures of film stars, as is common nowadays, is to invite much more mental and physical harm not to speak of the bad influence on our character. The pleasure thus derived is only short-lived.

TRAVELLING

One way of relaxation and recreation is through travelling to different countries. Islam has encouraged this provided it is with some sensible objective and benefit. The Prophet of Islam is reported to have said: "Travel so that you remain fit and healthy". The holy Qur'an has through more than ten verses exhorted people to undertake travelling on earth.

"What I have not they travelled on the earth that they should have hearts to understand them with or ears to hear them with" (Sura Haj - verse 46)

"Say Thou 'O our Apostle Muhammad - 'Travel ye in the earth and see how He hath originated the creation"

(Sura Anqabut - verse 20)

The travelling to Mecca for Haj and to Najaf, Kerballa, Kazmein, Samarrah and Khorasan on pilgrimage has been emphasized in Islam as deed of great virtue. Besides the physical and mental change that one experiences in such a holy safari, the philosophy is to offer the pilgrim an opportunity of learning the valuable Islamic history and of understanding and appreciating the great sacrifices given by those of our spiritual leaders in those holy places.

PHYSICAL EXERCISE SWIMMING - ARROW CASTING

One way of useful recreation is to play games on open grounds which involve physical exercise. This helps not only in building up strong body but also the mind on which man's progress depends a great deal.

Islam has encouraged swimming and arrow casting. The Prophet of Islam is reported to have said : "Teach your children swimming and arrow casting". Obviously besides physical development, the aim is to prepare youths for the defence of their country in times of war when attacked by enemy. It is also to prepare them for saving lives

in case of drowning or ability to defend against attack of dangerous animals.

HORSE RIDING

This has an important place in Islamic traditions. Our Prophets and Imams themselves participated in encouraging the exercises and practice of horse riding. In old days, the quick and common mode of transport to distant lands, particularly during wars, was on horse back. Even though today motor vehicles have taken the place of horses, yet horse riding is still to be seen and remain a useful form of exercise and relaxation.

It is narrated that once enemies had come to attack Muslims' properties in Medina. The Prophet of Islam along with some of his companions riding on their horses to chase the enemies. They travelled a long distance but did not succeed in capturing them. Abu Qatada comes to the Prophet suggesting a horse race since the enemies had already disappeared. The Prophet of Islam agreed to this and participated in the horse race which he ultimately won.

Thus on deep thought, we would realize that life is a precious gift from Allah. Islam, which came as a guiding code from Him has divided it into two categories viz. life on this earth and the spiritual life in the hereafter. The temporal life on this earth is of limited duration and therefore precious. As such it should not be wasted in pursuit of such pleasures and enjoyments which are meaningless and harmful to individual and to the society as a whole. Islam has forbidden those forms of relaxation and pleasures which are apt to lead one away from virtues and noble life.

(Quotations from: 'NIYAZ BE TAFRIH')