

Health (F)

By: A. Husain

SHAMELESSNESS AND CHEWING MIRA'A (MARUNGI)

"The Hour (time of resurrection - End of Time) will not come except when shamefulness would have disappeared from the youth and women and when 'Magatheer' (bitter plants - herbs) would be (widely) chewed the same way as green vegetables is done" (Biharul Anwar Vol.2 p.315)

This is what the Holy Prophet of Islam, Mohammed (s.a.w.) predicted 1400 years ago. Now explicitly today do we see that the chewing of Marungi is spreading like bushfire in East and Central Africa besides the use of drugs made from plants in many parts of the world.

Prophet Adam was approached by Angel Gebrael telling him that he was instructed to give him one choice of the three viz. 'Akl' - intellect, 'Haya' - shamefulness and 'Deen' - religion. Adam selected 'Akl'. Gebrael then instructed 'Haya' and 'Deen' to separate and move away. They refused, saying that 'we have been created and instructed to stay together with 'Akl' wherever it was'. (Biharul Anwar Babul Akl)

This anecdote is to demonstrate the existence and close relationship of 'Haya' - shamefulness and 'Deen' - religion with 'Akl' - intellect. And if and when lack of 'Akl' - intellect and senselessness is allowed to overtake one, whether by chewing Marungi, alcoholism or by any other means, shamelessness and neglect of religious values are bound to follow.

No wonder therefore, the above mentioned saying of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) was meant to warn us of the relationship of shamelessness with chewing of harmful plants like Marungi and its widespread use during this end of time.

Another subtle reference worth noting herewith is the use of word 'Magatheer' an Arabic word meaning bitter plants in the above hadith. Marungi is a bitter plant and therefore it is noticed that those chewing it have to sip soda water or eat sweets to counteract its bitterness.

In Somalia, President Siad Barre declared during 1983 a total ban on the use of this Marungi otherwise known as mira'a or Ghat. It is mentioned that this ban came as a result of delegation of women made representation to the President, complaining of impotency and neglect of their men-folk, who spent day and night out chewing Marungi.

People who chew Marungi have the habit of sitting and squatting together in groups and sipping soda or eating sweets along with it. In some places they pose a health hazard by spitting saliva. Those addicted claim it to be a good pastime, boasting of working energy whilst others liken it to having refreshment in a bar. But what is not borne in mind is the far reaching effect on one's brain, health and family life.

Henry Mutua - a prominent Marungi businessman in Nairobi, when interviewed by a Daily Nation correspondent said that most of his customers agree that this has the same effect as alcohol i.e. it is intoxicating. Some claim they feel strong and high after taking it, forgetting their problems and they do not even feel hungry. (Daily Nation 8.8.84)

Time and again medical experts have been carrying out research in the harmful effects of Marungi by examining victims of its addiction. The East African Medical Journal of February, 1981, whilst publishing the findings of a recent research, states "As the stimulation (of Marungi chewing) lasts for a short time, the user must chew the leaves almost continuously. Animal experiments have shown that its constant use can

cause chronic gastritis, hemorrhages in the gastro - intestinal tracks, damage to kidneys, constipation, insomnia, restlessness and increased wakefulness and can cause ejaculation without erection."

Moreover, patients examined and treated have shown characteristics of hysterical features, epileptic fits, severe headaches and at times behaving like a 'mad man'. No wonder therefore, a separate ward exists for marungi chewing mental patients at the Port Reitz Mental Hospital in Mombasa. Dr., M.A. Attas - an experienced medical man in this hospital - told me instances of how some reputed personalities ruined their careers as a result of Marungi habit. He also claimed that the harm caused by this far exceeded that of alcoholism.

In an article published in Message - Jan./March, 1983, Dr. Attas writes:

"All the toxic effects prove that like alcohol, it (Marungi) is definitely harmful and therefore unequivocally, forbidden and haram. Psychological effects, he says, include euphoria, unnatural sense of well-being, artificial joviality, excitement, indifference, carelessness. Later on apathy, depression and anxiety could develop.

Dependence on the drug is frequent and can be very strong with users developing 'the dropout syndrome'. They walk out on their families and friends, stop working, neglect their appearance, eat poorly and lose all their former interests, becoming solely concerned on how to satisfy their addiction. They sell and pawn what they possess, beg or borrow, steal or sink even lower until the sole aim of keeping continuous supply of their stock of the drug. they become completely human wrecks and outcasts of Society."

Thus like alcohol, addiction to Marungi ultimately results in ruining one's health, faculty of reason and family life. Would a wise and truly practicing Muslim, therefore, ever think of indulging in this type of addiction????