

A Well Spent Life

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As the pace of life hastens, many of us find it difficult to fit many tasks, duties and obligations in our everyday life. There are deadlines to meet, kids to drop off, and dry cleaning to pick up. We want to do many things but we fail to achieve most of them. We all have weekly schedules, but sometimes when we let things go out of control and don't plan properly; they overwhelm us and consequently our behaviour and attitudes turn inappropriate or, even worse, they do not reflect a good and positive image of ourselves.

More importantly, we may increasingly neglect the needs of our bodies and our souls. Our bodies need good rest, good care, good food, good water and good air. Our souls also need good rest and time out, purification, refreshment and energizing. All of that is fulfilled through our physical, spiritual, intellectual and social duties. For instance, the daily prayers, meditation, reading, learning, attending study circles, looking after family needs and spending quality time with the loved ones are definitely some of many things that can impact our welfare and happiness in life.

In the following lines, I would like to suggest some simple yet effective tips and ideas to help us all – including those who go to work early in the morning or to school, so that they can have as enjoyable, organized and well spent day as possible. Therefore, when our days, weeks and months become organized consequently we will have a well spent life. A life where everything is balanced and all aspects of what constitute life are taken care of. The soul's needs are fulfilled; the body's needs are satisfied, mental well being is established and family and social relationships are strengthened. In addition to our pursuit of our material and financial security, these four aspects of life should be in our minds constantly.

Step 1: Becoming fully conscious of the Problem

Needless to say, more and more people today seem to hold the perception that it is almost impossible to appropriately fulfill religious or social duties while making a living – one, it seems, always has to come at the expense of the other. Everyone is in a continuous struggle to keep the balance between the two.

Our financial success has become unfortunately the criterion of success in life – not relationships, not education and not even health or faith. Therefore, many people are gradually made to believe that money does bring happiness since the focus of the meditations of almost everyone in this world is on the “Almighty Dollar”. If you can buy a smile and the consciousness of many then money becomes everything. The saying that goes, “money does not buy happiness” is usually answered in many people’s minds as someone put it, “yes! But money buys honey and honey is sweet.”

Step 2: Becoming fully conscious of our responsibilities and priorities in life

Many of us would carry our children’s photos in our wallets or have the family’s latest or favourite portrait on the office desk at work or wear a ring on a finger to make sure that we do not forget our loved ones. All these things may remind us and help us to focus for some time on those we love, but they do not guarantee anything more. Being conscious of our responsibilities comes from our understanding of the weight we carry when we’re in charge of others. That weight is well felt if we comprehend the danger of neglect and the outcome of it. We care because we do not want to fail, therefore we aim at succeeding by meeting reachable goals.

However, the only way to success is through the proper setting of our priorities. These priorities are ranked based on their importance in both this life and the hereafter. For instance, the Qur’an’s way of legislation follows this method; God Almighty decrees orders based on the things that matter, or should matter, the most to the people of faith. The usual order in all the Qur’anic and Prophetic texts in regards to duties, rulings and regulations is as follows:

1. Faith: Relationship with God – Worship – Manners – Morality – Spiritual purification and elevation
2. Family: Filial Piety – Nurturing & raising children – Marriage – Relationships – Rights & Duties
3. Physical/Mental Health: Healthcare (Good Rest and sleep – Good and balanced Nutrition – Good Air Breathing – Exercise and activity)
4. Society: Charity – Neighbours – Friends – Humanity – Social work –Community – Government
5. Education: Learning – Teaching – reading – studying – Training – Development
6. Making a Living: Work – Trade

The first three elements should always take precedence over the last three ones at all times. However, the last three could be set between themselves in a different order based on

different situations and circumstances. Making a living and earning is not a goal but a means. However, it has become nowadays more and more difficult and it's not an easy thing to simplify its priority.

Step 3: Changing our attitude towards different aspects of life

Our Faith teaches that money is a means and should never be the ultimate goal. In Islam, we repeat a supplication that explains better this concept where we beg God saying, "O Allah! Do not make dunia – the material world – our major worry and the end of our knowledge, but rather put in our hands not in our hearts."

Making a difference between the major goals and the major tools will enable us to understand the different aspects of life that collectively constitute life in its ideal and complete form.

Step 4: Managing our time and energy better

1 – Manage your time wisely: Control time and do not let it control you!

Make a "To Do" List Every Day. Review your to-do list and refresh your memory about scheduled meetings or classes.

Put things that are most important at the top and do them first. If it's easier, use a planner to track all of your tasks. Make your most important phone calls early. You're more likely to catch people at their desks at the beginning of the day.

Then use your paper or electronic calendar to divide the rest of the day into project segments. Even if your time estimates are approximate, they help you focus on how much you can realistically expect to get done. Attack the most important projects when your personal energy is highest. For many, this may be first thing in the morning.

Check your e-mails and messages throughout the day, again sorting them immediately. Read and respond to urgent items, but file the rest away for the time you've already scheduled to handle them.

Wrap up the day and prepare for tomorrow. Review your checklist and cross off completed items. Move any pending items to a fresh list for tomorrow. You can use many free and effective software programs for this e.g. Microsoft Outlook, Google Calendar, Plaxo etc.

On another note, count your hours. If you sleep 6 or 7 hours and work for 8 hours plus the Traffic which can be in average 1 to 2 hours you are left with 7 to 9 hours for other things. Shopping, Meals and time with the family will take an average of 4 to 5 hours and the time in the masjid at night for Dars, Isha and Taraaweeh etc. will take a maximum of 2 to 3 hours. You will be left with another 2 hours that you can use for either more learning about Islam or for school homework or extra business or some workload from your office.

2 – Manage your energy wisely: Use your positive energy positively!

While managing your time make sure that you do the most demanding jobs or activities early in the morning without exhausting yourself. Rest in between different tasks and breathe enough oxygen at all times. Most of our stress is caused by incorrect breathing, dehydration, worry and unrest. Breathe properly – take deep breaths regularly to let oxygen flow through your body. Drink plenty of water. Try to understand where you lose time the most and cut it down. This way you will also save energy. You must take a nap even for 5 minutes and even while sitting on a chair. Today's experts are confirming what Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) stressed to his followers to observe a short nap everyday after lunch time or any time during the day. These power naps refresh and revitalize the body, the mind and the soul. Having that break is fundamental even if you are the busiest person on earth. Just try it for a week or two and see the difference yourself.

3 – Make your rest the daily Salaat (prayer):

Salat rests the mind, the body and the spirit. Use your break time for Salaat with a congregation if you can. After you freshen up with the water of Wudu (ablutions) you will feel some change. Touching the water is something that has its own spiritual and physical significance. We were created from clay that originated by itself from water as God Almighty says in the Holy Qur'an, "We made from water everything that is living."

4 – Watch less TV:

Unfortunately, it is widely common among many of us to stay up most of the night watching TV and movies for hours instead of doing useful things. We all like to laugh and have fun sometimes but we need to balance things otherwise we tend to become excessive. If constant entertainment sets the mood of our nights then we will be missing many important points of life.

Sadly enough, in today's world, the mind yearns only for entertainment rather than for learning and seeking spiritual elevation and purification.

5 – Complete a project:

Try to set some goals in the beginning of every month and plan for them in a way you will achieve by the end of the month what you intend to achieve. For instance, commit yourself to collecting funds for one of your mosque's projects, or for an orphanage, or a school...etc., Plan it well by contacting your close ones and friends. If you achieve more than half then it will be considered a success and it will encourage you to do better the next month. There are many things that could be done and achieved but we exhaust ourselves over the small things in life and waste a lot of time and energy because we do not set priorities and we do not work with a plan that defines our goals.

A well spent life

This way, if we give more focus to the abovementioned issues and areas of life, we will spend our life in the best manner. Life is indeed too short and too precious. What can be done today should never be delayed till tomorrow and what can be done tomorrow does not need to be done today especially if it will be at the expense of something that is a higher priority today.