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The Art of Reading: A Lost Treasure of Islamic Civilization

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The history of Islamic civilisation is rich with monumental achievements across every field of human endeavour. Anyone who traces the trajectory of cultural growth in Islam will notice that its most vibrant, creative periods were always closely linked to reading, a genuine love for knowledge, and an insatiable intellectual curiosity. This historical truth leaves little room for doubt: rekindling a passion for reading and keeping books as constant companions is one of the most important solutions to the contemporary challenges facing the Muslim world today.

But reading is not merely a hobby or a pastime. It is an art, a discipline, and a lifelong commitment that requires understanding, strategy, and sincerity.

Why Do We Read?

Human beings are naturally curious. We are born questioners, driven by an innate desire to discover the unknown. As we advance in civilisation, many areas of knowledge shift from being merely interesting to becoming essential for our spiritual, intellectual, and professional growth.

However, not everyone reads for the same reason. People's goals vary greatly depending on their circumstances, needs, and ambitions. In fact, many people do not even know why they read. Generally speaking, we can identify three broad purposes behind most people's reading habits:

- 1. Reading for entertainment** – This is the most common type, accounting for nearly 70% of readers. While it may seem light, it is not without benefit. It can keep a person occupied and prevent them from filling their free time with harmful activities.
- 2. Reading for information** – Many people read simply to gather facts and stay updated. This requires limited effort and is very popular, partly because many in our societies tend to seek the easiest path.
- 3. Reading for deeper understanding** – This is the most demanding yet most rewarding type. It aims to acquire a sound methodology for engaging with knowledge, develop new intellectual habits, and increase mental flexibility. Sadly, only a small minority read for this purpose, as most people believe their current mental abilities are already sufficient.

Understanding your own goal before opening a book is the first step toward becoming a serious reader.

The Lifelong Learning Mindset

God has created human beings with a natural inclination to ask questions and explore. This innate disposition pushes us constantly toward seeking more knowledge, with no possibility of ever feeling fully saturated or completely satisfied. The human mind tends to form habits and establish frameworks for its work. Over time, these habits become a kind of programming. The shallower a person's culture and knowledge, the narrower their imagination and the more limited their perspectives become.

Moreover, the massive flow of information and the continuous accumulation of scientific research mean that what we know today may become outdated tomorrow. The only remedy is continuous reading and lifelong learning. Without consistent effort, our knowledge will inevitably deteriorate.

Creating the Right Reading Environment

There is a strong connection between comprehension and the environment in which reading takes place. Several conditions help create a suitable atmosphere:

- **An organised, pleasant space** – A dedicated room for reading is ideal. It should be tidy and inviting. It is helpful to spend the last few minutes of each study session arranging the space and preparing for the next session.
- **Silence and isolation** – Some people neglect the importance of a quiet, private space. Noise inside or outside the home disrupts mental clarity and focus.
- **A comfortable chair** – A good chair, appropriate for the desk, with necessary references and books placed nearby, prevents wasted time from constantly standing up and sitting down.
- **Energy and comfort** – The goal is not the number of books read but the harvest reaped. Productive reading deserves planning, thought, perseverance, and even some effort. We must maintain vitality and comfort while reading.

Types of Reading: A Strategic Approach

Not all books deserve the same kind of attention. A skilled reader knows how to match their reading method to the book at hand.

Inspectional Reading (Pre-Reading)

It is easy to feel excited by the flood of new books in libraries. But we should not rush to purchase without considering whether a book is truly suitable for us. A book may be excellent in itself, yet not intended for our particular audience.

Within half an hour, we can make a sound judgment about a book by:

- Reading the introduction (many authors reveal their motives, goals, and target audience here).
- Scanning the table of contents (to understand the book's logical structure).
- Examining the bibliography (which shows the author's primary sources).
- Reading summaries at the end of chapters (if provided).
- Sampling a few pages or paragraphs to assess the level of analysis.

Speed Reading

Knowledge doubles approximately every fifteen years. This means published books are constantly challenging readers, demanding greater preparation. After inspecting a book, the reader decides what kind of reading it deserves. Some books are for speed reading; others require painstaking care.

Speed reading is based on the fact that the eye jumps from one area to another. During each stop, it captures a number of symbols and signals. Advanced nations have recognised the value of reading speed and have offered courses for over half a century. The primary goal is to train readers to capture as many words as possible during each momentary pause of the eye.

However, reading speed is closely tied to comprehension difficulty. A reader who has previously explored a subject can read new material on it much faster than a beginner. Sticking to a particular field of knowledge is thus a fundamental aid to faster reading and greater achievement.

Selective Reading

When diving deep into a specific topic, a researcher needs to consult many varied references to find cohesive material. There are two types of books to consult:

- **Books within the same field** – These form the primary source. They help build a solid understanding of the subject's basic structure. However, relying exclusively on them isolates the reader's knowledge from other branches of learning. Most readers prefer this type because it is easier and more contained.
- **Books from other fields** – These give a valuable form of knowledge integration, reconnecting the subject with other

branches of knowledge and offering a more unified vision of reality.

Analytical Reading

This is the best method for thoroughly uncovering the content of a book over an undefined period. Analytical reading is an attempt to elevate the reader to the author's horizon. It seeks to access the author's sources, cultural background, and deeper assumptions. This is the reading that transforms a casual reader into a true intellectual companion of the writer.***

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