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THE GUIDANCE OF THE PROPHET ﷺ ON MANAGING TIME

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Among the widespread social diseases, common among the youth and elderly, is time-wasting. I would like to describe this problem so that each and every one of us will examine our self and reflect upon our state. Does this apply to you? These days, the majority of people spend their evenings and nights in pleasures, distractions, amusements and wasting time; pleasures that may or may not be permissible. Perhaps the state of most people does not foretell good. After the 'Isha prayers or after closing down shops, people return to their homes and sit in the front of the television

hopping between channels. Ponder about the loss of time and what you are doing.

Boredom has spread amongst people so much that it is becoming harder for television stations to satisfy their viewers! Consequently, they are trying to innovate by varying their styles in order to amuse people and move them from their state of boredom. Most people spend their evenings until midnight or even later watching news or TV serials, until they get tired and then fall asleep!

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We never thought that the state of Muslims would reach this level! This is the state of the unbelievers in the west. Some of them return home to sit on their bed or sofa, placing a bottle of alcohol in front of them and sipping it while watching a movie. They eat and drink until they get tired and sleepy. Then they sleep wherever they were and wake up the next morning in the same place, like animals. They sleep like animals and wake up like animals!

We have been informed about this state by Allah ﷻ in the Glorious Book when He described the unbelievers: “They are only like cattle; nay, they are on an astray Path” [al-Furqan 25:44] and “those who reject Allah ﷻ will enjoy (this world) and eat as cattle eat; and the Fire will be their abode” [Muhammad 47:12].

We are not born to just eat and drink. The aim of life on this planet has never been for this. Rather, eating and drinking is meant for a higher purpose and preparation for another life. The human uses it as a means to worship Allah ﷻ. He ﷻ has given him precious capital - his lifetime.

A lifetime is the duration of a human being's life on the face of the Earth from his birth to his death - it is his capital and the most valuable gift that Allah ﷻ granted him. It is a vessel that he may wish to fill with urine - a time spent in disobedience and distraction, meaningless play or perversion. Or if he wishes, he may fill it with honey, by spending his time in

obedience to Allah ﷻ, His remembrance, drawing closer to Him, or reciting His Words so that he would have filled it with much good.

Why have we sunk to this level? Why have we reached this state of imitating the west? It is from a lack of knowledge of the fundamentals of wisdom! The elderly would advise the youth to heed the importance of time and of one's lifetime, both in the religious and worldly sense. The one who does not wish to spend his time in obedience to Allah ﷻ is heedless and is far from his Protector. Therefore it is necessary for him to take stock of his matters in worldly affairs, business, lessons, and his actions. It is necessary that he busy himself by building for what will come, to develop, to acquire new knowledge every day and not to fritter away his time and energy.

These days, when you visit the markets in the morning, you will rarely see people open their shops until after nine or ten o'clock. In front of you is the *al-Hamara'* Street for anyone wanting proof - be there at nine o'clock; you may not even find three or four shops open.

These are the markets of Damascus in front of you. These shops used to open early with Divine magnifications in search of provision, as the Prophet ﷺ clarified in various narrations. The Prophet ﷺ prohibited us to make haste for our worldly life. In some narrations, therefore, he ﷺ disliked us to be the first Muslim in the

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market or the last one to leave - "Do not be the first to enter the market nor the last to leave" - in order to ward off people from coveting worldly life. But this has overcome us, hence people in our days are accustomed to staying late at their shops and then staying up the whole night. If the government permitted shops to open throughout the nights, people would stay up in them day and night.

This was not the custom of the pious predecessors of our fathers and grandfathers - perhaps the elders know this. Their grandfathers would open their shops after the dawn prayer or after sunrise, and would recite the words of Allah ﷻ and keep company of their relatives and friends in the market. If some provision was granted to them and they sold enough to suffice their needs they would close for the day at the time of the midday prayer or late afternoon prayer and leave. The pious would thereafter sit in circles of knowledge and divine invocation and the worldly people would stroll in the orchards and gardens. There was never any covetness for the worldly life previously; now the desire of the world has overcome us. We squander the worldly life and the religion. We do not succeed either in our worldly life or in our religion. One of the poets of old said:

We amend our worldly life by fragmenting our religion,

So that neither our religion remains nor what we amend.

Ponder over the importance of time and how Allah ﷻ divided it. The night: "By the night enshrouding" [al-Layl 92:1]. "And the night when it enshrouded him" [al-Shams 91:4]. The day: "...and the day in splendour" [al-Layl 92:2]. "And the day when it revealed him" [al-Shams 91:3]. The Dawn: "By the Dawn, And ten nights" [al-Fajr 89:1-2]. The glorious morning: "By the Glorious Morning Light, And by the Night when it is still" [al-Duha 93:1-2]. The late afternoon: "By the afternoon! Surely man is in a state of loss" [al-'Asr 103:1-2]. It is stated that this is the time of the late afternoon prayer. Another opinion states it is all time. Allah ﷻ swore an oath by its importance.

In the Noble Qur'an, we find oaths on lifetimes. The lifetime of a person is ennobled only by what it is filled with, like a container is honoured by what is placed in it of drink, or of jewels or pearls. A shell would not have any value if it did not contain jewels and pearls or likewise. And indeed, the noblest of all lifetimes is the lifetime of the Prophet ﷺ, the most noble lifetime of a being is the lifetime of the Prophet ﷺ because he was the most knowledgeable being about Allah ﷻ, the most pious and most fearful creation of Allah ﷻ, as he informed us himself in authentic narrations. As Allah ﷻ swore an oath by his lifetime in the Majestic Qur'an, "By your life (O Muhammad) they moved blindly in the frenzy of approaching death" [al-Hijr 15:72]. Has this become the condition of mankind? Like a drunken man lost in a desert! He cannot find his way; he

eats, drinks, watches television, and wastes his time aimlessly.

Ponder over the narrations of the Prophet ﷺ providing guidance on using time well. In an authentic narration reported by al-Hakim in his Mustadrak, agreed and authenticated by al-Dhahabi, the Prophet ﷺ said, “Profit from five things before five things overtake them: your life before your death; your health before your sickness; spare time before being occupied; your youth before old age and your wealth before poverty”.

To profit from something precious necessitates that one is keen not to lose it. “Profit from five things before five things, your life before your death”. You are alive at this moment; you do not know when death will take you, and you know it cannot miss you. It may have taken your neighbour, your father, grandfather, mother and brother. Perhaps this time it will be your turn. One’s lifespan is from the unseen knowledge as stated in the Qur’an: “You do not know which land that you will die in” [Luqman 31:34]. Allah ﷻ has veiled this knowledge from his servant as a mercy for him, to allow room for him to have hope, and to open the door of action for all of creation. If man knew his lifespan, neither hope would remain in his life, nor would the incentive of action exist. His life would be terrible and hopeless. Therefore Allah ﷻ withheld the knowledge of one’s lifespan, and the time and place of death.

“Take advantage of your life before your death”. You are alive at this moment and able to act. When man dies his actions are cut off as the Prophet ﷺ said, “The world is action without reckoning and the afterlife is reckoning without action”. Would you like to be one of those who will say: “If only I was dust!”, or one of those who will say: “Lord let me return, perhaps I would perform pious works that I abandoned”. In rebuke, Allah ﷻ says to the likes of him, “By no means! It is but a word he says. Before them is a Partition until the Day they are raised up” [al-Mu’minun 23:99-100]. Or one of those who will say: “Would that we were but sent back! Then would we not reject the signs of our Lord, but would be amongst those who believe!” [al-An’am 6:27]. The door of action is open for you as long as you are among the living. You are alive, able to breath, move, and physically able to work. Allah ﷻ has opened for you doors of action to earn righteous works and not to commit sins.

“...Your health before your sickness”. We do not know the extent of our health or the immensity of this blessing - those who have been deprived of this blessing may know. There is no doubt that the sick earn more reward than others, and for the one who is tested in his well-being and his body, Allah ﷻ opens for him doors of elevation by worship and nearness to Him that are not open to others. This is a great meaning as the servant may not be able to do good works but he will be elevated through his patience during tribulations, and he attains

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closeness to Allah ﷻ. However, as long as you are strong and able, healthy and free from tribulations, thank Allah ﷻ for the bounty of strength. This can be achieved by helping the weak. Showing gratitude to Allah ﷻ for the blessing of well-being is not possible without using this blessing for what we were created for: to worship and obey Allah ﷻ.

“...Your free time before being occupied”. You have limited time. Do your utmost in seeking knowledge during the night and the day. These are the times of exams in schools and most of our children and youth are studying day and night in order to attain knowledge, they struggle to attain it. I give glad tidings to the youth if they amend their intentions solely for Allah ﷻ. Seeking knowledge is for the sake of discovering the wonders of the sovereignty of Allah ﷻ, increasing faith, benefiting people through medicine, architecture, history, mathematics and other types of sciences. If they correct their intentions for the sake of Allah ﷻ they will be rewarded for this toil and hard work. I beseech Him to grant our sons and daughters success and acceptance - truly He is the All-Hearing, the Near and the Answerer of prayers.

For him who desires success, it is necessary to exhaust himself and work hard. If such a person finds some free time how could he ever waste it? Because aiming high requires hard work and exhaustion. If you aspire to be among the best people, it is necessary to seek. If you want to become one of those

close to Allah ﷻ like the foremost righteous, it is necessary to seek, necessary to sacrifice your time for Allah ﷻ during the night and the day, to praise Allah ﷻ during the night and the day, to stand in night vigil prayers for Allah’s ﷻ sake, to recite His words, to be helpful to His creation, to do good deeds, to be kind and generous to people, to frequent the masjid, to be among the forerunners! Do you expect to enter Paradise without exerting yourself? Indeed, entering Paradise is by the grace of Allah ﷻ, but the means of success is obedience. The one who wastes his days and nights will not succeed either in his religion or worldly life.

We need to precede all other nations. The Islamic nation was the leader in previous centuries. In the west, we now see Europeans and Americans using their time so effectively that people are astonished by it. If you board a bus, you see people with open books or novels. Enter a doctor’s clinic whilst people are waiting for their appointments, and you will see a woman taking a book out of her bag, and a man reading a novel. Perhaps it is a trivial novel but they do not want to waste time. When we look at the life of the Prophet ﷺ, he would invoke Allah ﷻ at all times. Why are you silent? Why are you wasting time?

In a narration from Hind ibn Abi Hala, Imam al-Husayn ؑ said, “I asked my father about the entrance and the exit of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ”. This narration from *al-Shama’il al-Tirmidhi* is weak yet we may use it to

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acquaint ourselves with how the Prophet ﷺ spent his time. “When he would return home, he would divide his time into three parts; one for his Lord, one for himself and one for the people”.

By Allah ﷻ, if one of you enters your home and spends five or six hours or similar watching television, what time remains for your Lord ﷻ? What is left of your worship in order to obey your Lord ﷻ? Rather, I say what remains for your children? What remains for your family? Sit with your family and keep them company in obedience and worship of Allah ﷻ. Sit with your children and guide them. Tell them stories of the righteous instead of letting them watch cartoons. Children’s movies poison their minds. Tell them stories about their parents and grandparents, stories of truth and loyalty, stories of their ancestors. I see in some homes the children not even knowing the names of their living grandparents! To tell your children stories about your parents and grandparents is better than sitting them in front of the television. Why do you waste time with pleasure and entertainment? For the relief of boredom? Most people do this and they know it is prohibited. They know it has no benefit - but boredom has entered into the hearts of people.

The Prophet ﷺ divided his time into three parts. One for himself; this was for food, drink and necessities. A second part for Allah ﷻ, acts of worship, obedience, reciting the Qur'an, invoking Allah ﷻ and

night prayers. The third part was to help people alleviate difficulties in their known fields or similar. The key to this is to organise your time.

The Prophet ﷺ would divide and organise his time. For example it is narrated in Bukhari and Muslim from Sayyida ‘A’isha ؓ that the Prophet ﷺ would sleep until half of the night had passed and then wake up. The commentators mention that the Prophet ﷺ would divide his night into six parts. He ﷺ would sleep three parts of the night, pray in the fourth and fifth parts then sleep the for the sixth part until Bilal ؓ would come and wake him up.

So the arrangement of time of the night is six parts as distinguished by the Prophet ﷺ. He ﷺ used to sleep during the first half of the night. Doctors have proven that sleeping the first half of the night is most beneficial for people who suffer from bouts of anger and shift-nervousness which is widespread these days because of a lack of sleep in this part of the night. Certain endocrine glands only secrete substances in the first part of the night. The Sustainer of the worlds has made the night tranquil for us as He ﷻ informed us, “We appointed night as a garment and We appointed day for a livelihood” [al-Naba’ 78:10-11]. The night is tranquillity for people - a covering of well-being, to clothe with a garment of serenity. Reports have been authenticated about the Prophet ﷺ regarding the night prayer (Isha), “He disliked sleep before it and speaking after it”. So after praying the

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night prayer he ﷺ would retire to bed. I say there is an exception for those who desire to study, those who want to help others from worries and those who intend to worship.

Time is the principal capital of a person. One counts his wealth so why does he not count his hours? The righteous and the Gnostics of Allah ﷻ count their breaths. Not one single breath leaves them without relying on Allah ﷻ, without remembering Allah ﷻ, without watching what comes from Allah ﷻ. I am not saying it is necessary to count our breaths, rather count the hours - "Life is minutes and seconds". Let us count the minutes and seconds and be mindful of the works that we fill our time with, because this is what we will be shown on the Day of Judgement.

Imam Ibn 'Ata'Allah al-Sakandari رحمه الله said in his 'Book of Aphorisms' (*al-Hikam*), "Rights in time can be fulfilled but the rights of time cannot be fulfilled", meaning if time passes, it is not possible to perform an action in it - it is possible to make up for

an action due in that time but you cannot make up the time itself. If a day passes without action, without exertion and hard work, a new day is not added to your life. If you lost a period of study it is possible that you could study the next day, but your life does not increase by a day. In actual fact, you have lost one day. Likewise in prayer, if you miss a prayer then it is necessary to make it up but you should have used this time in another act of worship and benefiting anew.

Let us seize these opportunities and these times, especially these days of study, exertion and struggle. Dear youth! Dear elders! Dear fathers! Maintain time, organise it, invest in it as man invests in his capital. As man manages his capital then let him invest in his time adequately, spend his time struggling and working hard for religious and worldly affairs. I ask Allah ﷻ to give us success and good in the religion and worldly life. He is the All-Hearing, the Near, and the Answerer of prayers. All praise is due to Allah ﷻ, the Sustainer of the worlds.

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