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The power of reading

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Reading is primarily an intellectual activity and reading habit is a sort of attribute of a human being. Reading habit like other habits is developed in an individual during a period of time and is subject to change with age and maturity. Psychologically, habit is a course of learning. Readers first begin to develop pre-reading skills and then learn the print-to-speech code and practice it to a point of fluency when it can be used as a tool for learning from the text. Gradually readers learn to make inferences from what they read, become more critical of ideas in the printed text, and are able to take a broader

perspective in reasoning and thinking about what is written. Lin quotes this change as “Reading in one’s youth is like looking at moon through crevice; reading in the middle age is like looking at a moon in one’s courtyard; and reading in old age is like looking at the moon on an open terrace”. The meaning of reading has undergone through many changes. In the past, reading simply meant to extract visual information from any given codes or systems and thereafter, it became much more complex. In modern times, reading is defined as “the interaction of what is in the head with what is on the page within a particular context that causes readers to comprehend what they read”. Thus, reading is the ability to recognise, and examine words or sentences and understand the information within. It is not only a cognitive process of understanding a written linguistic message but to examine and grasp the meaning from it.

The importance of reading is observed and discussed by the great thinkers of all times and is considered as the most outstanding habit of all ages. Even the Supreme Authority didn’t ignore the importance of reading. The first message from the Almighty ALLAH to the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was “IQRA” means “READ”. From a long past, reading is an embedded activity in our culture, we read for pleasure, we read for information, and we read for insight. Reading fosters personal, moral and intellectual growth; it is a principal source of inspiration, information and entertainment. Reading influences the extent and accuracy of information as well as attitudes, morals, beliefs, and judgement of readers. Regular and systematic reading sharpens the intellect, refines the emotions, elevates tastes and provides perspectives for one’s living; and thereby prepares a person for an effective participation in the social, religious, cultural and political life. Reading habit is a medium of change towards better citizenship, enrichment of information and knowledge, knowing the events and happening without physical presence and self confidence.

Reading is a tool of acquisitive mind and a vehicle for obtaining ideas that cannot be transmitted verbally. Reading is the third eye of a person; it has power to see and observe what the other two cannot even think or dream. Reading widens up the scope of one’s imagination. It adds new sight to eyes and new wisdom to mind. “A dumb person becomes a communicator and a lame climbs mountains of knowledge through reading”. Reading loads the mind with new software. The individual who reads well has at his command a means for widening his mental horizons and for multiplying his opportunities of success. Reading is a vital factor affecting intellectual and emotional growth. Sir Richard Steele has logically quoted, “Reading is to mind what exercise is to body”. Reading helps understand the whole universe. It helps know about different people and places, cultures and traditions, and meet the famous; prophets and angels, saints and sinners, poets and artists, kings and queens, scientists and astronomers, politicians and social reformers, and writers and masters of the world without having any physical contacts with them. It pleasantly entertains in all days, ages, weathers, and fortunes. Reading habit is the prominent gateway to the knowledge room. It is the heart of self education and lifelong learning. It is a continuous and never ending learning process. In modern competitive age, reading is the cornerstone for success in all academic disciplines. A good reading habit is a healthy addiction; once this powerful habit is mastered, it improves the vocabulary, analytical skills, concentration power and deciphering new words and thereby helps a person in the academic and competitive achievements. Insofar schooling is concerned; reading is the most single study tool. Next to the teacher, the reading is usually the principal educating agency contributing to pupil’s success.

In modern knowledge based society, knowledge is power and this power is absorbed by

reading. It is well said “The nation who reads is a nation who leads”. There is no doubt in saying that a reading society is a leading society. In the last few decades the efforts are taken worldwide to promote literacy rate. However, the acquisition of literacy is a self defeating exercise unless the newly literate are encouraged to continue reading for keeping alive the existing knowledge and expanding it to further horizons. If the literates stop to update their knowledge, they may gradually revert to illiteracy. Henry Ford has rightly said, “Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young”. There is a tremendous need for consistent and better reading by persons of all ages. The great poets, authors, philosophers, scientists and politicians etc. have usually been avid readers. In all professions one must read a great deal to keep pace with the new developments. The best scientists, administrators, teachers, lawyers, engineers and doctors demonstrate in their lives the value of reading. No professional can be successful unless he keeps himself up-to-date. Reading keeps a person knowledgeably alive.

Reading is important not only for the individuals, it has a great social and political significance. Political leaders are well aware of the fact that a country’s national indexes of sustainable development are closely related to its level of reading literacy.

Responsible politicians prefer literate citizens who can read information thoroughly and are not swayed by the Television manipulation and propagandist slogans. Law enforcing bodies know that majority of prison population are illiterates. Social workers are witness that adult illiterates are the major shareholders of unemployed lot. Reading is also essential for international understanding and world brotherhood. It helps understand and appreciate the common achievements of the global family. It empowers us to make a distinction between ignorance and knowledge, between irrationality and wisdom.

Reading has a long and distinguish track record for establishing positive and lasting benefits to humanity. It gives a unifying and civilizing force tending to unite social groups through the dissemination of common experiences.

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