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SCIENTIFIC PAPER ON THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS
VALUES IN THE CONTROL OF DIARRHOEAL DISEASES

by

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Religious values in Islam, "The Baptism of God" (H.Q II, XXX:30) as declared and outlined in the Holy Quran, and affirmed and practised by the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) constitute a universal doctrine for the welfare of the entire human race.

"Verily, this Quran guideth unto that which is the most right.." (XVII : 9);

"And, We have sent thee (Muhammad) not save as a mercy to all the worlds" (XXI :107)

"The same religion has He established for you as that which He enjoined on Noah - that which We have sent by inspiration to thee - and that which We enjoined on Abraham, Moses and Jesus..." (XLII : 13)

Such values have been worked out by the Most Gracious God : "...the Cherisher of everything (VI : 164), "...Who perfecteth every thing (XXVII : 88), and the Best Knower of all about His creation : "Should He not know what He created !!..." (LXVII : 14).

These values, moreover, should be qualified to meet all requirements of a proper human life and to give adequate guidelines to help solve emerging difficulties and urgent problems: "... Nothing have We neglected in the Book"...(VI: 38).

Hence the wise decision of the RSWG on D.D.R. to seek the help of religious values in highlighting the campaign against such a social evil and major health problem as diarrhoeal diseases. This is of particular usefulness and practicability in such communities where religion is prevailing and its values are practised and highly esteemed.

Acute diarrhoeal diseases constitute a major public health problem in developing countries and a leading cause of mortality and morbidity among infants and young children.

Etiological agents in diarrhoea involve two main sectors :

- (a) infective/enterotoxigenic; and
- (b) non-infective/allergic

The first, which is the most prevalent, could be bacterial, viral, parasitic, mycotic or an admixture involvement.

To the non-infective sector belong the nutritional, the metabolic and the allergic disorders. These, though are relatively much less common causatives particularly in children and are of least epidemiological importance, yet they could be of special interest in relation to the food quality, physiological and certain environmental factors.

The great menace embodied in acute diarrhoeal diseases involves the rapid depletion of water and salts which are life essentials.

The teachings of Islam, besides their spiritual and moral motivations, give a place of prime importance to health education, promotion and care with implantation of cleanliness and purity in a physically and mentally fit community. Even the devotional commandments of Islam, as we shall see soon, contribute towards the promotion of healthy behaviour on both individual and community levels as regards personal, family, nutrition and environmental hygiene. This would always urge people to lead healthy life-styles and to fulfil the Prophet's saying in the Hadith meaning that "strong and healthy believer is better than a debilitated one" (Al-Bukhari).

The whole discipline described below contributes forward to a strategy for self-help and self-reliance towards purity and cleanliness with full awareness of the old proverb : prevention is better than cure; and the Holy Quranic text :..." and let not your own hands throw you into destruction, and preserve in doing good.." (II : 195)/

Predicated by the Holy Quranic texts and the traditions of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) , which are the main two sources of Shari'a, the

following points represent the Islamic religious teachings contributing towards the creation and development of the most suitable condition for a proper hygienic comprehension in a society:

1. The sanctity of water and the care for its reservation.

The Prophet (Peace be upon him), forbade urination and defecation in the road, shady places and water, whether it is running or stagnant, as water is needed by people for drinking, cooking and cleaning. If it is polluted by the urine or feces of a sick person, the disease he suffers from may be transmitted to any person using that contaminated water. In the case of stagnant water risks are even greater. The Prophet (Peace be upon him), "forbade urination in stagnant water" and "prohibited that a man urinate where he bathes."

Abu Huraira narrated that the Prophet (Peace be upon him), said : " Let none of you bathe in stagnant water while in a state of ritual impurity" Abu Huraira was asked what such a person would do? He answered : "He should take some of it and use it" .

The Prophet also said : " Let none of you urinate in stagnant water or bathe in on it to rid himself of ritual impurity".

In addition, the Prophet said : "Beware of the two damnable evils." He was asked : "What are the two damnable evils?" He answered : " Defecation in the way of people and in shady places that shelter them from the heat of the sun."

He also said : "Beware of the three damnable evils : defecation in water resources, on the open road and in shady places where people seek shelter from the sun."

Comparable to urination and defecation is everything that pollutes water and threatens man's health, such as the dumping of factory wastes, dead animals and garbage in rivers, canals and drains, washing contaminated clothes therein, and doing anything that spoils the environment. God Almighty says:" Corrupt not the earth after it has been set in order."

Islam's concern for keeping water pure is clearly expressed by the following saying of the Prophet (Peace be upon him): " When any one of you gets up from sleep he must not dip his hand in water until he has washed it thrice, he knows not where his hand was during his sleep."

The Prophet (Peace be upon him) warned also against leaving food and drink containers uncovered. Aisha, the Prophet's wife, may God be pleased with her, is reported to have said : " I used to prepare for the Prophet, (Peace be upon him), at night three covered containers : one containing water for his ablution, another for holding his siwak (tooth-brush), and a third containing drinking water". In another narration told by Ibn Maja on the authority of Jaber, it is said: " The Prophet, (Peace be upon him), commanded us to tie up the mouths of our waterskins and to cover our containers."

That was meant to avert that harmful insects fall into foods and drinks transmitting to them disease germs. In other words, that was meant as a means of prevention and prophylaxis.

2.Milk, the ideal food in infancy

The Holy Quran highly recommends breast feeding during the first two years of life : "Mothers shall suckle their children for two whole years; (that is) for those who wish to realize a perfect suckling. The duty of feeding and clothing nursing mothers in a seemly manner is upon the father of the child.

Noone should be charged beyond his capacity. A mother should not cause harm to her child, nor should he to whom the child is born cause harm to his child. And on the (father's) heir is incumbent the like of that (which was incumbent on the father). If they (the parents) desire to wean the child by mutual consent and (after) consultation, it is no sin for them; and if ye wish to give your children out to nurse, it is no sin for you, provided that ye pay what is due from you in kindness. Observe your duty to Allah, and know that Allah is Seer of what ye do.

Breast feeding and its effect on the immunological status of infants versus artificial feeding is now well-known. This has been illustrated by experimental research showing the protective role of breast milk on the mucosal surface of the gut due to its high content of immunoglobulins particularly the colostrum which is very rich in the protective immunoglobulins particularly SIg A which the infant cannot synthesise before the first month and even later it is of a very low level.

Breast milk feeding helps early maturation and stimulation of the immunological mechanism of the newly born.

Microbiological studies have shown marked difference between the focal flora of the breast-fed infants consisting mainly of lacto bacillus bifidus and E. Coli while those of the artificially fed infants were consisting of mixed organisms mostly E. Coli, proteus, pyocyanous and citrobacter which were more liable to pathogenesis.

Recently, the effects of oral rehydration fluid alone and of oral rehydration fluid plus breast feeding on the course and outcome of acute diarrhoea were assessed in two groups of 26 children aged under 2 years. Children who continued to be breast fed during treatment with oral rehydration solutions passed significantly fewer diarrhoeal stools. They also passed, on average, a smaller volume of diarrhoeal stools and recovered from diarrhoea sooner after the start of treatment. Their requirement for oral rehydration fluid was significantly reduced.

Breast feeding exerts a beneficial effect on the course and outcome of acute diarrhoea by reducing the number and volume of diarrhoeal stools.

3. Food and feeding implications

The choice of food of good quality is imperative in Islam, particularly as regards purity and freedom from microorganisms: "This day are all good things made lawful for you " (V: 5), "O ye who believe! Eat of the good foods wherewith We have provided you." (II : 172).

Moderation is commended : "... and eat and drink but be not prodigal. Lo! He loveth not the prodigals". (VII : 31).

Moderation in life and a proper balance in behaviour is an Islamic obligation: "Thus We have appointed you a nation of moderation " (II: 143). Food balancing, distribution and economy, has become an urgent international problem of much concern. While almost one third of the world's population in developing countries are threatened with famines and suffer from anaemias, nutritional deficiencies and diarrhoeal diseases, another sector of the world's population, mostly in the developed countries, dispense unwisely with excess food while suffering from atherosclerosis, cardiovascular disorders, hyperlipidemia and gastro-intestinal disturbances.

Honey is mentioned in the Holy Quran, and its curing properties are pointed out:

"And thy Lord inspired the bee, saying: Choose thou habitations in the hills and in the trees and in that which they thatch:"

"Then eat of all fruits, and follow the ways of thy Lord, made smooth (for thee). There cometh forth from their bellies a drink divers of hues, wherein is healing for mankind. Lo! herein is indeed a portent for people who reflect." (XVI : 68,69).

The nutritional as well as curative properties of honey have been the subject matter of many investigations. Its antibacterial, nourishing, regenerative and soothing characteristics on the epithelial tissue have been well assessed. Its application both internally and externally in many inflammatory conditions has been repeatedly reported.

b) frequent daily washing of the exposed areas of the body in ablution as a preparation for each of the five daily prayers " O ye who believe ! When ye rise up for prayer, wash your faces, and your hands up to the elbows, and lightly rub your heads and (wash) your feet up to the ankles. c) perfection of ablution with proper washing of the hidden places. d) Obligatory bathing after sexual intercourses, seminal emissions, when menses is over and after experiencing orgasm even in dreams.

Islamic teachings for the prevention of communicable diseases, and what to be done in case of epidemics.

The Holy Quranic mention of infection, micro-organism invasion and outbreaks of epidemics, has been interpreted by personal efforts (XI: 82,83; CV;3,4,5; CXIII : 1,2,3,4,5.

The Holy Prophet (Peace be upon him) said " No diseased person should come in contact with a healthy one.." (S.B.)

Bukhari and Muslem reported the following Hadith: " No infection, No superstition, No credulity, and fly away from lepers as you fly away from the lion, and when you have to talk to one of them, then keep apart for a distance".

This Hadith, however, needs full discussion later on.

5. Islamic teachings in case of epidemics:

Islam developed the concept of quarantine some 1400 years ago. The Prophet, (Peace be upon him), said : " If you hear of an epidemic in any land, then don't approach it and if the epidemic outbreaks in your own land, then stay where you are and don't quit". This Hadith was implemented by Omar, the 2nd Chalif, during his reign, when there was an outbreak of an epidemic in part of the Islamic Empire. It provides guidance to the people of Islamic countries in case of epidemics, such as cholera and other infectious diseases. It reflects the basic measures that should be taken to avert the spread of the epidemic.

Its therapeutic effect in diarrhoeal diseases is thought to be worth of trial.

A research project is highly suggested to investigate the value of honey in the treatment of diarrhoea and the possible usefulness of including honey in the oral treatment of dehydration.

The self-help in wise feeding is manifested in the Holy Prophet's saying : "We are people who eat not unless we feel hungry, and once we eat, we never get full".

Other sayings of the Prophet (Peace be upon him) : " The stomach is the site of disease and fasting is the head of treatment".

"The worst container that the son of Adam would fill, is his belly : as little food as possible would keep him fit. If he has to eat more, then he should fill his belly with no more than its third of food, another third of drink and keep the rest unfilled for his breath", some kinds of food are prohibited which might carry various hazards to health and transmit microorganisms that may cause diarrhoea and other diseases : "Forbidden unto you are carrion and blood and swine flesh and that which hath been dedicated unto any other than God, and the strangled, and the dead through beating, and the dead through falling from a height and that which hath been killed by (the goring of), and the devoured of wild beasts, saving that which ye make lawful", (V:3; XVI : 115).

4. Personal and domestic hygiene

The promotion of personal and domestic hygiene, particularly hand washing has proved its efficacy in combatting communicable diseases, particularly bacterial infectious and diarrhoeal diseases.

The Islamic devotional commands advocate physical purity as a main pillar, requesting : a) washing hands before and after meals: The Prophet (Peace be upon him), " used to wash his hands whenever he wanted to eat , " He who spends the night with hands that smell of grease and contracts an evil in consequence shall have no one to blame but himself".