



THE SMARTPHONE

Beneficial or Harmful?

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The smartphone has become an inseparable part of our day-to-day lives. From within the confines of the home to every region and sector of the outside world, people are seen immersed in the smartphone, yet very few contemplate the negative effects this small gadget is having on their lives. The smartphone undoubtedly has its benefits like efficient worldwide communication, quick internet access, timely news updates, simple navigation, easy online shopping, fast bank transfers, etc. However, an intelligent person does not only focus on the benefits of an item and become oblivious of its harms. Therefore, it is necessary to ponder over the negative impact the smartphone is having on our lives. A few moments of contemplation will help us realise the extent of harm it is causing us.

Worldly Harms

What makes the smartphone particularly dangerous is its irresistible attraction which disconnects us from our surroundings and prevents us from enjoying and benefitting from the many worldly blessings Allāh ﷻ has created for us. Let us cite a few examples:

When taking a walk in the park, we remain focused on our mobile phones and consequently fail to appreciate the beautiful scenery around us.

When we sit to partake of a meal, we are unable to truly enjoy the food because our eyes are glued on the smartphone throughout the meal.

This silent addiction does not allow us to have a peaceful sleep either. Hours are spent engrossed in the smartphone, resulting in frequent late nights. It has also become a norm

to keep the smartphone by the bedside during the night and check it whenever it buzzes. The subsequent lack of quality-sleep has a negative impact on our health and reduces our productiveness during the day.

Social Harms

This terrible addiction has also affected our social lives and disconnected us from those who are important to us. A family may be seated together in the same room, yet each person will be in their own world, occupied in some form of a pastime on the smartphone. They fail to even acknowledge each other's presence and do not communicate with each other as a family ought to. When the family goes on a holiday with the intention of spending quality time together, they fail in their objective, as 'quality time' is given to the smartphone.

In the home, the young children often run to the father with much love hoping to be entertained, but he is too busy on his phone and says to them, 'Go to your mother, I am busy.' They then go to their mother who is also busy on her phone and says, 'Go to your father, I am busy.' When the children get fed up and cause a nuisance or 'disturbance', the parents 'solve the problem' by tossing a smartphone into their hands! This has a detrimental effect on the spiritual, physical and mental development of our children.

Husband and wife even quarrel and reach a break-up point in their marriage due to this smartphone. Spending an excessive amount of time on it and sometimes even cheating on one's spouse whilst on it, results in rights being violated and hearts broken.

Guests who we are commanded to honour are left neglected. Frequent attention to the smartphone whilst in front of them makes them feel unwanted and dishonoured.

Spiritual Harms

Along with the many worldly and social harms, there are many spiritual harms of the smartphone too. It has proven to have a negative impact on a very important character-trait of a believer, trustworthiness in fulfilling responsibilities. Those of us who have an average 9am-5pm job are required to work for the full duration of their contracted hours and not engage in any personal activity. This is because the employer who is paying us, has essentially bought our time of us; hence doing anything in that time besides fulfilling the task set by the company would be a breach of trust and tantamount to stealing. Unfortunately, many people during their contracted work hours frequently scroll through their messages on social platforms or keep up to date with the latest news and fall short in diligently fulfilling their duty.

Another great spiritual harm of the smartphone is the unprecedented levels of futile activities we engage in. This leaves us with no time for 'ibādah and has an effect on our spirituality. Very few people can claim to have never engaged in some futile activity on the smartphone.

A Qārī ṣāhib who is spiritually associated to me once informed me that for two or three months, he had been missing his daily tilāwah and adhkār. I asked him to ponder over the reason, upon which he immediately said, 'I already know the reason. It is the smartphone. When I first bought it, I used it carefully for a while. One day somebody sent me a videoclip of a debate. I liked it and thus started watching other debates on YouTube, which lead me into a spiral of pointlessly watching videos and wasting hours of my time.' He would spend so much time on YouTube that he would not have any time left for his tilāwah and adhkār. I said to him, 'You know the problem and

the solution, hence there is no need to ask me for guidance'. He got rid of the smartphone and once again became punctual with his daily practices.

An even greater harm of the smartphone is that it ultimately lands us into sinful activities. Safeguarding the eyes and ears becomes extremely difficult as one does not always have control over what appears on the screen. If an obscene image happens to pop up on the screen, many people do not have the spiritual strength to resist and look away, thus they take pleasure from it. When this happens repeatedly, the nafs searches for more and falls prey to the many different forms of indecent and shameful activities available on the smartphone. This results in sins like masturbation, looking at obscene material, developing illicit relationships and eventually fornication.

The same smartphone used to commit sins is then used to publicise them. Youngsters will shamelessly boast of their sins to friends on social media platforms. This decreases their chances of being forgiven and could be more detrimental than the sin itself.

If one claims that the smartphone has not affected their spirituality because it has not led them to sin, then they will not be able to deny that in some way or another it has affected the sincerity in their worship and good deeds. Just as sins are publicised on the smartphone, it has now become extremely common to publicise good deeds too. People are seen more worried about taking selfies of themselves than pleasing their Creator, when present in blessed places like the Haramayn Sharīfayn, engaged in some worship like du'ā or in some relief work. Feeling the need to 'capture' the moment, they do not realise that they are actually wasting a precious moment of their lives due to falling prey to riyā (ostentation).

A huge harm caused by the smartphone is that it constantly occupies the mind. Every notification will urge one to immediately check his phone, even if he is engaged in ṣalāh, recitation of the Qur’ān or dhikr. In fact, even in the Houses of Allāh we are unable to connect to Allāh, as we remain connected to the smartphone by way of conversing on it, through messaging or just browsing. Unfortunately, this engrossment has deprived us of the solitude of mind required to connect to Allāh ﷻ even in blessed places and during worships.

Another great harm caused by the smartphone is that it has deprived many from the blessed environment of the masjid and the company of the ‘Ulamā, Mashāyikh and the pious. Many people tend to think that merely listening or watching clips about Din on the smartphone in the comfort of their homes is sufficient for spiritual progress. The reality is that without the company of the ‘Ulamā, Mashāyikh and the pious one can never truly excel in spirituality and acquire the correct understanding of dīn.

If the smartphone does not become an impediment from the gatherings of the ‘Ulamā and Mashāyikh and the masjid environment, it will make many of us violate the etiquettes of these blessed gatherings and also of the masjid. Our attention would be clearly more centred towards the smartphone than the esteemed ‘ālim who is sat before us. This constitutes disrespect to an ‘ālim and disinterest to the knowledge of dīn which becomes a means of deprivation from dīnī knowledge.

Weigh out the Pros and Cons

After numerating various harms of the smartphone, let us implement a maxim we learn from the Glorious Qur’an. Allah ﷻ states regarding alcohol,

قُلْ فِيهِمَا أَثْمٌ كَبِيرٌ وَمَنَافِعُ لِلنَّاسِ وَإِنَّهُمَا لَأَكْبَرُ مِنْ نَفْعِهِمَا ط

Say, 'There are major sins and benefits for people in them (alcohol and gambling), and their sin is greater than their benefit.' (2:219)

The maxim is that when there is both harm and benefit in something, one must let go of the benefit and save oneself from the harm. An example is alcohol. It is prohibited despite having benefits due to the harm it causes. The smartphone is no different. It also has both harms and benefits. In fact, the harms of the smartphone outweigh its benefits, and therefore we should avoid it.

Safeguarding Ourselves

In order to safeguard ourselves from the harms of this gadget, we should ideally get rid of it altogether. A simple mobile phone which is used mainly for calls and text messages will suffice for our communicational needs. In the modern age, this may seem old fashioned, but it is wiser to save oneself from so many obvious harms than to worry about being labelled 'old fashioned'. The smartphone is not as necessary for the majority of us as we believe it to be, and getting rid of it would only bring about many benefits which we ourselves will witness and appreciate.

For those who are genuinely in need of a smartphone, such as those whose work requires them to check emails regularly, business owners who need certain apps on the phone, etc., strict measures should be put in place to regulate and limit our usage of the smartphone:

1. Stipulate certain hours of the day when the smartphone will not be used. For example, 10pm until the Fajr ṣalāh,

whenever we sit to eat, when at work or in a class, when in the Masjid, etc. In these times, we should never look at the phone.

2. Set time limits for the tasks that genuinely need to be carried out on the smartphone. For example, 20 minutes to check the news, 30 minutes to check and reply to emails, etc. An alarm should be set to signal the end of the set time.
3. Apps are now available which disable us from using social media or YouTube beyond a set amount of minutes per day or week, at a cost of a few pounds per month. If this saves us from wasting precious moments of our lives, then it is something we should seriously consider.
4. Only use the smartphone when there is a genuine need. This will save us from engaging in anything that will lead to *lā ya'nī* (futile activity) or disobedience to Allāh ﷻ.
5. Avoid using the smartphone in private. Use it in open areas such as the sitting room where family members pass by regularly. This will save us from looking at shameful and immoral things on the phone.

May Allāh ﷻ enable us to recognise what is good for us and what is bad, and save us from all tools of *lā ya'nī* and sin. May Allāh ﷻ grant us the courage and *tawfīq* to get rid of the smartphone; and if it is absolutely necessary, then may He enable us to keep it under control, and not let it control us. *Āmīn*.

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