

ON LYING IN BED----- G. K. Chesterton

In his essay *On Lying in Bed*, G. K. Chesterton speaks about the major and minor vices of humans, through a humorous account of the idle proposition of lying in bed. Society or rather moralists have chalked out good and bad habits for humanity. There are morals, virtues or vices which can either be major or minor. According to Chesterton, a person can indulge in a minor vice like lying in bed simply to laze, as long as his principles, ideals, and morals are sound and unchanging.

Though the practice of lying in bed is looked at with disdain by many, Chesterton observes that an interesting and creative activity can be practised while lying on the bed. One can take a long coloured pencil or a brush or a broom and paint the ceiling while lying on the bed. But there might be a disadvantage to this pursuit ,because the paint might spill on the artist's face. He says it is better, therefore, to resort to a simple long pencil. Renaissance painter Michelangelo must have acquired the idea of painting the frescoes, in the Vatican City, when he was lying on the bed. The idle practice therefore, can be a source of artistic inspiration, as it had to Michelangelo, who created a divine drama on the ceilings of the Sistine Chapel.

Chesterton also observes that a person's creative impulses are always hampered when they have to live through the mundane and the repetitive . People are accustomed to living a stereotyped existence, with set rules and fixed designs, like the wall papers which are fixed to the walls. The wall papers offer no scope for creativity or artistic pursuits. One cannot paint on them. It is only the white ceiling which offers freedom to paint, to create or to act according to one's impulses.

Chesterton says that the opinion about lying on the bed for no apparent reason, is often hypocritical. People extol small and secondary matters of conduct but disregard great and primary ones. They accuse a man of bad habits but not of bad ethics. For instance, in the maxim : "Cleanliness is next to godliness" , It is cleanliness which is given more importance than godliness. Similarly, lying in bed is considered a bad habit in contrast to getting up early in the morning. Chesterton argues to this accepted view by saying that not all virtuous people get up early in the morning. Misers and burglars do so too.

A man's minor actions and arrangements ought to be free, flexible and creative, whereas, his principles and ideals should be constant and unchanging. For instance, there should be no stringent rules about where to have one's lunch. One can have it on the bed or on top of a tree. Too much emphasis on good habits might lead to less emphasis on enduring virtues

like honesty, integrity or compassion. "A man can get used to getting up at five o' clock in the morning. A man cannot very well get used to being burnt for his opinions." Ideals, principles, beliefs, reformations have greater value than the minor good habits.

Chesterton concludes the essay by calling upon his readers to freely lie on the bed without reason or justification. He implies that is harmless to break minor rules as long as the major ones are intact.