

Chapter 72: The Habit of Reading Books

Books are one of the best tools for training and upbringing. A good book always has a salutary effect on the mind of a reader. It will elevate spirit and thoughts. It will augment his store of knowledge. Books help in correcting moral ineptitude.

Particularly in these days of mechanical existence, when people have hardly any time to attend meetings and symposia, the best source of acquiring religious and general knowledge are books that can be browsed whenever a person finds some time to spare. It is possible that the reading of book might have a deeper impact on the minds of the readers than the other sources of acquiring knowledge.

Sometimes, reading brings about a revolutionary change in the outlook of a person. The habit of reading is the best pastime. It can keep a person busy when he has nothing else to do. The persons who are in the habit of reading, not only make the best use of their spare time but they will keep their minds away from the worries that might chase them if they sit brooding, doing nothing. A good book, for a reader, is better than visiting the best of gardens and scenic places.

‘Ali, The Commander of the Faithful, says:

"A person who keeps himself occupied with books, will never lose his peace of mind."¹

“Obtaining fresh knowledge remove the tiredness and cloudiness of your hearts; because the hearts, like the bodies, too experience exhaustion.”²

The gauge for the progress and civilization of any nation is the quality and the number of books and the number of persons habituated of reading them. Formal education of a person is no criterion of judging a person’s learning. A really learned person is one who is engaged in meaningful reading and research. We unfortunately have lots of persons with school diplomas and university degrees but very few learned scholars and researchers. Most children, when they complete their formal education, keep aside the books and get busy with other activities of life.

The growth of knowledge of these persons gets stagnant from that time. Their criterion of acquiring education for finding a job has been achieved. They feel that there is no further use for any more

knowledge. In fact, education should be for achieving excellence in the chosen field of knowledge. Education is a continuous process and goes on till the last breath of a person. The Religion of Islam too has exhorted its followers to pursue the path of learning from the cradle to the grave.

The Prophet of Islam has said:

"Search for knowledge is the duty of every Muslim. Allah likes the seekers of knowledge."[3](#)

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq says:

"Even if my companions are motivated to acquire knowledge at the threat of a whipping, I would approve of it."[4](#)

The Prophet of Islam has said:

"Barring two types of persons, there is no reward for anyone else; First the erudite scholar and then he who is busy acquiring knowledge."[5](#)

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq said:

"Persons are of three types: 1. The erudite scholar, 2. The seeker of knowledge, and 3. The others are mere a heap of garbage."[6](#)

Luqman, the Prophet, told to his son, ' Spare some time in the day and night for reading and acquiring knowledge. If you stop reading, your knowledge will dissipate.'[7](#)

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq said:

"Search for knowledge in all conditions is absolutely necessary."[8](#)

The Prophet of Islam has said:

"Search for knowledge is the duty of every Muslim man and every Muslim woman."[9](#)

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq says:

"If the people knew the uses of knowledge, they would have tried to acquire it even at the cost of their very lives. For this purpose they would have undertaken hazardous sea voyages."[10](#)

The Prophet has said:

"If I spent one day without adding to the store of my knowledge, I would consider that day unlucky for me."[11](#)

It is the duty of the parents to send their children to schools for acquiring knowledge of reading and

writing. Islam has very clear directions in this regard for the followers of the faith:

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq says:

"A child plays for seven years, studies for seven years and for another seven years learns about what is permissible (*halal*) and im-permissible (*haram*)."[12](#)

The Prophet of Islam has said: "A son has three rights over his father: 1. The father must select a good name for him. 2. The father should teach him to read and write, and 3. when he grows up, get him a spouse."[13](#)

"When a child is taken to the school, and the teacher instructs him to say Bism Allah (In the name of Allah Almighty), Allah will spare the child's parents from the fire of the Hell!"[14](#)

"Pity on the children of the Last Epoch, for what their forebears have brought to them. Although the parents would themselves be Muslims, they would not acquaint the children with the religious duties."[15](#)

The other responsibility of the parents is that they bring up their children in such a way they cultivate the habits of reading good books and become researchers of knowledge. The atmosphere in their homes should be one of education and learning. They must motivate the children by their words and actions to cultivate the habit of reading.

Before the child goes for formal education to the school, he should be introduced to books. In the beginning the parents must read out books to the child. They should read small and interesting stories and fables to make the child interested in books. Give the children books with lots of multicolor pictures and illustrations.

Every day, the parents or the elder siblings should read to the child a part of the book to keep his sustained interest in the contents. They should explain to the child about the illustrations in the book. Then the child should be asked to recount the story and tell about the illustration printed with the story. In this informal education, the parents should not make haste in teaching and should not give to him any books that are beyond his comprehension. They must first make the child interested in listening to stories, then bring the process of reading out from the books.

Continue this process till the child learns to read and write himself. Then leave the work of reading the books to the child. Sometimes ask the opinion of the child about a new book that he has read. Discuss the contents of the book with him. .Continue giving attention till the child becomes habituated of reading books.

Here the parents must be reminded of certain points:

1. The children like stories and fables and understand their contents well. It is therefore useful the material provided to them on any subject should be in the form of stories.

2. Every child will have his own individual personality. The capability and tastes too will differ from person to person. There will be changes in the tastes of a person with advancements in years. Therefore, the parents must first try to gauge the taste and the capability of their child and then bring the books to suit his requirements. Don't thrust difficult and boring contents on the child. This might have negative impact on the child's reading habit.

3. Since the child is in the process of developing his personality, and the books can have deep impact on this process, care must be exercised to see that books with appropriate content are chosen for him. The parents should first read the books themselves, then decide about their suitability for the child's reading. The child should not read any undesirable matter that might have negative impact on his impressionable mind. If he gets into the habit of reading such literature, it might be difficult to wean him out of it.

4. Children show more interest in reading about crime and adventure. These books may have deleterious effect on the psyche of the child. Similarly books that give vent to the sexual instincts in the child should be kept out of his reach.

One person writes in his memoirs thus: ' My Granny used to love me very much. I used to sleep with her in the nights. I always used to ask her to tell me bed-time-stories. To make me go to sleep, she used to tell me one story every night. In her repertoire there were stories about the Jinn Baba and other tales of horror.

These stories have left their mark on my psyche. I used to sleep in the feeling of horror after hearing the stories. I started seeing horrible bad dreams. Over time, I turned into a timid and cowardly person. I was always afraid to be alone. I became excitable and restless. This condition persists with me. How I wish parents and elders don't relate horror stories to their impressionable children. I have decided that I will not tell such stories to my own children. I generally tell them stories from the Holy Qur'an and other stories with good morals.'

5. The habit of reading is not just a pastime. The main purpose of reading is to acquire knowledge and understand the contents of the books and deriving advantage from them. It is not very important how many books the child reads, but the important thing is how he has read them. Is he just making a cursory rapid reading? Has he read a book with absorbed interest and understood its contents? The parents should give full attention to this aspect. Occasionally, they must ask the child to give the gist of a book he has read. They should derive their conclusion if the child has understood the contents correctly or not. They should correct the child, if his understanding of the contents is not correct.

6. Children generally like books with imaginary stories. Some intellectuals encourage reading of such books. They feel that such book will encourage the imaginative faculties of the child. But the author feels that the reading of imaginary and fictitious stories can promote the habit of lying in the child. His mind will become the storehouse of false thoughts. When he grows up, he might allude to falsehoods to fulfill

his needs and wishes.

7. It is true that a child prefers to read stories than other reading matter. But care must be taken that he is given a carefully selected mix of books on various subjects and not just the story-books. The child must slowly develop interest in reading and understanding intricate subject matter of serious literature.

8. It is not true that the children are fond of only fictitious stories. They will definitely show keen interest in reading the stories of great personalities, their lives and achievements. They can have their role models in these personages and aim to model their own lives on the lives of the great personages.

- [1.](#) Gharar al hukm, p. 636
- [2.](#) Usul al-Kafi, v 1, p. 48
- [3.](#) Usul al-Kafi, Vol1, p. 30
- [4.](#) Usul al-Kafi, v 1, p. 33
- [5.](#) Usul al-Kafi, v 1, 33
- [6.](#) Usul al-Kafi, v 1, p. 34
- [7.](#) Bihar al-anwar, v 1, p. 169
- [8.](#) Bihar al-anwar, v 1, p. 172
- [9.](#) Bihar al-anwar, v 1, p. 177
- [10.](#) Bihar al-anwar, v 1, p. 177
- [11.](#) Majma al zawaid, v 1, p. 127
- [12.](#) Mustadrak al-wasail, v 2, p. 645
- [13.](#) Mustadrak al-wasail, v 2, p. 625
- [14.](#) Mustadrak al-wasail, v 2, p. 625
- [15.](#) Mustadrak al-wasail, v 2, Page, 625

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/principles-upbringing-children-ibrahim-amini/chapter-72-habit-reading-books#comment-0>