

## A Review on Modifying one's life style

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**ABSTRACT:** A concept widely used today and whose effect in many areas has been proved is life style. Attaining a desirable life style consistent with one's goal requires a strong will power to modify and reform obstacles including bad habits that disrupt achievement of goals. In this paper, firstly it has been attempted to describe the correlation of sin and habits disrupting goal attainment, as well as the relationship of repentance and giving up a habit and how it reforms one's life style. Subsequently, the procedures of quitting sins or bad habits in psychological and religious views have been described.

**Keywords:** Modifying, One's Life Style

### INTRODUCTION

The term life style is defined as an individual's or group's particular way of life. It implies the method of living which is indicative of habits, attitudes, tastes, moral criteria, values, tendencies and the overall components of an individual's or group's life. According to another definition: life style refers to a collection of behaviors displayed by social members as fitted to their inner motivations and tastes to actualize their inner character in a real and human environment. In other words, life style is an equation in which a curve is summarized (1). Components of life style including family, marriage, accommodation, clothing, consumption pattern, entertainment, carrier and individual and social behaviors in different contexts are not new subjects in our life. As the definition reveals, they are dependent on many factors. Sociologists believe that age, social class, ethnicity and sex influence them. In other words, an individual's personality constructs his/her life style (1-3). According to several psychologists, life style refers to a collection of tendencies and preferences which are at work in attaining a final goal. In fact, according to the statement of Ayatollah Khamenei: "every individual's life style is influenced by his/her interpretation of life; depending on each goal in one's life, every person follows a certain life style" (4). Realization of the key goal specified in every 'political, social and economic school and theory' requires faith in that goal. Without such faith and serious attempts no goals would be achieved.

Attaining high-level goals in life becomes also possible through changing one's life style. One basic component of life style is comprised of habits. Old habits die hard. Similarly developing a new habit is as hard. Habits are rooted in human nervous pathways. Through repetition, new habits can be established (5, 6). According to the definition of habits: a habit is an action that is in fact a reflection of one's unconscious feelings; actually, everybody's life style influences his/her choices. It causes the person to gradually get used to certain behaviors and internalize a certain value system (7). Formation of a habit and its permanence is influenced by factors generally called 'habit cycle' including clue, behavior and reward. A clue is in fact the same activity that has led to the habit and includes everything in one's mind that realizes the habit; behavior is the same habit that has been practiced, is the reward of a positive feeling and is produced as a result of a habit. In fact the reason for the creation of a habit is in fact a goal, but through the passage of time that reduces the essentiality of that goal, the habit keeps getting done automatically. The resultant apparent peace leads the individual to recurrently follow it; however, once the habit is formed, the initial joy fades away gradually (5, 8). Habits might be advantageous or disadvantageous for achieving one's goal; in fact, a series of habits are considered as good and a group of others as evil. The latter are indeed undesirable behavioral patterns that impede goal attainment. They should be recognized and removed since through a rise in age, the probability of ridding of them is lowered.

That is, because more repetition in practice strengthens the habit (5).

In the religious dictionary there is a term known as "sin" which is defined as 'an action taken against God's will and satisfaction. It is accompanied by a kind of moral darkness reflected in one's ego and makes human being distant from God who is the light of skies and the earth. In other words, it prevents human from achieving perfection and coming close to God'. According to the definition of life style we previously mentioned, any goal achievement requires an appropriate life style. Bad habits which are part of life style hinder goal achievement. The goal Islam sets for human being in this world is an upward movement towards God. According to the definition of sin, it is an action that prevents one's movement toward God and the resultant perfection. Then we could conclude that sin and getting used to it is similar to a bad habit. Ways of ridding of sins explained in Islamic sources like Quran and hadiths are similar to psychological concepts offered for quitting bad habits (9,10).

In religious literature, the existing concept for quitting sin is 'repentance'. This term was taught to Adam and Eve by God when Satan deceived them and led them out of Heaven (Nahjolbalaqa, p.22). The term repentance implies any kind of return. As an expression it means feeling remorseful, turning one's back to sin and deciding to give it up. In other words, it is a verbal, mental and practical stoppage of the sin. A myriad of hadiths exist on the privileges of repentance which attests to the significance of this matter in everybody's life. Some of those privileges as God mentioned in the holy Quran are: "Just in case those people repent, become faithful and practice good deeds, God will turn their evils to good deeds. God is merciful and affectionate". According to Imam Baqer (p.b.u.h): "God is happier to see a human repent than a man who manages to suddenly find his long-lost baggage and horse in the darkness of a desert". In another hadith, Imam Sadeq (p.b.u.h) stated: "God inculcated to David the prophet: 'O' David, once a faithful man commits a sin, but then returns, repents, feels ashamed once he calls me, I will forgive him, I will erase that sin from the memory of angels or change them to good deeds. I will have no fear of this. I am the kindest of the kind" (9).

Life style in Islam has a high status. In other words, Islamic instructions are not restricted to beliefs and moralities. It also includes the appearance of life that is the life style. This high

status can be also traced in Quran. The first address to the prophet Mohammed was: "O ye who believe"

This addressing is related to a 'behavioral style' and not a morality, belief or interest(11, 12). The great leader of Iran has described lifestyle as the software of Islamic civilization (3). Therefore, in order to achieve the goal set by Islam for human beings, one requires to reform his/her lifestyle appropriate to one's goal. Part of that lifestyle is one's habits. That is, modifying one's lifestyle requires modifying one's habits (13). As stated by the great leader of Iran, "human beings are not used to certain sins, therefore, do not understand their significance. In case they ponder upon sins, they understand them in the depth of their deeds and behavior. Of course human is self-suspicious. Ordinarily, human should be less skeptical towards oneself. This is in fact the misery of human beings in justifying everything they do. However, nothing is impossible. God will help us. God's reason is evident to us. If we go for it, we will find it" (14). The basis of many religious programs lies in quitting bad habits, such as fasting in Ramadan which is compulsory in Islam. The great leader states with this concern: "what we can learn from this holy month is that a God-seeking human will power can manage to overcome all materialistic whims and desires which one's ego asks for. This is a key issue to us. Occasionally we tell ourselves we are unable to overcome what our ego wants. Fasting in Ramadan proves us that we can. Once we decide to do something, and we are determined to do that, we can overcome all whims and can achieve it. We are able to defeat deceptive faces of undesirable habits in us through faith in God and a strong will power. This power from which we should learn a lesson cannot only save us from personal undesirable habits but also from social and local habits which keep us back from materialistic and moral advancement. Therefore, one such lesson would be the domination of will power over all obstacles" (15).

Moreover, according to the statements of the great leader of Iran, in the era we live in, predominant governments are used to dominating others and bullying them. They tend to interfere in other nations' cultures, politics, education and life style due to their arrogance and since they want everything under their control (16). In line with resisting undesirable aspects of western lifestyle, expanding and establishing Islamic lifestyle, in the present research it has been attempted to investigate some influential factors of lifestyle

modification through giving up habits and repenting of sins.

### **STAGES OF QUITTING HABITS OR REPENTING OF SINS**

Habits are involuntary actions created gradually and ridding of them requires a certain plan. During the attempts at giving a habit or sin up one fails time and again in controlling oneself. That is because following the habit is strongly correlated with its stimulus. Why quitting a habit or sin is difficult, which is a heated discussion, lies in the same continuous failures. It goes so far as to view quitting habits as a miracle (Tohafologhoul, p.489).

Moreover, a Persian proverb reads: Quitting habits leads to diseases (17,18). Why there are many benefits in giving up habits lies in the difficulty of the task. Concerning the importance of fighting against bad habits, Imam Ali (p.b.u.h) states: The most beneficial praying is dominating one's bad habits (Ghorarolhekam, p.187, 45<sup>th</sup> hadith). There are different stages involved in giving up sins and habits a combination of which are presented here.

1<sup>st</sup> stage: is the state of remorse. That is, the person is wholeheartedly remorseful of what he used to do wrong. In a hadith from Imam Ali (p.b.u.h) regretting having committed a sin is stated as the first step of quitting sins (19,20).

2<sup>nd</sup> stage: is the most important step of fighting against habit or sin. This is to be realized in future. It requires monitoring of the occurrence time of the habit or sin so that its underlying reason is known and its repetition is prevented. To do this, we can make a record of feelings before the occurrence of the habit and analyze them through a period of time for example for a week. It makes us aware of the conditions and let us dominate them (19). In a number of hadiths as well as the statements of some morality scientists' people are advised to jot down their mistakes and judge on themselves every night. According to the leader's statements at the beginning of 2011: "Human gets used to certain sins; undermines some and commits them. Every New Year something can be done about this. One is to ponder upon how to reduce sins, that is to write them down. In fact, self-assessment leads to self-awareness. In case there is no awareness of bad habits, for sure no attempt will be made to give them up. Through the passage of time that habit gets more and more strengthened. Awareness of a bad habit should be consistent, but uncritical since the shame and sadness produced as a result of awareness of one's

bad habit can lead the person to the peace that lies in repeating the habit. Giving up a habit requires a series of awareness-raising techniques specific to the individual. However, the procedure is always the same. In order for an individual to better understand what is going on, how they feel and how others view them, they need to perform that habit time and again. Once one gets aware of the bad habit, performing that habit might recurrently happen for certain time. But this should not concern the individual. Similar to tidying up a closet which seems messy, up until the time it gets tidied up, it all seems a natural state. As habits are formed gradually and slowly, giving them up also takes time and needs patience. This is manifested in the great leader's statements: "Man needs to assess himself. He should cut down on his sins one by one. We are used to certain sins. Sometimes we get used to 5, 6 or ten sins. Let's try to give them up one by one. Cut down on these weaknesses one by one" (14). This gradual stoppage is called formation.

2. recognizing the stimulus: It implies removing of all stimuli causing a particular habit. According to religious sources one way of getting rid of a sin is to eliminate all background and presets of that sin. This helps one to cope with one's ego better and prevent its contamination by sins. However, it should not be done abruptly. It needs to accompany formation. If giving up of a sin is done without knowing its stimuli and how it is linked to circumstances, then the stimulating factor would constantly tantalize the person (18, 21).

3. preventing the response: that is to prevent the person from committing the bad habit. Every time the habit is impeded, tendency towards committing it would be lessened too. Ayatollah Bahjat considers strong will power as the main and constant key to quitting sins until it gets established. In this state, committing a sin is similar to drinking a poison by a thirsty individual, or eating a dead body flesh by a hungry person. This is indeed the key to the earthly life as well as afterlife (22).

4. Alternative response: replacing another practice for a bad habit, such as counting numbers in anger instead of shouting reduces the frequency of that habit occurrence. Besides that, replacing old habits also produces a feeling of control within an individual. Tranquilizing techniques can, therefore, be used instead of habits. Once the habit occurs, one is supposed to treat to that technique. Among tranquilizing techniques mentioned in religious sources to overcome sins is remembering God. With this regard, Imam Ali

(p.b.u.h) states: "There are two kinds of remembering, remembering God at the time of misery, and better than that remembering God once one encounters the forbidden which prevents commitment of that sin". This proves to the individual the fact that one's habit is replaceable. It needs to be reminded that not all tranquilizing techniques are equally effective for all people. One should see with which technique s/he feels more at ease and then get engaged in it every day, so that once the habit emerges s/he can replace it easily (19,21,23).

5. Positive and negative reinforcement: these two are constantly the key factors of behavior control. They are two instructional approaches that can be used to give up habits. The root of punishment is awareness. That is, awareness raising leads to the weakening of the wrong deed and its non-recurrence. Positive reinforcement, on the other hand, encourages the recurrence of the behavior and forms a positive habit (24,25).

## CONCLUSION

A balance in this life and afterlife is essential in both personal planning and practice and in national government. Moreover, this is a primary index of development. Iran is a country with high ambitions and dreams to achieve, attainment of which requires a lifestyle fitted to that ambition (13,26). Furthermore, correcting lifestyle in a way so as to result in a divine goal requires passing through a way defined by religion for its reformulation. In the holy Quran, God posits: "The faithful, repent towards God so that you can gain eternal happiness and satisfy God" (9).

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