



TELEVISION

THE ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

In a time when the television has become a part of the essential furniture in most homes, to bring up the question of the *Shar'i* position of the T.V. would sound strange to many. However, for those concerned with earning the pleasure of Allah Ta'ala and avoiding His wrath, this is an extremely important question.

The Islamic perspective regarding television can be understood very simply. Firstly, it is impossible to watch anything on T.V. and yet avoid listening to music. With regards to music, Rasulallah (Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam) is reported to have said: "Music creates hypocrisy in the heart just as water causes the crops to grow" (*Mishkaat*). He is also reported to have said: "Allah Ta'ala has sent me to destroy musical instruments" (*Mishkaat*). In another *hadith* it is mentioned that Rasulallah (Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam) placed his fingers into his ears when he heard the sound of music coming from a distance (to block out the sound) (*Mishkaat*). There are several other *ahaadith* that clearly condemn music and declare it to be *haraam*. One will definitely become involved in this *haraam* act when watching T.V.

Secondly, it is a certainty that when watching T.V., one will become involved in the *zina* of the eyes. Allah Ta'ala says: "And say to the Believing men that they should lower their gazes (from strange women)" (*Al-nur*:30). Allah Ta'ala also addresses the Believing women with the same command. Rasulallah (Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam) is reported to have said: "A glance (at a strange woman) is a poisonous arrow from the arrows of *iblees*" (*Tabrani*). The severity of this sin is explained in several *ahadith*.

Hence when these two severe sins are a certainty in watching television, this alone makes it clear that to indulge in this activity will be forbidden. May Allah Ta'ala save us from our deadly enemies — *nafs* (base desires) and *shaitaan*.
Aameen.

This "special issue" focuses on the T.V. — the Islamic perspective in this regard, as well as shocking facts in the light of new research. Read it with an open heart and with the intention of seeking guidance.

POISON IN A BOX

"If we truly thought that T.V. had no impact on anyone, would we be spending billions of dollars on television advertising? If commercials have an effect, would'nt other messages?"

The above is the statement of a child and family professor, Dr. Greer Fox (Quoted from *The Tennessee Alumnus*, Spring 1994). To most people, this statement will not convey anything new to them. It will merely reaffirm what they always believed — that T.V. has an impact on the viewer. However, what almost everybody fails to realise is the extent to which the T.V. penetrates into the minds of the viewers, especially children.

It was this very level of impact that prompted the writing of this article. The mind-boggling extent to which T.V. influences the mind can be clearly appreciated by the innocent reply of a five year old child to a question put by his teacher. This incident sends shivers down the spine and leaves the mind numb with shock. For a *mu'min*, it will pull away the ground from under his feet and leave him speechless when we consider the frightening implications of such an incident. The incident is reported by the teacher herself. She writes: "I asked one of the boys in my class: "Who is the most powerful, Allah or the Power Rangers?" **Without batting an eye, he exclaimed with childish certainty: "The Power Rangers!"** When I told him that Allah was the Most Powerful and that the Power Rangers were weak in the sight of Muslims, the boy was greatly disappointed. I was greatly disturbed by the depths of regard that these pupils have for T.V. stars."

Let us read the above several times. YES, this IS the extent that T.V. erodes the mind, especially the impressionable minds of little children. NO, this is NOT an isolated incident. Rather it is a rude reflection of what perceptions have built up in the minds of other children who are equally exposed to the *Imaan*-killing poisons of the T.V. Some children verbally express these perceptions. Others may not speak them, but they act them out in various ways much later in their lives. Nor should it be felt that this devastating effect of television is restricted to little children. Teenagers and adults are all seriously affected in a most subtle manner by this medium.

Having touched on this topic, let us delve a little deeper into analysing the various poisons that are contained in this box. The information contained here consist of the findings of American researchers after years of work. Hence this is a case of hearing the facts "from the horse's mouth."

PROBLEMS

Among the numerous problems that have afflicted our society, perhaps the most worrying and frightening are the problems that have afflicted the youth. The problems of the youth are more alarming since these very youth will be the parents and leaders of tomorrow. The rate of juvenile crime, drug abuse, teenage pregnancies, etc. needs no elaboration. However, most people blankly refuse to accept that the television has played a major role in creating this chaos. But here we have it, from those very

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people who have lit the fire which has now become a raging inferno. The president of the Academy of Television, Arts and Sciences, Richard H. Frank, admits: "Just as television was once an **ENABLER** of the nation's drug problem, I believe, to some extent it may today be an **ENABLER** of some of the problems of the youth." Often parents come crying, wanting to know: "But why does my child behave like this?" Perhaps they have received the answer.

TIME

When one considers the average time that a child spends in front of the box, it is not difficult to understand how the T.V. can be an enabler of some of the problems facing society. According to Baehr, the ex-director of the Television Centre at City University of New York, **the average child watches 15 000 (fifteen thousand) to 40 000 hours of television by the time he's 17. He goes to school for about 11 000 hours and spends about 2000 hours with his parents** (Hollywood Reporter, March 4-6, 1994). Can we imagine what rot settles into the mind of that child after so many hours in front of the box? If we cannot, then let us read the incident of the innocent five year old child again!

"BABY SITTER"

Often the best thing that parents can find to keep their children occupied is the television. In fact, some parents will be heard justifying this with the words: "At least it keeps them off the street." However, the television is no less dangerous than being on the streets. Rather, it is much more dangerous. Dr. Greer Fox says that when children are at home watching television, parents feel they are protected from the dangers of the outside world. This is so because those dangers are "more apparent than the subtle messages that kids receive on television." But it is the "subtle messages" wherein the greatest danger lies for a *mu'min*. They attack the *Imaan* directly.

"EDUCATIONAL"

In all this time spent in front of the box, what exactly does this "educational tool" (as many like to call it) teach your child? According to the same Baehr, the "educational theories" of television called for a three step process. (1) Modelling behaviour. (2) Repeating that behaviour. (3) Re-inforcing that behaviour. He then concludes by saying: "That is exactly what television is doing. It models cruelty and violence, and it repeats that behaviour. By the time he's 17, **the average child sees 200 000 to 400 000 sex acts on T.V., 100 000 to 200 000 acts of violence and 17 000 to 33 000 murders.**" (*The figures are not a misprint*).

In the light of the above, is it any surprise that a survey conducted by a U.S. group, Children Now, found that "sex on T.V. encourages kids to have sex before they

are ready, and that some shows **ENCOURAGE kids to disrespect their parents.** Also, some shows send the message that "being bad is cool." In another survey conducted by the same group, 750 youth **between the ages of 10 to 16** were interviewed. 62% said that sex on T.V. influenced their peers to have sexual relations when they were too young.

HEART ATTACK

Television has not even spared the health of its ardent viewers. The harmful effect on the eyes are well known. According to the research of American psychologist Herbert Krugman, "watching T.V. scrambles your brains" (Natal Mercury 29-7-86). A Pennsylvania State University researcher, Dr. Paul Kettl, has found a "dramatically high connection between the rise of T.V. and a rise in depression ..." He found that as the presence of television grew, so did depression (Daily News). Now new research has found that watching T.V. can bring about and also aggravate heart problems. The study found that "violent scenes raise blood pressure and increase the level of stress hormones in the body. High blood pressure taxes the heart muscles and stress hormones suppress the immune system." The researchers

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monitored 18 men and 22 women. After the subjects had watched some violent scenes from a T.V. program, their urine levels of the three stress hormones — adrenaline, noradrenaline and cortisol — were measured. The researchers found that "women had higher levels of cortisol, the most damaging of the three stress hormones. Cortisol suppresses

the immune system and prolongs the effect of the other two stress hormones."

SOLUTION

There are many more facts and statistics of this nature in the documented reports of Western researchers. In the interests of brevity, they have been left out. Nevertheless, by now any sincere reader would be asking the crucial question: "What is the solution?" The solution can be summed up in four words: "FIRST ATTACK. THEN DEFEND." It may sound like very strong words, but let us consider the situation realistically. If an intruder has come into your home, grabbed hold of your child, and is about to strangle him, what would you do first? Will you first run to the phone and call the builder to install a strong security gate? Or will you simply grab whatever is available and attack the intruder in order to save your child?

The intruder we have here is one...

➡ That teaches your child that the Power Rangers is (Allah Ta'ala forbid) the most powerful!

➡ It teaches your child to disrespect you, and in the words of the researchers, "to be disruptive and destructive."

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►►It shows your child 200 000 sex acts by age 17 and teaches him/her to engage in pre-marital sexual activity.

►►It exposes your children to 100 000 acts of violence and 17 000 murders by that age.

►►It "scrambles the brains" and causes depression.

►►It adversely affects your health and that of your family.

This intruder is hacking away at the body and soul of your entire family. **What will you do first?** Phone your doctor for an appointment? Call your local Imaam to speak to your child about respect for parents? **FIRST COURAGEOUSLY AND BRAVELY GET RID OF THE INTRUDER.** The precedent for this has already been set. According to a Daily News report, "dozens or possibly even hundreds of television sets have flown out of Bombay's tower blocks." The "tele-bashers who are the followers of a local Muslim preacher" are "heaving their sets out of the window, hacking them to splinters of glass and plastic, burning or simply selling them." According to one "tele-basher," Abida Begum, the reason for this was: "Our children were being corrupted." It is thus time to follow this noble example.

THEN DEFEND. Now by all means install the security gate and the alarm system. The defence system in this case is the following:

1. INTRODUCE DAILY TA'LEEM (LEARNING AND TEACHING DEEN) IN THE HOME. To learn one chapter of the knowledge of Deen is more rewarding than 1000 rakaats of nafil salaah. The angels surround the gatherings of *Ilm*. According to the Hadith, the one who treads the path of seeking the knowledge of Deen, Allah Ta'ala eases the road to *jannah* for him. Read the virtues of the various deeds to your family. This will create the urge to practice upon those deeds. With *ta'leem*, the darkness of ignorance will be dispelled. Contact your local Aalim for further guidance in this regard.

2. ENGAGE DAILY IN THE RECITATION OF THE QUR'AN.

Upon the recitation of each LETTER, one is blessed with ten rewards. Recitation of the Qur'an creates *nur* (spiritually illuminates) the heart. The evil *jinns* and *shaitaans* flee from a home where the Qur'an is recited regularly. The home wherein the Qur'an is recited shines unto the inhabitants of the heavens just as the stars shine unto the inhabitants of the earth (*At-Targheeb*). Regularly read an authentic *tafseer* of the Qur'an (such as *Tafseer-e-Uthmani*) and learn what the Qur'an says to you.

3. ENGAGE DAILY IN THE ZIKR (REMEMBRANCE) OF ALLAH TA'ALA. Allah Ta'ala says: "Behold, with the remembrance of Allah do the hearts get peace." (*Al-Ra'd:24*) In another *aayah* Allah Ta'ala says: "Remember Me and I will remember you" (*Baqarah*). *Zikr* will grant one solace and peace. It will connect one to Allah Ta'ala. It will cleanse the heart of spiritual illnesses. Recite *durood* upon Rasulullah (Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam) daily in abundance. According to the Hadith, when *durood* is recited, an angel conveys it to Rasulullah (Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam) together with mentioning the name of the one who recited it as well as the name of his/her father" (Virtues of *Durood*). By reciting *durood* excessively, our names will be mentioned repeatedly to Rasulullah (Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam) when the angels convey each *durood* to him. What an honour this is!

4. JOIN THE COMPANY OF THE PIOUS AND SPEND YOUR TIME IN THE ACTIVITIES OF DEEN. Like evil company will make one evil, pious company will likewise make one pious. Engage in the effort of rectifying oneself and encourage others at the same time. By making an effort for Deen, Deen will become valuable to us.

These aspects will make life itself more meaningful. It will also enable one to attain the everlasting bounties of *Jannah*. May Allah Ta'ala grant us the ability to throw out the intruder and adopt the solution. *Aameen*.

A SHOCKING LINK

TELEVISION AND MURDER

University of Washington researcher, Brandon S. Centerwall compared white homicide (murder) rates between 1945 and 1974 in South Africa, and the United States and Canada. (The South African government did not permit television broadcasting until 1975). Centerwall found that the annual homicide rate in the United States increased by 93% from 1945 to 1974, **WHILE IN SOUTH AFRICA WHERE TELEVISION WAS BANNED, the white homicide rate fell by 7.2% during the same period;** and in Canada, the homicide rate increased by 92%. For the United States and Canada, there was a gap of 10 to 15 years between T.V. introduction and a doubling of the homicide rate. **In South Africa, by 1987, white homicides had increased by 130%.** (*Family Policy*, May 1994 survey)

AL-HAADI COMMENT

The above findings indicate a clear link between television and the rate of murder. The facts are glaring at us. The question is: **Are we going to take heed???**

TELEVISION AND DESENSITISATION

"Children who watch repeated acts of violence on T.V. **are less horrified by it in real life.** Some people develop a "bystander" mentality, in which real violence is viewed as unreal." (Brian Wilcox —U.S. psychologist)

AL-HAADI COMMENT

Is this the reason that many people are hardly affected by the serious plight of the suffering Muslims in many countries. Have we become mere "bystanders?"

FAQIHUL UMMAH

The sterling advice of Faqihul Ummah Hazrath Mufti Mahmood Saheb (Duamat Barakaatuhum) has helped thousands of people to overcome many problems and difficulties — especially in the line of *Islahun Nafs* (inner-self reformation). Hereunder is a reply to a letter seeking guidance.

STRAY THOUGHTS

LETTER:

با سمة تعالى

Respected Mufti Saheb

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله

The question, which was not published, apparently pertained to a remedy for the stray thoughts that come into the mind while one is engaged in salaah, etc. Hereunder is the reply.

SUMMARY OF REPLY: با سمة تعالى

Respected Brother

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله

...If stray thoughts keep occurring to you while you are engaged in *salaah*, do not endeavour to fend off such thoughts. Instead, focus your full undivided attention towards your *salaah*. Adopting this procedure will itself lessen the stray thoughts.

If one is troubled by stray thoughts excessively, upon completion of the *salaah* address *shaitaan* thus: "My *salaah* is fulfilled. Do whatever you wish!" Thereafter recite لا حول ولا قوة الا بالله. When *shaitaan* will observe that the stray thoughts had no effect on you, he will refrain from instilling stray thoughts into your mind. He will not waste his efforts on you in future. However, this is attained after much effort and after having persevered in this manner for a long time *...May Allah Ta'ala help you... (Maktoobaat, vol.1: pg.48)

* Hence do not become despondent if you do not get immediate results. Continue to strive towards achieving your goal. (Translator).

THE MIND BEHIND THE BOX

The views, beliefs and opinions of an individual does not remain locked up inside his mind. Even if he does not speak about it, his views will certainly find expression in the things that he does. The same is true with regards to those who are the "minds" behind T.V. programs and other films. Their views and beliefs will find subtle expression in their productions. Hence, it is interesting to know what their views and beliefs are.

A survey conducted by UCLA and U.S. News & World Report asked 6 300 entertainment industry decision-makers for their opinions on such topics as sex, violence, religion and the media. Some of their findings were:

- ➔56% say they have little or no faith in organized religion.
- ➔65% oppose organized prayer in public schools.
- ➔91% support abortion rights.
- ➔73% think laws should be written to protect gay rights.

Thus one can be certain that these views are subtly indoctrinated into the mind of the viewer. It is only an extremely critical observer that will discern it.

DID YOU KNOW?

❶ Did you know that some viewers directly imitate or copy what they have seen on T.V.? For example, in October 1993, a young girl was killed in a mobile home fire that was set by her five year old brother. He had just watched a cartoon where the lead characters had set fire to a home. (*Family Policy*, May 94) Besides this, there is documented evidence of copy-cat murders, rapes, burglaries, etc. Are we prepared to risk this happening to our families?

❷ Did you know that 58% of the Hollywood elite admit to having avoided watching a program because of its violent content and 76% say they have discouraged or prevented their children from watching a violent show? (*Hollywood Reporter*). Yes. The very people who produce the programs for all and sundry to view, are avoiding watching it themselves. Is the hypocrisy not glaring?

❸ Did you know that psychologists have found that cartoons such as 'Dennis the Menace' depict violent behaviour as "cute and endearing"? (*Tennessee Alumnus*, Spring 1994) Perhaps some parents may be getting more answers with regards to the behaviour of their children.

❹ Did you know that the ball now lies in YOUR court? YOU have to realize the responsibility towards your children and family. YOU have to make the right decision — a decision that will please Allah Ta'ala. May Allah Ta'ala help you.

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