Time Management in Islam

There are among those who believe in the popular saying as "Time is Gold." Time in Islam is more valuable than Gold or any precious material thing in this world. Of all religions, only Islam guides mankind not only to the importance of time but also how to value it. Allah and Rasulullah very clearly tell us the value of time, why we must not waste it and how we can make use of our time wisely to increase our iman (faith) and thus attain success, especially eternal success in the life hereafter.

The following are some of the most important duties demanded of Muslims:

1. Ensuring benefiting from time
2. Utilizing leisure time
3. Racing for good deeds
4. Learning from the passage of time
5. Seeking the superior times
6. Planning and organizing time
7. Fulfillment of time commitments
8. Necessary awareness of time wasters

Both the Qur'an and the Sunnah enjoin Muslims to be conscious of time. We are reminded that life in this world is nothing but temporary. We never know when death has been appointed for us. We must value time for the pleasure of Allah. For our guidance and success, we must never waste time nor abuse it.

Ibn Abbas narrated that Rasulullah said:

"There are two blessings which many people are deceived about: (They are) health and free time." (Bukhari 8/421)

Indeed, we displease Allah when we abuse time. We must remember that time must be spent to fulfill our very purpose in life that is to worship Allah throughout our lives. Allah makes this very clear in the Qur'an when He says:

I have only created Jinn and Men, that they may serve Me. No Sustenance do I require of them, nor do I require that they should feed Me. For Allah is He Who gives (all) Sustenance, Rabb of Power, Steadfast (for ever). Qur'an (51:56-58)

But celebrate the praises of thy Lord, and be of those who prostrate themselves in adoration. And serve thy Lord until there come unto thee the Hour that is certain (i.e., death). Qur'an (15:98-99)

Everything we do in accordance with the Qur'an and the Sunnah is an act of worship. Such
worship must be done sincerely for the pleasure of Allah ﷻ alone. We should make use of our time (which includes our "free time") in doing beneficial things especially those that will make us closer to Allah ﷻ and earn His Mercy.

We have to make use of our time wisely by knowing more of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. We must have correct knowledge of what Allah ﷻ and Rasulullah ﷺ have commanded us to do and at the same time to refrain from what they have forbidden us. This is imperative so that we earn Allah's pleasure and reward. Allah ﷻ makes it very clear, when he says:

O ye who believe! Obey Allah, and obey the messenger, and make not vain your deeds! Qur'an (47:33)

Corollary to the above divine commandment, we must ask ourselves: Have we been obeying Allah and His Messenger? To what extent have we used our time learning the Qur'an and the Sunnah in order to have correct iman (Faith), to do righteous deeds, to enjoin the Truth or do Da'wah, and be patient and constant? As time passes by, are we sure we are devoting our time for the sincere worship and pleasure of Allah ﷻ? Are we taking guidance from the following very enlightening Ayat (Qur'anic verses)?

By (the Token of) Time (through the ages), Verily Man is in loss, Except such as have Faith, and do righteous deeds, and (join together) in the mutual teaching of Truth, and of Patience and Constancy. Qur'an (103:1-3)

In line with the above Qur'anic injunction, we have to discipline ourselves by giving value to the importance of time. We must be prompt in doing good deeds, which will increase our faith and subsequently enable us to gain Allah's pleasure and mercy.

Islam encourages Muslims to care for time, to utilize it wisely and not to waste it and to benefit from it. Besides, it holds them responsible for their time.

We have to remember that on the Day of Judgment we shall be asked how we spent our lives, wealth and knowledge. In other words, we will be questioned on how we spent everything that Allah has given us as implied in the following Hadith:

Narrated Abdullah Bin Mas`ud ﷺ, Rasulullah ﷺ said:

"A man shall be asked concerning five things on the day of resurrection: concerning his life, how he spent it; concerning his youth, how he grew old; concerning his wealth, whence he acquired it, and in what way he spent it; and what was it that he did with the knowledge that he had."

Rasulullah ﷺ used to call on Muslims to take the initiative to do good deeds before any obstacles arise. For instance, he said, "Lose no time to do good deeds before you are
caught up by one of seven calamities awaiting you: a starvation which may impair your wisdom; a prosperity which may mislead you; an ailment which may damage your health; an old age which may harm your senses; a sudden death; the Dajjal (Antichrist); or Doomsday, which is indeed the hardest and most bitter." (at-Tirmidhi, al-Baihaqi)

The above Hadith urges Muslims to take the initiative, and not to delay good deeds; man's life is not free from impediments, such as those calamities, which can prevent him from accomplishing what could have been done earlier. Wise are those who grab available opportunities before being handicapped by obstacles.

If we are to evaluate ourselves objectively, have we been spending our time wisely for the pleasure of Allah ﷻ? Have we been spending our lives based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah? Have we been practicing Muslims? How many of us are Muminoon (Faithful Muslims) and/or Mutaqoon? How much knowledge of the Qur'an and the Sunnah do we know? Do we practice what we learn and impart the same to others or at least share them to our families and kin? Have we ever enjoined to others what is right and forbid what is wrong?

To be successful, we have to manage our time wisely by making plans for virtuous deeds that please Allah ﷻ. We must spend time learning Islam based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah.

**Another Year Passes By and Time Marches On**

O ye who believe! Fear Allah, and let every soul look to what (provision) He has sent forth for the morrow. Yea, fear Allah: for Allah is well-acquainted with (all) that ye do. Qur'an (59:18)

Another year has passed; minutes move into hours => into days => into weeks => into months => into years - seemingly faster than ever; yet every moment is a precious component of life and every moment counts.

**Time - Use it, do not abuse it**

Our attitude towards time indicates our attitude towards the value of the capital of life. If we want to purchase something, we require financial capital; and if we want to do something in life, we require the capital of life, time. That is why the Qur'an exhorts us to value the time we have before life is up. Qur'an (63:10)

Realize that...

- Time is the measure of life, time is an amaanah (trust), time is a gift from Allah ﷻ and its proper use will determine our outcome for eternity.
- We are born in time, live in time and die in time; time is the ambit within which we
operate. What we do with time is what we do with our lives.

- Each one must realize that every moment that passes by is an opportunity gone, used or abused; never to return. Soon time will be up and we'll have to leave this physical world and give account for our lives.
- The more we remind ourselves of the responsibility of the present the better we get at living the moment and the better we live the present moment the better the consequence for the future.

Our attitude towards the future influences our mind-set towards the rest of life. Being positive about life ahead is among life's greatest motivators. Hope is the best attitude one can harbor towards the future; this realistic expectation that something good or better could/will happen if only we continue doing the best we can. Remember that today well-lived makes yesterday a dream of happiness and every tomorrow a vision of hope.

Wise are the words of the one who said ... "I expect to pass through this world but once; any good therefore that I can do, or any kindness that I can show to any fellow creature, let me do it now; let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again."

**The Characteristics of Time**

We are to bear in mind that time has certain characteristics, among of which are the following:

1. Time passes quickly.
2. Time that passes can never return, nor can it be compensated for, for time is irretrievable.
3. Time is the most precious thing that man possesses.

**Muslim's Duty towards Time:**

Having all this great value and importance, time is to be duly appreciated and managed. In Islam there is no room for slogans like the so-called "killing time", for in Islam time is really valuable. In fact, wasting time is much more dangerous than squandering property, because unlike property, time cannot be compensated. Free time is a blessing that is overlooked, and not wholly appreciated by many people.

This indicates that it's very important for a Muslim to try his utmost to husband his time and make the best use of it in beneficial things. A Muslim may use portion of his time in making invocations and supplications, celebrating the praises of Allah. Rasulullah ﷺ used to supplicate: "O Allah! I seek refuge in You from sorrow and distress, and I seek refuge in You from disability and laziness."

A Muslim should learn how to organize his time, and make a realistic plan for his worldly and religious duties, without any of them overlapping the other. That is to say that one
should know how to arrange his priorities: the most important and the most urgent comes first, and carried out according to schedule. Organizing time also includes leaving a place for relaxation and entertainment, for 'all work and no play make Jack a dull boy.'

One of the methods of managing his time properly is for a Muslim to get up early and sleep early, for early hours always yield great blessings. Starting his day with prayer and the supplication of the morning brings the Muslim Allah's grace. A Muslim should always bear in mind that every time has its own task that suits it. Doing tasks in their due times brings about peace of mind and comfort.

**In general, sensible people know the importance of time.**

Imagine there is a bank which credits your account each morning with $86,400. It carries over no balance from day to day, allow you to keep no cash balance, and every evening cancels whatever part of the amount you had failed to use during the day.

What would you do? Draw out every cent, of course!

Well, everyone has such a bank. Its name is TIME. Every morning, it credits you with 86,400 seconds. Every night it writes off, as lost, whatever of this you have failed to invest to good purpose.

It carries over no balance. It allows no overdraft. Each day it opens a new account for you. Each night it burns the remains of the day. If you fail to use the day's deposits, the loss is yours.

There is no going back. There is no drawing against the "tomorrow". You must live in the present on today's deposits. Invest it so as to get from it the utmost in health, happiness and success! The clock is running. Make the most of today.

To realize the value of ONE YEAR, ask a student who has failed a grade.
To realize the value of ONE MONTH, ask a mother who has given birth to a pre-mature baby.
To realize the value of ONE WEEK, ask an editor of a weekly newspaper.
To realize the value of ONE DAY, ask a daily wage laborer who has kids to feed.
To realize the value of ONE HOUR, ask the lovers who are waiting to meet.
To realize the value of ONE MINUTE, ask a person who has missed the train.
To realize the value of ONE SECOND, ask a person who has avoided an accident.

Treasure every moment that you have! And treasure it more because you shared it with someone special, special enough to spend your time ... and remember that time waits for no one. . .

Yesterday is history, tomorrow a mystery, today is a gift, that's why it's called the present!
If you study the seerah with specific focus on his daily and regular routines, it is an eye-opener. How meticulous he was in planning every aspect of his day; how he prioritized tasks; how serious he was about keeping his word and how he kept his speech precise and not indulging in idle talk. Here are five lessons on time-management that we can draw from the Prophet’s enormously productive and purpose-driven life.

1. Be an Early Riser

Rasulullah ﷺ said: “O Allah, bless my nation in their early mornings (i.e., what they do early in the morning).” [Ibn Majah]

Schedule your important tasks earlier in the day, especially those which require mental exercise, and watch the blessings from Allah do the magic.

2. Schedule your day around the Five Daily Prayers

No compromises. The discipline to give up all your work and life’s distractions to perform salah strengthens your willpower to live a purposeful life. Just as you endeavor to be punctual for meetings with your colleagues or project team mates, you should perform your salah on time.

While some of us who are students or working professionals may find it difficult to pray on time, we can overcome this by discussing the issue with your colleagues or friends. Once you have fulfilled your most important obligation, the rest will become easy for you.

3. Prioritize and Be Consistent

If we look into the seerah, we can deduce that the day of Rasulullah ﷺ was divided into three main parts.

Spiritual development: This was the time he dedicated solely to Allah. It was typically the late part of the night when he would recharge himself spiritually for the next day and boost his resolve to face the challenges in his mission. It was during the night that he engaged in intimate communication with his Rabb, the Source of all strength and empowerment, through qiyam (night prayer), dua (supplication) and zikr.

Family affairs: The prophet was consistent in making time for family matters.

Personal/Social affairs: He consistently made time for his companions, so no one felt neglected or had their affairs swept under the carpet. This was the time when men and women would come with their personal, marital, financial, spiritual and even health problems. This is when he would receive delegations from other nations and faiths or attend to nerve-racking issues of politics, conflicts and leadership.

Figure out the real priorities in your life. What is worth spending an hour on? What comes first? What is a must-do and what is good-to-do? Allocate time consistently to activities that matter. Unless you plan for and schedule time for community work, studies or attending to
parents, your spouse or children on a daily basis, they are not considered important enough to you. Chances are, you will eventually start neglecting these high priority actions.

4. Hasten in Doing Good
Rasulullah ﷺ had a sense of urgency in doing good and warned others against procrastination.

Narrated ‘Uqba bin Al-Harith : Once Rasulullah ﷺ offered the Asr prayer and then hurriedly went to his house and returned immediately. I (or somebody else) asked him (as to what was the matter) and he said, “I left at home a piece of gold which was from the charity and I disliked to let it remain a night in my house, so I got it distributed.” [Bukhari]

Procrastinators do not appreciate time nor the means and the opportunities that Allah gives them to be productive. Each day has its own share of work and each time has its own share of obligations. Therefore, in the life of Rasulullah ﷺ, there was no such thing as idle time.

5. Honoring the Time of Others
Rasulullah ﷺ was sensitive to his companions’ time and needs. His khutbahs (sermons) were brief, concise and powerful. Aim to arrive for meetings, classes and events 10 minutes before they are scheduled to start. If you are running late, inform the other parties. Honoring others’ time is part of fulfilling your promise. Breaking a promise not only causes inconvenience to others, but also causes you to lose their respect.

Tip #1: Work in small chunks

Don’t try to get something done in one sitting, especially if it takes a lot of time. Split it up into smaller chunks so that it is done by the deadline without affecting your other tasks.

Example 1: You have an assignment due on 15 May. Split up your work into one hour daily chunks of research, drafting, writing, referencing and editing so that it is done on time without seeming like a burden.

Example 2: If you have a 200 page book to read, split it up into 20 pages a day so that it is done in 10 days without affecting your other tasks and responsibilities.

Tip #2: Discipline is Key!

To be successful in anything in both worlds, self-discipline is necessary. This applies to time management as well. One needs to be very strict on oneself to stick to times, stick to schedules and not get distracted from priorities.
Alhamdulillāh, Islam teaches us self-discipline through our daily prayers, especially trying to pray with khushū', as well as through Ḥajj, fasting and other aspects of our religion. We need to take the discipline we learn from this and apply it to other areas of our life including time management.

It takes discipline to make schedules, checklists, etc. and even more discipline to stick to these schedules. It takes discipline to ignore distractions and avoid unnecessary phone conversations. This is a habit all Muslims need to develop.

**Tip #3: Eliminate Time Wasters!**

For people who don't constantly monitor their days, a lot of time is wasted in useless activities (lughw as the Qur'an refers to it). A simple step to avoiding time wasters is to keep a log for a few days of everything you do in a day. You will be surprised at how much time is wasted in useless activities that do not benefit you in this world or the next.

By cutting down our time wasters to just the necessary means of relaxation and fun, we can free up a few more hours in the day for other beneficial projects.

Common time wasters to look out for include:

1. Wasting too much time on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube or browsing non-beneficial websites
2. Talking on the phone for hours (this can also lead to sins like backbiting)
3. Television and Video Games
4. Oversleeping

By cutting down the above to just the necessary amount you need to function properly in a day (6-8 hours sleep, 2-3 hours of fun), we are able to free time for things which matter.

“Successful are the believers... those who stay away from lughw (things which waste time)” (Surah Mu'minoon 23:1 & 3)

**Tip #4: Make a schedule**

I prefer a weekly schedule to a daily one as it gives you more time to schedule more things and allows for planning in advance.

Stephen Covey says about weekly schedules, “Organizing on a weekly basis provides much greater balance and context than daily planning... Business, education and many other facets of society operate within the framework of the week, designating certain days for
focused investment and others for relaxation or inspiration.” (7 Habits of Highly Effective People, p. 161)

Such a schedule helps one to plan ahead for the week and will prevent a person from oversleeping, wasting time, etc.

Also note that the schedule should be flexible enough to be adjustable for sudden emergencies, so I recommend leaving one hour a day open for any adjustments.

**Tip #5: Learn to say No!**

Think about what are the biggest time wasters. Usually, it has something to do with excessive socializing. Whether it's long phone class, instant messaging, social networks or hanging out. Much of our day goes in useless discussions.

The only way to avoid this is to learn to decline such offers... politely of course. :)

I'm not saying don't phone people or visit them but if a phone call is going on too long and is cutting into your work time, there is nothing wrong with excusing yourself and saying you need to get back to work. Do this often and people will get the message and will only contact you when necessary or when they know you have time to chat.

Declining offers for long chats and useless conversations not only will help you stick to a schedule and accomplish more but will protect you from sins like backbiting and gossip as well.

**Tip #6: Beneficial Hobbies**

We all have that time of the day and that day of the week (and that month of the year sometimes) in which we are tired, don't want to do any work and just want to have fun. There is nothing wrong with this as long as the means of fun is halal and you do not go into excess.

However, even better is if we establish hobbies which are both productive and fun! This could be a physical sport, reading, playing educational or puzzle solving games, the list of beneficial hobbies can go on and on.

Inshā'Allāh if we establish beneficial hobbies, then even our fun time becomes productive and is not wasted!

So these are my seven time management tips. Feel free to share your own in the comments section so that we can all benefit.