

**Quench Not Thine Own Light**

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**Al-Islam.org**

**Article**

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### Quench Not Thine Own Light

W. B. Basbir Pickard (B.A. Cantab)

*The present article presents in short the disadvantages of consuming intoxicants and dallying in activities such as gambling and the advantages of staying away from such activities.*

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***"Guard thyself against the insidious evils of intoxicants and games of chance."***[1](#)

In a few brief sentences I am called upon to strengthen the bulwarks of humanity against an insidious, fair-seeming evil, that, armed with the shining nets of pleasure, entangles and ensnares the unsuspecting.

The victim once ensnared, an onlooker can recognise the poisonous nature of the evil, can see the poison eating its ways into the reason, corroding the sources of vitality and corrupting the sense of proportion, beclouding the clear judgement of what is good and what is evil, of what is right and what is wrong.

With this brief exordium, let me proceed in earnest to lay bare the subject. Take away the cloak from evil, and the cowardly ugliness of the essence of evil has but little power. The Holy Quran states:

***"Oh you who believe! Intoxicants and games of chance .... are only an uncleanness, the devil's work; shun it therefore that you may be successful. The devil only desires to cause enmity and hatred to spring in your midst by means or intoxicants and games of chance, and to keep you off from the remembrance of Allah and from prayer; will you not then desist?"(Sura 5, Verses 90-91)***

To become intoxicated is to smudge and make filthy and to blotch the fair face of your reason. You yourself can recognise a splash of mud upon your own physical person. Even so, another can recognise the defilement existing over the reason of a man or woman intoxicated. Yet worse is intoxication for this very inherent reason, that, once the judgement is smirched, beclouded, it no longer possesses the clear sighted vision to recognise the state into which it has come. It knoweth not its own defilement and disgrace. Wherefore it certainly behoves humanity to watch carefully and to guard tirelessly against all the approaches of this most insidious, smooth, seeming foe, intoxication.

Wine maketh pleasant and comfortable the entrance to her palace of rosy-hued oblivion. Wine inviteth thereto gently, flattering the unsuspecting self-esteem. Wine saith; "Come a little way with me just to

take off the roughness of reality! You are tired: you have fought hard today: You have worked hard, I have plenty of soft cushions! You positively owe it to your self to make use of them and rest upon them! You deserve all this pleasantness now: So relax a little and take your ease with me: it will be for your good!

If a man or woman is not fore-warned, strongly, determined not to dally with things evil, what happens? Reality remains the same, unchanging, but wine seduces the senses to think it otherwise. Reason is gradually befooled by wine into imagining that a better state of affairs is coming into being. Wine and intoxicants bring a rose-coloured veil between reason and reality, thereby depriving reason of her true faculty of taking stock of reality.

Intoxicants destroy reason's power of providing against eventualities. Intoxicants mock the reason and blind the reason with false semblances, so that it cannot see clear Truth and build up life constructively in accordance therewith.

Now the following strange inequality exists in the action of wine and intoxicants upon a man's life, namely that they will steal away the best part of a man (his reason), cause him when only half himself to do something, of which his complete self would strongly disapprove. Once the act is committed, slinketh then away the intoxication, leaving perchance the man or woman in a bemused state of uneasy slumber, whether physical, mental or spiritual, or all three combined, to awake amidst the thorns of pain, the bitings of remorse and the sharp penetrating points of undoubted, evadeless reality.

So the process has been in these three stages:

1. Dissatisfaction at reality
2. Satisfaction with unreality
3. Regrets and remorse at a reality foolishly made worse than formerly.

In this third stage, too, a man or woman finds that they have to take the consequences and pay the penalty for what "someone else has done;" for, truly, when under intoxication a man or woman is not himself. Now, where as a normally intelligent being is prepared to take the consequence of their own considered action, remorse, shame and pain is but doubled to endure the sharp punishment of a "blind" action, an action committed when only half oneself.

I should now like to draw attention to the simplicity and the beauty of this absolute and final prohibition of wine · contained in the words of the Holy Quran.

The taking of wine and intoxicants is clearly, without question, doubt or dispute, designated as **"an uncleanness, the devil's work."** Who then would want to "take a little," "be moderate," or know when to stop?" Nay, the time to stop from "an uncleanness the devil's work" is not to commence at all, shun completely, dabble not therein either secretly or openly. Play not with an admitted evil, but eschew it absolutely.

The total prohibition of wine is a vast blessing, a great simplifying of much of the complexity of our life. Not only is a portion of life radically simplified, but the benefit conveyed by total avoidance of wine is the acquiring of a steadfast sanity, a clearer reasoning for the overcoming of the difficulties and complexities that still remain in other directions and phases of modern life. Mark this clearly; a twofold benefit, two blessings:

## **First benefit**

Simplification of life: avoidance of unconsidered wrongful actions that would bring a train of painful consequences and many regrets: a safeguard from falling inadvertently into evil, strives, quarreling, foolishness, stupid mistakes, angry estrangements; violence, heedlessness and forgetfulness, which often, though small in themselves, entail enormous and unforeseen consequences even as the careless throwing of a lighted match, or neglect of a lighted candle, or carelessness of a glowing fire in the grate, may result in a house burning, a conflagration, deaths and distresses.

All these serious consequences arose from a carelessness and what occasioned carelessness? The mind was not alert: it was temporarily off its guard: and what is one of the things that most readily puts the mind off its guard? That thing is wine and intoxicants.

## **Second benefit**

A clearness of the eyes for seeing, of the mind for judging, of the reason for estimating, and a brightness and quickness in the powers of action for carrying out right purposes.

Avoidance of wine and intoxicants is a sane and steadfast progression in the direction of righteousness, in the fulfilment of duties unto God, to oneself and to others.

The total avoidance of wine is the only perfect way. This is a clear-cut demarcation between black and white, good and evil, right and wrong. This gives no rise to a misty field for endless discussion and dispute, as to "how far?", "how much?", "how little?", "where is excess?", "what are the circumstances?", "for some people so much, for others so much?"

Nay, in total and invariable avoidance of wine there is no "white" fading away and sinking by hardly perceptible degrees into definite "black", no bemused mind groping to draw the line of "too much" at a convenient point; nor, when the convenient point has been found and the line demarcated, all the relaxing will power vainly summoned to prevent the reeling body and the rocking mind from overstepping this imaginary line of extravagance and excess: a line strangely seeming, to move and to become multiplied, as one approaches it! Nay, nay, but a clear and definite prohibition: "No Wine!"

Turning now to some of – the evils resulting from the use of intoxicants, we find that some of the many evils and abuses arising from wine are specified by the Holy Quran.

***The Shaitan only desires to cause enmity and hatred to spring in your midst by means of intoxicants and games of chance, and to keep you off from the remembrance of Allah and from prayer. Will you then desist? (5:91)***

Now, in being kept off from the remembrance of Allah and from prayer, there is definitely a double disadvantage: those who indulge in intoxicants and games of chance suffer two losses.

## **First loss or disadvantage**

The remembrance of Allah is swept away from their hearts. Prayers and the sweetness of prayer's solace is foregone, forgotten.

## **Second loss or disadvantage**

Strife and trouble, quarrel and worldly embarrassments are occurred, which otherwise – by the remembrance of Allah and by keeping up of prayer would not arise; or, even if arising, would, by the Grace and Help and Aid of God, be dealt with successfully.

Now it is to be presupposed that it is part of human nature that, when once the true good of a person has been thoroughly realised by that person, he will not only desire to obtain that true good, that essential benefit, but will take steps himself to grasp that good, to seize that benefit firmly and make it absolutely his own.

So then we proceed to state that health and efficiency of faculties is one of the greatest benefits that a person can enjoy. Health and efficiency is the true good of every person.

Now wine and intoxicants are the greatest enemy of normal human health (we are not here discussing the use of alcohol by physicians upon the sick and abnormal). The action of alcohol is upon the nervous system. In these days of stress and strain and tension, anything acting directly upon the nervous system must be viewed from the first with the gravest suspicion. After a gentle excitement of the senses the essential nature of alcohol makes itself evident upon the human system by a diminution of the power of self-control and by a discarding of the sense of personal responsibility, until, finally, the intellect itself is submerged.

The action of alcohol upon the tissues and substances of the body is as the action of fire, of an acid upon tender substances, eating, corroding, and destroying; so that by intoxicants health is rapidly ruined. For it seems that the forces of the body are similar to an army fighting in the field. Snipe off the officers and the high command, and how will that army fare? Will it not suffer confusion, rout and disintegration? So would the glorious health of the body suffer at the hands of alcohol, which first would incapacitate the High Command, even the Reason, and then would play havoc at its own free will upon the nerves, the limbs and organs of the body, now helplessly become its prey.

So in brief, the matter should be summed up and stated thus: "If you value health, avoid intoxicants. If you desire efficiency refrain from wine. "

And now, the evils inherent in intoxicants being sufficiently manifest and indisputable, let's turn and consider especially games of chance, gambling.

This social evil is desperately attached, even as a cancerous growth, upon Western Civilization. Is gambling really regarded by the majority of Western people as deleterious, as harmful, as a great social and national pest, as an enemy to true civilisation?

Yet actually gambling is such an enemy to civilization, such a destroyer of social happiness and well-being. Gambling saps the foundations of confidence: It makes social conditions unstable, unreliable: It takes away the honest value of money and of material things, and creates instead a state of feverish uncertainty and hysterical recklessness, prelude to panic, downfall and disaster. The object of gambling is "to get without earning". Gambling is, therefore, from its root nature, unjust and subversive of sound and sane financial organisation.

Gambling breeds a fever of continual speculation and unrest, and destroys intrinsic value and the sweetness of the earnings of honest labour. Gambling is either a spendthrift, causing the vanishing of the profits of honest labour, or else a dishonest grabber, gaining piles of valueless, worthless money, to be squandered as easily and as worthlessly as acquired.

Beautifully, indeed, hath the Divine Wisdom of the Quran forbidden all these things, these games of chance, this gambling. How sane and happily balanced would society be if these precepts were universally observed! May Allah aid the spreading abroad of this sanity, this happiness!

<sup>1</sup>. As stated in several Verses of the Holy Qur'an such as: 2:219; 4:43; 5:90-91.

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