

Islam Question & Answer

General Supervisor:
Shaykh Muhammad Saalih al-Munajjid

225943 - Did the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and his Companions (may Allah be pleased with them) do any kind of athletic training or exercise?

the question

I want to do some kind of exercise to increase my physical strength, but I want to do that in an Islamic manner. Did the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) do this kind of exercise? What is the style of swimming that the Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and his Companions (may Allah be pleased with them) used to do?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Muslim (2664) narrated that Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "The strong believer is better and more beloved to Allah than the weak believer, although both are good."

This strength includes both physical strength and strength of faith, as we have explained in the answer to question no. [10238](#).

Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

"And their prophet said to them, 'Indeed, Allah has sent to you Saul as a king.' They said, 'How can he have kingship over us while we are more worthy of kingship than him and he has not been given any measure of wealth?' He said, 'Indeed, Allah has chosen him over you and has increased him abundantly in knowledge and stature. And Allah gives His sovereignty to whom He wills. And Allah is all-Encompassing [in favor] and Knowing'"

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[al-Baqarah 2:247].

“and has increased him abundantly in knowledge and stature” means: He has favoured him over you and given him more in terms of knowledge and stature; in other words, He has given him deep insight and physical strength by means of which he is qualified for his post as king, for if he has deep insight and the ability to implement the right decision, he will be able to fulfil this role in the best manner, but if he were lacking in either of these two qualities, he would not be able to do his job properly. If he were physically strong but lacked deep insight, then the king would be unsuccessful in running the kingdom’s affairs, because his strength would not be used in a wise manner. If he had deep insight but did not have the strength to implement any decisions he made, his insight would not benefit him because he would not be able to achieve anything. Tafseer as-Sa’di, p. 107.

Having physical strength, health and soundness helps a person to worship Allah by praying, fasting, performing Hajj, striving in jihad, and so on. Being physically weak and sick is an impediment in doing many acts of worship.

There are matters of Islamic etiquette that one should pay attention to when playing sports and doing exercises to strengthen the body:

- Seeking reward with Allah, and doing these things to help one worship Him and support those who have been wronged.
- These activities should not involve anything that is contrary to Islamic teachings, such as participants bowing to one another, striking the face, uncovering the ‘awrah, gambling, and so on.
- It should not distract one from obeying and worshipping Allah, honouring one’s parents and other important priorities.
- One should not spend great amounts of wealth on it, to the point of extravagance; rather

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one's involvement in such activities should be based on moderation and within the framework of Islamic teachings.

For more information, please see the answers to questions no. [20198](#) and [218489](#).

We do not know of anything in the Sunnah to indicate that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) used to do this kind of exercise or play sports as known nowadays. For Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, perfected His blessings upon him in all his affairs, and granted him perfect physical strength and strength of faith.

What we know of such matters that is proven in the Sunnah is the following:

Firstly: The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) wrestled with Rukaanah (may Allah be pleased with him) before he became Muslim.

Abu Daawood (4078) narrated that Rukaanah wrestled with the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) threw him to the ground.

Classed as hasan by al-Albaani in al-Irwaa' (5/329).

Secondly: he raced with his wife 'Aa'ishah (may Allah be pleased with her).

Abu Daawood (2578) and Ahmad (26277) narrated that 'Aa'ishah said: I went out with the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) on one of his journeys when I was still young and had not put on weight. He said to the people: "Go on ahead." So they went on ahead, then he said to me, "Come, let me race with you." So I raced with him, and I beat him, and he said nothing. Then when I had put on some weight, and I had forgotten about it, I went out with him on one of his journeys, and he said to the people: "Go on ahead." So they went on ahead, then he said to me, "Come, let me race with you." So I raced with him, and he beat me, then he smiled and said: "This

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is in return for that.”

Classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh Abi Daawood.

Thirdly: archery. Al-Bukhaari narrated in his Saheeh (3373) that Salamah ibn al-Akwa' (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) passed by a group of Aslam who were competing in shooting arrows. The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Shoot, O sons of Ismaa'eel, for your father was an archer. Shoot, and I am with the tribe of So-and-so.” One of the two groups stopped shooting, so the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “What is the matter with you, why are you not shooting?” They said: O Messenger of Allah, how could we shoot when you are with them? He said: “Shoot, for I am with all of you.”

Undoubtedly the Sahaabah (may Allah be pleased with them) used to train in horsemanship and the skills of fighting and running, and they were extremely strong and tough.

Such matters vary from one time to another, and from one situation to another.

With regard to swimming, it is soundly narrated from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) that he said: “Everything in which there is no remembrance of Allah is idle play, except four things: a man playing with his wife; a man training his horse; a man running between two lines (as in a race); and a man learning how to swim.”

Narrated by an-Nasaa'i in as-Sunan al-Kubra (8889); classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in as-Saheehah (315).

We do not know of any report from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) about swimming which suggests that he did it himself.

With regard to the words, “Teach your children to swim, shoot arrows and ride horses,” we do not

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know of any report with this wording from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him).

A similar phrase was narrated from him, "Teach your sons to swim and shoot arrows, and teach girls to spin." But this is a very weak (da'eef jiddan) hadith.

See: as-Silsilat ad-Da'eefah by Shaykh al-Albaani (3876, 3877).

For more information, please see:

<http://www.ahlalhadeeth.com/vb/showthread.php?t=7865>.

And Allah knows best.