

Youth And Stress

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This text discusses the causes of stress amongst the youth and gives some solutions in light of the Holy Qur'an and sayings of the Ahlul Bayt ('a).

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Introduction

Today, we are at a stage where man finds himself at ease with regards to many of his problems and difficulties. Ironically, this progress and advancement has come at a price; it has opened up newer problems and difficulties for man, while closing the door on the older ones. And these problems are by no means insignificant; on the contrary they strike at the very foundation of our lives.

Earlier it was just about getting education. Today it is no longer only about education, it is about getting grades that are much higher than the 70%–80% which at one time was considered very impressive. On the one hand, we have to deal with the pressure to clock higher grades, explosion in the number of vocational courses, escalating fees and donations, falling standards of education and on the other hand we must deal with distractions like television, 24/7 cable, sports and the intense fascination of the youth with all these distractions.

All this has taken its toll on the parents and their children leaving them even more stressed out with little time for the pursuit of excellence in their studies. The tension of paying the loan installment coupled with rising prices and household expenditure piles on to the load of stress.

Once children complete their schooling, they along with their parents must deal with the rigors of college, especially in the 12th standard, which marks the beginning of higher education. There are difficult entrance tests to be tackled, prohibitive fees to be paid, donations to be given; all of which only heightens the stress for the parents and children.

On completing education, there is pressure to take up a good job (read a high-paying job). This involves appearing for endless interviews across tens of companies. This is another instance of stress. Once you are recruited by the company, there is pressure to meet its deadlines and targets; yet another case of stress.

Once you get a good job, you are under pressure to buy your own house. House prices are so

prohibitive that you just can't purchase property outright; you are forced to apply for a housing loan. The interest rate on loans is so high that the interest amount works out to be greater than the principal; yet another illustration of stress. The tension of paying the loan installment coupled with rising prices and household expenditure piles on to the load of stress.

Thereafter, search for a spouse is on which is not easy as everyone has his own definition of a good spouse and obviously, finding one is never easy. This is another instance of stress. After marriage, there are issues between the husband and wife, the daughter-in-law and mother-in-law, the wife and her sister-in-laws, etc. This is another case of stress.

All this stress is for those who have achieved everything in life. However, those who could not get a good education or a good job are also victims of stress. So anyway you look at it, stress is central to our lives. Extreme pressure and stress advance man's old age. Hazrat Imam Musa Al-Kazim (a.s.) says:

*"Excessive worries advance old age."*¹

A Burdensome Life

Our reflection in water or in the mirror will be clearly visible only if the water or mirror is still. If there is disturbance in the water or if the mirror is unsteady, our reflection will also appear disturbed or unsteady. Similarly, the reflection of our life will appear steady only if we have peace of mind. However, regular stress and tension has robbed us of the reflection of our lives.

There is so much stress that the youth are unable to even sleep peacefully. Even more hard pressed for sleep are those who work in Call Centers. Allah – the High – declares in the Holy Qur'an:

اللَّهُ الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمْ اللَّيْلَ لِتَسْكُنُوا فِيهِ وَالنَّهَارَ مُبْصِرًا

Allah is He Who made for you the night that you may rest therein.... (Holy Qur'an, Surah Al-Ghaifr, 40:61)

وَجَعَلْنَا نَوْمَكُمْ سُبَاتًا وَجَعَلْنَا اللَّيْلَ لِبَاسًا وَجَعَلْنَا النَّهَارَ مَعَاشًا

"And We made your sleep to be rest (to you) and We made the night to be a covering and We made the day for seeking livelihood." (Holy Qur'an, Surah An-Naba, 78:9-11)

An Unstructured Life

The laws of nature dictate that man should work during the day and rest at night. By sleeping during the day, man cannot replace his night sleep. This is because at night, the whole world is at rest. Animals

and birds are at rest. The moon is out and the darkness is all- pervasive. All these have a role to play in inducing sleep.

Medical science has proved that irregular sleep has an impact on, among other things, man's digestive system. Irregular sleep can seriously impair digestion and lower man's activity level. Poor digestion can lead to abdominal discomfort and adversely impact man's ability to concentrate. It makes man very irritable and his tolerance levels and patience fall dramatically.

When man cannot get rest and peace through the natural channels (like sleep), quest extends to the unnatural channels. This is how cigarettes and tobacco squeeze into his life. And if he is not very religious, then even alcohol becomes an option for him leading to complete destruction over the long term.

In the prime of youth, the harmful effects of these deadly habits are not overtly tangible. But over a period of time, such a lifestyle totally erodes human body and immune system. Smoking and alcohol have killed or incapacitated quite a few young souls. While they depart from this world, they leave behind widows, children and old parents who have to depend on others for their basic needs.

Victims of Ambition

Today, it is the ambition of every educated youth to work in a good company. If it is an overseas company, it's even better. Of course, the ultimate is to work in a multinational company. These companies give an ordinary salesman fashionable designations like Sales Executive or Sales Manager. These labels appear very attractive to the youth. Moreover, these jobs are more lucrative compared to Indian companies.

Of course, these multinational firms get the maximum out of their employees. There is great pressure on them to achieve their deadlines or targets (which are always on the higher side).

If the work is delayed, the salaries remain stagnant or may even be reduced.

All these factors combine to keep employees busy in their offices for long hours in the pursuit of their targets. They are constantly worried about how to achieve their targets. Worries of this nature rob them of all peace and tranquility.

A Monotonous Life

When this youth returns home, he is totally exhausted both physically and mentally. His only desire is to drop dead on his bed. He does not wish to be disturbed by anyone until he wakes up the next morning. However, his children and wife do not see it that way. The children are eager for their father's love and compassion. The wife is anxiously awaiting her husband so that she can relate to him everything that

has transpired during the day and share her burden with him. However, the young, exhausted husband does not have the time. He only wants to sleep and gear up to achieve next day's target.

As a direct consequence of the husband's punishing schedule, the wife is unable to discuss household issues and problems with him. This leads to a lot of pent-up frustration and emotional distress for the wife. Under the circumstances, when the wife reacts irritably to an issue, the husband is upset with the wife's 'bad behavior'. The relationship that was founded on love and sincerity turns sour. Tension in the relationship mounts and relations between the husband and wife get strained.

The husband and wife are constantly bickering and accusing each other. This leaves a negative impression on the minds of the young children. They are concerned about their mother's poor health; at the same time, they are worried about their father's busy schedule. Since both, mother and father are preoccupied with their problems, children feel ignored. They grow up without any supervision and this opens the door for many vices at a later stage.

In a place like Mumbai, purchasing property can be a traumatic experience. Property prices are very high; yet owning your own property is a must. This is necessitated post-marriage when the father's existing house can no longer accommodate the son's family. Purchasing a property in Mumbai is a monumental task. It has become almost impossible to buy a property outright, so taking a home loan becomes inevitable. Housing loans do not come cheap; add this to the exorbitant prices of real estate and ordinary pigeon-holes too have gone beyond the reach of most middle class and upper-middle class households.

A Suitable Marriage

Marriage is an important aspect in the life of today's youth. Parents are eager to find a suitable match for their son, who in their view is peerless. Finding a suitable bride can be very challenging. On the other hand, there is the girl. If she happens to be from a well-educated background then her parents are eager to find a boy from a similar background to maintain parity. In their quest for the most perfect boy, many boys who could have qualified are overlooked.

Eventually when parents are unable to find the best match, relationships are finalized in a hurry and the boy/girl who has been selected is not necessarily the most suitable one.

However, until the relationship is finalized, the youth has to undergo a lot of physical stress. The parents are unable to perceive this; according to them their son is still a child. However, the physical urges of the youth are not like that of a child. If these urges are not addressed at an opportune time in a legitimate manner, they will find an outlet through other means. This is more so in the present times, when all around there are several distractions for the youth.

Issues like these have engulfed society leaving the youth in a very confused state of mind. These

problems have become so integral to the life of the youth that ignoring them could prove disastrous.

The Solution

One way to solve this problem is to break it up into smaller problems. Then the smaller problems must be graded according to priority. When we analyze the problems in this manner we realize that some problems have assumed gigantic proportions because we ignored them for a long time. Some other issues can be solved quite easily with a little bit of planning. Some problems appear premature at the moment and it is pointless worrying about them at this stage. Some difficulties can get resolved only with time.

The advantage of analyzing problems in this manner is that suddenly you feel relaxed mentally and your problems appear uncomplicated. You are left with the feeling that the solution is at hand. Based on this analysis, the stress faced by the youth can be divided broadly in two categories:

1. Physical Stress.
2. Spiritual Stress.

Physical stress

The human body has its limitations. On being over-stressed, it throws up. The situation worsens due to lack of dietary precautions, sound sleep and deprivation of fresh air and light.

Hazrat Imam Ja'far Al-Sadiq (a.s) says:

“Three things hasten the ageing-process:

- *Eating sun-tanned meat*
- *Residing in hot and humid areas*
- *Excessive use of stairs for climbing.”²*

It has already been mentioned that youngsters get intensely involved with their work and as a result, ignore healthy food habits. In the midst of their work they are most likely to get hooked on to junk food for immediate satiation of their hunger.

Human beings require nutrition. The digestive system digests food and supplies nutrition to the entire body. A proper digestive system is necessary for a healthy body. Overeating and junk food spoils the digestive system which in turn affects the entire body. Careless eating habits make a person sick and old before time.

Hazrat Imam Musa Al-Kazim (a.s.) says:

"A good diet is the best medication and the stomach is the focal point of all diseases" [3](#)

A good diet does not mean that a person leaves food altogether. Imam (a.s.) has explained this as follows:

"A good diet does not imply total abstinence from eating. Rather it entails eating within limits." [4](#)

Hazrat Ali Ameerul Momeneen (a.s.) says:

"A person who is careful about the cleanliness of his food, chews his food properly, stops eating while still hungry and promptly answers the call of motions, such a person will never be sick except he dies." [5](#)

These are the principles of a healthy life. If a person becomes sick as a result of ignoring these rules, then he himself is responsible for his ill health.

Today our youngsters are subjected to work as well as peer pressure. Their lives are disorganized and they focus on the food in fashion than on the nutritional value of the same. The newspaper advertisements are not a guarantee for good food (especially in our country where laws are formulated to fill the coffers of the bureaucrats as against social benefit). Roadside stalls (which are usually crowded) ignore all rules of cleanliness. Their serving utensils are washed in contaminated water. Their food may appear mouthwatering but damages our digesting system for sure, because it is devoid of cleanliness and purity.

The time available on these roadside stalls is so less that one does not chew the food but rather gobbles it up, which makes digestion extremely difficult. The trend of eating varieties of food is also catching up rapidly. Barely one food is digested when another type enters the stomach.

Ameerul Momineen Ali Ibn Abi Taalib (a.s.) says:

"One who sows the love of various foods in his heart reaps the fruits of different diseases." [6](#)

Some people are of the impression that whatever we eat, how much ever we eat and whenever we eat everything gets digested. The youngsters today are focused on records. In challenging themselves to break records they play havoc with their health.

Let's diagnose these problems before attempting their cure. Let us understand the root cause and address it as superficial solutions will provide just temporary relief.

Love of the World

It is clear that the root of all these problems is the love of the world. Hazrat Imam Ja'far Al-Sadiq (a.s.) says:

“One who’s heart is attached to the world, his heart will always be attached to three characteristics: an eternal gloom, unfulfilled hopes and endless aspirations.”⁷

The more one acquires the world, the more he desires it. One should be aware that bounties are not limited only to the material world. It is the delusion that only the one with material bounties is a successful person and otherwise this life is unsuccessful. This is an erroneous belief.

The Other Bounties

The Holy Prophet of Islam (S) has said:

“One who limits divine bounties to just food and drinks is in reality unaware about them. He has in fact denied these bounties and is misled (by his ideas). Divine chastisement is near to such a person.”⁸

A major cause of stress among youngsters is the belief that worldly bounties are everything. They believe that only that person is successful who wears the most expensive dress, dwells in the best of the houses, travels in luxury, eats a wide-range of choicest dishes and drinks a variety of juices. They erroneously believe that one who does not have these is a failure. Thus, this race of material gains begets stress.

The Holy Prophet of Islam (S) has said:

“One who lives and has the following three things, he has all the bounties of the world:

- *He is not sick and remains healthy in mornings as well as evenings.*
- *His traveling route is peaceful (i.e. he lives in security)*
- *He has his provisions for the day.*

And if he has a fourth thing then he has all the bounties of this world as well as the hereafter. That fourth thing is belief.”⁹

Thus, the best bounties are good health, peace and provisions for the day. Many possess these bounties but are unaware of their importance. Instead, they consider themselves unsuccessful. Of course, the best of these bounties is the bounty of true belief. One who has these four, in fact has everything.

The grim reality is that increase in worldly bounties correspondingly increases hopes and greed, which can never be satiated. While, Allah the glorified has decreed needlessness in being contented. Allah revealed to Prophet Dawood (a.s.):

“I have placed needlessness in contentment, while the people search for it (needlessness) in excessive wealth and are not able to find it.”¹⁰

The Holy Prophet of Islam (S) has said:

*"Contentment is an inexhaustible wealth."*¹¹

If a man limits his worldly needs, he will achieve satisfaction soon.

Hazrat Imam Ja'far Al-Sadiq (a.s.) eloquently mentions a very important point. All of us who desire to be enumerated among his followers and consider this as a great fortune can solve most of our problems by acting on this tradition. We will replace mental stress with peaceful contentment.

*"Be contented on whatever Allah has granted you. Do not covet what is with others. Do not hope for what you cannot acquire. Only one who is contented will be satisfied. The one who is not contented will never feel happy. Be careful to acquire the part of your hereafter."*¹²

If our income or salary is sufficient to fulfill our basic needs. It provides us a house which gives us sound sleep, is sufficient for us in our interactions with our friends and relatives. If we are able to properly educate our children along with these we enjoy good health, live in security, we should remain contented on these and be thankful to our Lord. Instead of striving for luxuries we must take out time for worship and some leisure. If we are thus able to enrich our Hereafter, we should consider our lives successful. Instead of complaining for more, we can live a joyful life by thanking Allah for whatever bounties He has bestowed on us.

The Restless Soul

Remaining unmarried is another cause for stress. Unmarried youngsters in families are a cause for worry. Even these youngsters themselves are mentally disturbed. If they are asked the reason for remaining unmarried normally the reply given is that they are not able to find a suitable match.

Finding a Proper Match

A proper spouse is considered to be the one regarded highly by the society. In such a match factors like wealth, business, spacious house/bungalow and education are emphasized upon. In addition to this it is also deemed essential that the girl be beautiful and boy handsome. However, based on wealth and social standing, physical appearance is compromised to certain extent in some cases.

Factors like religiousness, good manners, obedience to laws of sharia, and nobility do not receive due attention. Ages pass by in search from good to better and better to the best match. Even the combination of factors like religiousness, noble family, obedience to laws of sharia, average education and better than average looks do not materialize in marriages because the concerned person belongs to a poor family with no special position in the society.

Why is this so? The reason is that we have left the path of the holy Ahlul Bayt (a.s) and observe baseless worldly customs and traditions. Let us enlighten these dark paths by illuminating words from Ahlul Bayt (a.s.).

Holy Prophet (S) said:

"After accepting Islam, there is nothing more beneficial for a Muslim than a believing wife, glancing at whom he is pleased, who obeys when he says a thing, and protects his wealth and her chastity in his absence." [13](#)

In this tradition Holy Prophet (S) has emphasized belief and manners in the process of selecting a wife. In another tradition he (S.) says:

"One who marries a woman solely for her beauty shall not find it in her, one who marries a woman for her wealth Allah hands her over to her, (i.e. Allah leaves him on himself and reduces his taufeeqat and protection from deviation and destruction). You should marry a woman who is religious." [14](#)

(One who marries for wealth and beauty will not find them and if he prefers religion over wealth and beauty then both shall follow, InshaaAllah.)

Ibrahim ibn Muhammad Hamadan inquired from Imam Muhammad Al-Baqir (a.s.) regarding marriage. In reply, Imam (a.s.) wrote a letter narrating a tradition from Holy Prophet (S) who said:

"When such a person proposes marriage whose religion and trustworthiness pleases you, then accept his proposal and marry (your children) to him; if you fail to do this then surely great corruption and dispute will spread on the earth." [15](#)

On paying attention to the above tradition, we find that Imam (a.s) has emphasized religion and good etiquette, ignoring wealth and opulence. Overlooking religion and faith results in the spread of corruption and dispute on earth. Marriages not based on religion and belief do not succeed. Unsuccessful marriages lead to corruption in society, split in families and spread of evil in the society.

A person sought advice from Imam Al-Hassan (a.s.) regarding his daughter's marriage. It appears from the reply that he wanted to understand what type of a spouse he should get his daughter married to. Imam (a.s) replied:

"You marry her to a pious and a religious person (who fears Allah}, for if he likes your daughter he shall treat her with respect and in case he does not he will not oppress her. That is, the fear of Allah shall prevent him from oppressing her." [16](#)

Approach of Ahlul Bayt (a.s)

Most of the problems pertaining to marriage can be solved if the present generation and their parents follow simple and basic principles advised by Ahlebait (a.s.) and shun meaningless worldly traditions and customs. It has been already mentioned that the sacred religion of Islam sets religion, piety, ethics, character and nobility as criteria for the selection of a spouse.

Marriage is not just a physical union. Before anything else it is a union of hearts and a covenant. All parts of the body are obedient to the heart. The tranquility of heart lies in belief and religion, not wealth and beauty. Blessed and happy homes are a result of satisfied hearts, not good looks.

God forbid, if relations turn sour after marriage then one must not lose patience. Problems can be solved by proper thinking and reflection, not by anxiety and tension. If we leave aside our ego, not exacerbate small problems into unsolvable issues, listen to the problems faced by today's youth, give them wise counsel and treat them kindly, then with Allah's grace, we can solve most of these problems and save relations from severing.

However, it is advised that parents of girl and boy both help them in reaching a proper solution without interfering in their personal affairs. The reason: The considerable difference between the emotions of the youth and that of their parents. Parents should also note that as per Islam, their role after marriage is that of a well-wisher and an adviser not of a judge or a guardian.

Deprived People

Human beings by habit want better things in life. A person walking on foot looks at the one with a bicycle who looks at the one with a motorcycle. Similarly, a person with a motorcycle yearns for a car and one who possesses a car wants a better model. Same is the case with homes. A person with a 100 square feet house wants a 200 square feet house. Likewise, a person living in a slum wants a flat. A flat owner looks at the one with a bungalow who in turn craves for a villa.

This thinking results in a psychological stress and feeling of depravity and inferiority. In attempt to overcome this, he undergoes tremendous mental trauma. He grumbles, instead of being grateful to Allah. If a healthy person looks at an ailing person and a person blessed with home looks at a wanderer then they shall realize the bounties that Allah has bestowed upon them. Such a feeling will lead to gratitude, which leads to remembrance of Allah which in turn leads to a satisfied and peaceful heart.

"Surely by Allah's remembrance are the hearts set at rest." (Holy Quran, Surah Ra'ad, 13: 28)

Imam Ali (a.s.) warns about greed in following words:

*"Greed is a mount which exhausts the rider."*¹⁷

A greedy person will never be peaceful. Imam Al-Sadiq (a.s.) says:

*"Greed deprives a person of two things and surrounds him by two others. A greedy person is deprived of contentment which results in loss of peace and comfort; he is also deprived of being satisfied by what Allah has provided him and as a consequence he loses treasure of certainty."*¹⁸

The stresses faced by the present generation will change to peace and satisfaction were it to adopt the

path of contentment, patience and reliance on Allah, His pleasure, belief, faith and moderation and eschew greed, false hopes, impatience, ill manners and extravagance.

Imam Ali (a.s.) wrote to Imam Al-Hasan (a.s.) in his will:

"My sons, adopt moderation in your life, be just in worship and stay away from excessiveness and extravagance. Take only those tasks in your hand which you are capable of doing on a continuous basis." [19](#)

In another tradition he (a.s.) said:

"One who adopts moderation, his difficulties will be light." [20](#)

We discussed mental stress till now. The present generation can lead a happy and contented life and save itself from physical and mental ailments if it adopts the approach of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.). Moderation gives one an opportunity to fulfill his worldly needs, time to worship Allah and leads to felicity in this world and hereafter as well.

Let us now discuss physical stress and exhaustion which has surrounded today's youth. The present generation should bear in mind that they must take out the time to benefit from and enjoy the sustenance they have earned with hard work. It should not happen that the hard-earned wealth is spent in treatment and medicines. It should rather be used in spending quality time with his near and dear ones. After passing one's youth in hard work the remaining life should not be wasted in treatment of physical ailments.

Allah says in the Holy Qur'an:

"Allah does not impose upon any soul a duty but the extent of his ability." (Holy Quran, Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:286)

"Allah desires ease for you, and He does not desire for you difficulty." (Holy Quran, Surah Al-Baqarah 2: 185)

Imam Musa Al-Kazim (a.s) narrates from Holy Prophet (S) that he (S) said:

"Treat your bodies gently. Moderation is the best course of action." [21](#)

The present generation should organize and plan their activities well in advance. They should chalk out the schedule, which apart from earning livelihood, allows them to worship Allah, benefit from His bounties and spent delightful time with their families

As per the advices of the Ahlul Bayt (a.s), one should divide his day in four parts.. Imam Ali Al-Ridha (a.s) says:

“Try to divide your time in four parts i–e divide your daily life in four parts:

- *One for worshipping and invoking Allah*
- *One for earning livelihood lawfully*
- *One for social interaction and meeting reliable friends, those who introduce your drawbacks but praise you and have a high opinion about you in their inner self*
- *One for enjoying the lawfully earned livelihood. This part shall help him remain steadfast on the other three”[22](#)*

If we wish to start our day with vigor and enthusiasm, it is necessary that we sleep soundly at night. Sound sleep requires that we eat light and easily digestible food.

May Allah give us the tawfiq to mould our life as per the teachings of Islam and Holy Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) and include us among the servants of Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.).

- [1.](#) Bihar Al–Anwar, vol.78., Pg.326, narrating from Tuhaf Al–Uqool
- [2.](#) Tuhaf Al–Uqool, pg 317
- [3.](#) Makarem Al–Akhlāq, vol 2, pg. 180.
- [4.](#) Al–Kafi, vol 8. Pg.291.
- [5.](#) Makarem Al–Akhlāq, Pg 76.
- [6.](#) Ghurar Al–Hikam, Pg.14
- [7.](#) Al–Kafi, vol.2, Pg. 320.
- [8.](#) Tuhaf Al–Uqool, Pg.52.
- [9.](#) Tuhaf Al–Uqool, Pg, 36.
- [10.](#) Uddat Al–Daaee, Pg. 166.
- [11.](#) Mizan Al–Hikmah, Chapter of Contentment
- [12.](#) Al–Kafi, vol. 8, Pg. 243.
- [13.](#) Makarem Al–Akhlāq, Pg. 101
- [14.](#) Bihar Al–Anwar, vol. 16, Pg.235
- [15.](#) Bihar Al–Anwar, vol 103, Pg.446.
- [16.](#) Makarem Al–Akhlāq, vol. 1, Pg. 446
- [17.](#) Fehrist Ghurar Al–Hikam, 60
- [18.](#) Safinah Al–Bihaar, Chapter of Greed
- [19.](#) Safinah Al–Bihaar, Chapter of Moderation
- [20.](#) Bihar Al–Anwar, vol. 71, Pg. 342.
- [21.](#) Bihar Al–Anwar, vol.62 Pg.141.
- [22.](#) Bihar Al–Anwar, vol. 78, Pg. 346

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