

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE AWARENESS

#### WHAT IS SO HARMFUL TO THE MIND ABOUT WATCHING TELEVISION?

Watching television has been characterised as multi-levelled sensory withdrawal that may be stunning the growth of our children's brain. Brain size has been shown to decrease 20-30% if a child is not touched, played with or talked to (Healy 1990). Television in fact only presents information to two senses: hearing and sight. In addition, the poor quality of reproduced sound presented to our hearing and the flashing, coloured, fluorescent over-stimulating images presented to our eyes cause problems in the development and proper function of these two critical sense organs (Poplawski 1998).

From this research we find that there will be problems in later life as the two senses; vision and hearing, have not fully been utilised due to watching many hours of TV.

Our visual system, "the ability to search out, scan, focus, and identify whatever comes in the visual field" (Buzzell 1998), is impaired by watching TV. These visual skills are also the ones that need to be developed for effective reading. Children watching TV do not expand their pupils, show little to no movement of their eyes (i.e., stare at the screen), and lack the normal saccadic movements of the eyes (a jumping from one point to the next) that is critical for reading. The lack of eye movement when watching television is a problem because reading requires the eyes to continually move across the page. The weakening of eye muscles from lack of use can't help but negatively impact the ability and effort required to read. In addition, our ability to focus and pay attention relies on this visual system. Pupil dilation, tracking and following are all part of the reticular activating system. (Johnson 2001)

This shows that whilst watching TV the eyes do not get the necessary exercise. This is one of the reasons children wear glasses at a very young age.

Reading a book, walking in nature, or having a conversation with another human, where one takes the time to contemplate and think, are far more educational than watching TV. The TV and computer games are replacing these invaluable experiences of human conversations, storytelling, reading books, playing "pretend" meaning using internal images created by the child rather than the fixed external images copied from television. Viewing TV represents an endless, purposeless, physically unfulfilling activity for a child. Unlike eating until one is full or sleeping until one is no longer tired, watching TV has no built-in endpoint. It makes a child want more and more without ever being satisfied. (Johnson, 2001)

#### **Brainwashing**

In the fifties, due to the fact that the Chinese succeeded in brainwashing American Prisoners Of War (POWs) during the Korean War, the US Army conducted studies to develop their own "Manchurian Candidate." They concluded that there were three necessary elements for a successful brainwashing program: physical and mental exhaustion, repetition, and reducing the desired messages to slogans. If we examine the present condition of life in most industrialised countries, we find that the majority of the population is sleep deprived due to high levels of stress, overwork, lack of exercise and long work days. They are constantly bombarded day in and day out with repetitive "messages" in the form of commercials, billboards, semiotic commercial symbols, logos, internet ads, and film and television. (Johnson, 2001)

We are bombarded day in day out with advertisements, false information from tabloids, advertisements on billboards, on the bus stop everywhere we go, junk mail, and the internet is as worse. Do not let this filth into your minds and corrupt you soul.

### **Family disputes**

Shaykh Hamza Yusuf once visited a local bookstore and was looking at a particular section when a full-blown argument erupted among the members of a family of four: the mother, the father, and two sons-one about nine and the other about sixteen. The nine-year-old was arguing that two hours of Nintendo and two hours of TV were not excessive, while his mother held otherwise. What struck him most was when the nine-year-old said to his mother, "You watch at least two hours of TV everyday, so why can't I?"

This is the power struggle that Dr. Johnson states that 'they have little moral authority over their children in this matter'. Children are surprisingly smart when it comes to detecting hypocrisy in adults. If we are to effectively protect our children in the present and influence their choices later, we must live the life we desire for them now. All else leads to the double-minded confusion of our present disastrous condition.

Our children are confused as they are not in the 'Islamic environment' but surrounded by western culture and left to imitate it because we have neglected the rights of the children. We hear scholars talking about rights of parents and hammering it in, however, there are not many who talk about the rights of children and the importance of up-bringing. I have heard daughters' running away from home because they want to marry a non-Muslim. They have not realised the difference between a person with Iman and a person without, as the culture in the home has been the same as the non Muslims. We are headless of Salaah, no attention is paid towards what we eat, how many of us look at the ingredients before eating something? By Allah we have forgotten that we have to answer to The Almighty on the Day of Resurrection! Put all the excuses aside and learn about Islam and pass it onto your children otherwise let alone the child praying the funeral prayer over you but you will have no-one to pray for you after you leave this world.

### **'Parents die after clash'**

A article in the Asian Image, February 2004 issue, caught my attention. The article was titled 'Parents die after clash'. The article states;

"The parents of a student in India have burnt to death after arguing about the amount of time the teenager spent watching television reports Kerala Next.

The incident occurred in a north Kolkata home after Manas Halder objected to his 19-year-old daughter Rituparna's habit of watching television for "hours on end".

He then poured petrol over himself and lit it after an argument over it with his wife. Seeing her husband on fire, his wife, Chameli, tried to douse the flames, but the flames caught her too."

This is reality, what you see on TV is made up of peoples' imagination and corrupt ideas in our minds and souls not giving us the ability to think but imitate.

### **Inspiration**

TV seems to have a profound effect on our life and therefore, one could argue, on our soul. As human beings, we become detached from the real world by watching TV. We sit in a comfortable chair, in a warm room, with plenty to eat and watch a film about people who are in love, run away from home and who have difficulties in their life. Our hearts go out to them and we imitate them.

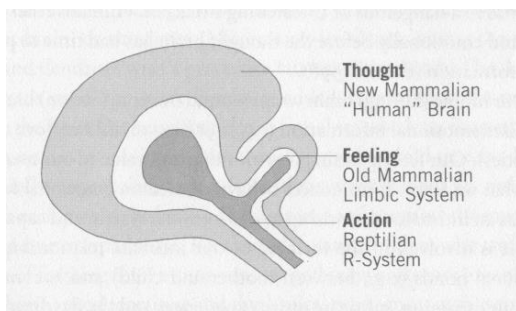
One could argue that reading a book could promote the same sense of unreality without action. The phrases "turn off the TV" or "get your nose out of a book" and "go do something" have meaning. Nevertheless, while reading a book the child's mind creates its own pictures and has time to think about them. These thoughts could actually lead to ideas that inspire a child or adult to action. TV does not give time for this higher level of thinking that inspires deeds. (Johnson, 2001)

There was a time when parents would say to children, 'Go to sleep the lion will eat you' and still the child would not be afraid. However, today we scare our children with, 'Go to sleep or else a cat will come.' We should be telling our children true stories, about the companions of the Prophet, upon him peace, about the great Imams, about the great warriors and not about 'Jack and Jill' or 'Incey Wincey Spider.' Subhan-Allah! What has happened to the Ummah?

## Images

TV projects images that go directly into our emotional brain. It is said that the words we hear go into knowledge while the images we see go into our soul.

The limbic system and the right hemisphere of the neocortex process pictures that elicit emotion. If no time is given to think about these emotional pictures, then the left hemisphere is not involved.



Once again, watching television often eliminates the part of our brain that can make sense of, analyse, and rationalise what we are seeing. (Johnson, 2001)

## Thinking

The problem with TV is that children get used to not using their imaginative thinking at all, and they don't exercise that part of the brain that creates the pictures. Children are not reading enough, and we aren't reading or telling them enough stories to help their minds create pictures. Creating pictures is not just entertaining, but the foundation of our dreams and higher thoughts. We dream, think, and imagine possibilities of the future in picture. (Johnson, 2001)

Neil Postman in his book 'Amusing ourselves to death' writes;

"When a television show is in process, it is very nearly impermissible to say, "Let me think about that" or "I don't know" or "What do you mean when you say...?" or "From what sources does your information come?" this type of discourse not only slows down the tempo of the show but creates the impression of uncertainty or lack of finish. Thinking does not play well on television, a fact that television directors discovered long ago."

TV rots the senses in the head!  
It kills the imagination dead!  
It clogs and clutters up the mind!  
It makes a child so dull and blind.  
He can no longer understand a fantasy,  
A fairyland!  
His brain becomes as soft as cheese!  
His powers of thinking rust and freeze!

From *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, by Roald Dahl, 1964

## Cartoons, films and soap operas

### Disney's Goofy

Cartoons and puppetry, even the dangerous yet highly respected Sesame Street, have themes inappropriate for younger children, not to mention the many toxic effects they have on the growing minds of our child. Cartoons are not only violent beyond belief but have increasingly mature adult themes. In the 'Goofy' movie by Disney, Goof's son, who happens to have contempt for his father, is seen at the outset of the film in a field fantasising about female dog with cartoon cleavage and a flimsy evening gown. (Johnson, 2001)

### Pokeman

The world famous cartoon series Pokeman is very disturbing indeed. When showing the children, it seems like an ordinary cartoon, however, behind the scenes of the Poke Rap there are hidden messages. Forward the lyrics sing, "Got to catch them all, Got to catch them all..." however, when reversed one can hear the words, "O Satan, O Satan, O Satan".

### Popeye

The so called innocent "Popeye the sailor man", the music in the beginning of the cartoon which sounds like any other ordinary cartoon, however, when reversed; the cartoon is sending the messages to our children that sex before marriage is permissible. Forward the lyrics are as follows, "Popeye the sailor man, toot toot..." when reversed, it can clearly be heard, "Give me a F\*\*K, Give me a F\*\*K now!"

### Films

In Florida, long before the school shootings, a 12 year old boy had seen a Kojak episode about a man who kills his elderly neighbour. Like Kojak, the boy shaved his head, popped a lollipop into his mouth, went next door, blew away his 80 year old neighbour, and then asked, "Who loves ya baby?"

### Lion king

In this film, when the lion is on the mountain top, the lion groans, however, when one reverses this scene and plays it slowly it is clearly heard and very freighting, "Take off your clothes."

I have tested and heard the above which made me realised what the non-believers are trying to do with our Imaan. It is freighting, and we have not realised this but say there is nothing wrong with it, this is because we are unaware of the true facts and except what the TV tells us, we can't think for ourselves and this is the problem. Sooner or later TV will destroy us if we don't take a lesson. Only a few examples have been used in this book, however, there are many examples that can be found in other films, TV programmes and shows for children in their music etc. These also include the Simpson's, films by Disney, Harry Potter etc.

Neil Postman writes;

"The single most important fact about television is that people watch it, which is why it is called "television". And what they watch, and like to watch, are moving pictures - millions of them, of short duration and dynamic variety."

Further studies carried out by doctors tell us about soap operas and how it effects our children. The article entitled '*Soap operas create 'climate of bullying'.*' The article is as follows:

"Backbiting and bitchy characters in TV soaps are helping to create a "climate of bullying and aggression", a Preston academic has claimed. Dr Sarah Coyne, from the University of Central Lancashire, believes programmes such as *Emmerdale* and *EastEnders* may be breeding a culture of nastiness, especially among the impressionable young. She has carried out research which appears to show that children and young teenagers are strongly influenced by scenes of aggression on television. Physical and verbal acts encouraged "indirect aggression" among 11 to 14 year-olds.

Other work by Dr Coyne found that episodes of unpleasantness, such as snide remarks, spreading poisonous gossip or giving people the cold shoulder, featured highly in 29 soaps and sitcoms shown on British television.

A study covering 250 hours of television showed that 92% of the programmes contained instances of "indirect aggression". In 60% of cases it was a female character exhibiting the behaviour. Often she was attractive and rewarded for her actions.

*Emmerdale*, *EastEnders* and *Coronation Street* were the most aggressive soaps, showing "bitchy" scenes at the rate of 14 or 15 times an hour. In contrast, the Australian soaps *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* were comparatively tame, with only four or five hourly episodes of "indirect aggression".

Dr Coyne said: "If TV is having this effect it's something we need to investigate further. It's creating a climate of bullying and aggression."

The research was conducted in the Preston area in March last year. Dr Coyne showed 199 students, aged 11 to 14, soap-style films in which actors displayed indirect or physical aggression, or engaged non-aggressively.

Before watching the films, the children were given a puzzle task by a researcher who deliberately appeared rude, arrogant and obnoxious. After the films were shown, the children were asked to give their assessment of the researcher. "The kids who watched both indirect and direct aggression scenes evaluated him as much lower than those who watched scenes of no aggression," said Dr Coyne."<sup>1</sup>

### **Assessment**

If you want to know if TV affects your child, you can conduct a simple test yourself, and you don't have to read it in a book or wait for the government to do it. Just put five boys in front of a TV, let them watch *Ninja Turtles* mutant movie, and after two hours, see what happens. You will suddenly have a gang of little maniacs kicking and punching each other until somebody gets hurt, and at that point, they will all start crying for pizza "just like the turtles."

We should not underestimate the reality of the effects of all these messages. Centuries ago, a wise Greco-Roman slave, Epictetus, warned people about the images we allow into our minds. He said that we would not allow someone to go through our bodies against our will, yet we allow people to penetrate our minds everyday without putting up a fight, and often they do not have our best interests in mind. Most of us recognise the importance of keeping the natural environment clean

---

<sup>1</sup> Reporter, Thursday, April 22, 2004

and free from pollution in order to live in a state of physical well-being, but the importance of the environment of the mind and soul seems to escape many of us. The internal environment is actually more important because when our souls are polluted and poisoned, we no longer have a concern for our own well-being or that of others, and will do nothing more than pay lip service to concern of society and nature. Allah states in the Qur'an the importance of looking after the soul;

*The day when neither wealth nor sons shall avail. But he who comes before Allah, with a sound heart.<sup>2</sup>*

We owe it to our children and ourselves to seriously consider the machinations of mass media and how it has transformed us as a species. We should call into question its "important messages." Who are the senders of these messages, and what are their intentions? Are these messages for our benefit or harm? I believe they are now harmful and soul-destroying. They are messages that we should be struggling against with all of our moral and spiritual strength.

### **Facts & figures**

Dave Grossman, an expert on the growing field of killology, writes:

- Nearly 40% of violent incidents on TV are initiated by characters who possess qualities that make attractive role models.
- 1/3 of violent programs feature "bad" characters who are never punished.
- More than  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the violent incidents feature physical aggression that would be lethal or incapacity if it were to occur in a real life.
- At least 40% of the violent scenes on TV include humour.
- 60% of TV programs contain violence, and more than 60% of the violent incidents involve repeated behavioural acts of aggression.
- Youth who watch 2 hours of cartoons each day are exposed to 500 high risk portrayals of violence per year that teach aggressive behaviours.
- Murder is the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading death cause of death among young people 15-24 years old.
- Every minute a child is arrested in America for committing a violent crime, and gun-related violence takes the life of an American child every 3 hours.
- Since 1960, teen suicide had tripled.
- Every day an estimated 250,000 students in America bring guns to school. (Johnson, 2001)

---

<sup>2</sup> Surah No: 26, Surah Al-Shuara; Verses: 88-89