

## The Benefits of Reading

Reading is like sharpening your axe. It is necessary to sharpen your axe if you want to retain your vital energy, if you value individual and social peace, and if you seek success and fulfilment in your job. I would like to remind you that you should take the time to think comprehensively through this subject.

Reading is important where it concerns the purity of our heart and the strengthening of our health, mind, spirit, character. This is why Syriac literature places strong emphasis on the wisdom of truth found in life-enhancing and enriching books. Because of the meanings of the truth that is integral to the essence of life, Syriac writers show in their literary works that a civilization cannot exist without books/literature and vice versa.

Literary works and literary ideas instill people with strength. Literary writings/works proceed from people and find their way back to people. They open up the human spirit and broaden one's horizons. They expand the limits of thought. It tames reactivity, puts people through processes of spiritual and mental renewal, recovery and transformation. It sows people's hearts with the seeds of universal fellowship and spiritual unity. For this reason, St. Aphrem of Nusaybin (306-373), writes that, **"Books are like mirrors. A pure eye will see in them the shape of truth. Light befits the eyes, as truth befits thought. You must choose light for your eyes and a book for your thoughts. If you do not read every day, know that your demons will beat you. And you will have loafers for company."**

The truth articulated by Saint Mor Aphrem is uttered thus in the verse of Syriac thinker/writer Mor Ishak of Nineveh (613-700): **"Knowledge of the truth fills the heart with peace. It boosts people with joy. It provides great counsel. It is intriguing. It enlightens the eyes."**

As understood from the emphases made by these two historical writers/personalities, Syriac thinkers/writers have created a one of a kind literary tradition through their intellectual productivity and literary activities. They have made large contributions to the development of thought, strengthening of actions, help and solidarity, and the world of morals and wisdom. These contributions which provide harmony and order between the worlds of spirit-meaning and body-matter, whisper the secrets of righteousness, goodness, morality, and beauty to us, the travelers on the road of life. This is because they believed that civilization could not progress without books/literature. So much so that they noticed this very early on and did

what was necessary through their literary productivity. Since time immemorial, literature has functioned as an effective force in the transformation of people and societies. Within this context, literary works possess attributes that do not lose relevancy.

I believe books are the best source of nutrition for the human mind. In the words of 14th century thinker/writer Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), **"A person alone does not have the strength to obtain nourishment. He is not enough to procure the nourishment he demands. He must combine his strength with those that are from the same species in order to provide food both for himself and for them. By helping each other, more sustenance could be gained than any of those people would require."**

Reading is like digging a well with a needle -it requires determination and patience. Reading is a search for truth, authenticity, and the meaning of life. And every search contains the thrill of discovery. Hope and excitement are the inextricable qualities of reading. Reading is requisite for humanity; hope and excitement are requisite for liveliness. We shouldn't forget that sentences are like nails that fasten the meaning and truths of life to our minds. The beneficial books which restore our vital energy are very helpful when it comes to keeping our life under control, being attuned to life, and staying healthy and unscathed by life's cycles.

There are many pleasurable activities in life. Yet nothing can supersede reading. Books allow us to know ourselves. They open the doors to self-knowledge. The first requisite of being human is to read with self-knowledge. Reason being that through reading, a person gets to know himself and more readily advances through life. The aspired goal becomes easier to reach thanks to the book. For reading is like a journey beginning at the cradle and ending at the grave. If reading ends together with school, that's not reading. We have no knowledge when we are born. Throughout our lives, we accumulate much knowledge. Books and reading play a crucial role in this accumulation. Civilization is the aggregate information and reading material produced by the generations that preceded us. In furtherance of civilization, we can join this caravan by reading the books that predate us. Or as expressed by Descartes, **"The reading of all good books is like conversation with the finest men of past centuries."**

Many thinkers, writers, philosophers, and scientists who had knowledge of self wrote that without books, life is blind, deaf, and dumb. How succinctly Montaigne articulated human self-realization and self-discovery with the words, **"I have no more made my book than my book has made me."**

Kafka says this about the visible emergence of values essential to humanity: **"A book must be the axe for the frozen sea within us. Some books seem like a key to unfamiliar rooms in one's own castle."**

As Lord Byron said, **"A drop of ink may make a million think."** Also worth remembering are the words of Voltaire when he said, **"Every country besides the barbaric nations is ruled by books."** Otherwise, Ovid's warning will come true: **"Nations that do not raise their young minds with books are doomed to fall."**

**"A book is a dream that you hold in your hand,"** says Neil Gaiman. Many inventors made their discoveries thanks to inspiration or clues appearing in their dreams. Thinking creatively might be possible by looking at the world and at events through a different lens. Every book is a different lens through which the reader looks at the world.

A book is like a sincere and loyal friend. It doesn't take offence when neglected. It isn't resentful. Reading is a lifestyle. Everyone whose path leads through reading adopts it as a mode of behavior. Book readers have a healthy development of language. Their communicational capacity is increased. It goes without saying that people who read and internalize what they've read express themselves more freely and are more successful in the information and communication society of today. When done as regularly eating and drinking, reading proves vital in people's easy learning and good decision-making abilities.

In fact, it would do well to point out that the brain actively functions with the learning and questioning gained from books and that as a result of reading, many capacities of human intelligence such as attention, comprehension and interpretation, and attention to detail showed positive development. By declaring that **"The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn,"** famous American writer Alvin Toffler basically categorizes those who, despite their reading and writing abilities, are not book readers as illiterates. Ursula Kroeber Le Guin cautions the people of today and nicely articulates the vital importance of reading by saying, **"If a generation is raised with the belief that ignorance is bliss, the next generation will not even notice its ignorance, because it won't know what it is."**

With their positive, character-altering influence, books are ever enriching us. Hundreds of benefits of reading could be listed. Young and old alike can interact with books. Thanks to

books, we can more easily recognize and evaluate human behavior. Someone who has read about a life-related problem and its solution in a book will have an easier time resolving similar problems encountered in his own life. Reading teaches a person to dream and to love people, nature, and animals. It arouses one's interest toward inventions and technology, and prompts one to do research. Books, which show humans their place and duty in the cosmos, teach the necessity of working for success while making people more articulate with their thoughts.

To quote a wise expression, **"The shore is beyond your reach, but never quit reading to reach the depths.** No one should ever claim, **"I am complete."** If they say so, they are incomplete. As soon as one says **"I am complete,"** they're finished.

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