

The Right Path to Health

Health Education through Religion

Health An Islamic Perspective

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In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Foreword

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Nobody would disagree that health is one of God's greatest blessings; in Islam it is the greatest blessing after that of faith, for the Prophet ﷺ said, "After faith, no one was given anything better than well-being".


However, there is another blessing for which humanity hardly ever gives thanks, and that is that God, who *has created and fashioned and who has proportioned and guided*, has shown us the way to good in this world and the next, and has guided us to that which is beneficial and to the protection of life, intellect and progeny. Thus, the verses of the Quran and the *hadith* of the Prophet ﷺ contain innumerable principles relating to the protection of health which protect everyone equally and safeguard their well-being. These principles are scattered throughout the texts of the *sharia* to the extent that one is amazed at the fact that they are not classified, as other texts are, so as to make it easier to derive the rulings from them and so enable people to know the practical legal rulings in detail.

Dr M.H. Khayat has attempted to undertake this task in regard to the *fiqh* of health. At the invitation of the Islamic Organization of Medical Sciences he prepared a lecture on the *fiqh* of health which he delivered at the fourth Conference on Islamic Medicine held in Karachi in 1984 and which was published in the proceedings of the conference issued by the Organization.

We decided to make the benefit of that lecture publicly available by publishing it in the Health Education through Religion series, particularly since the author made a number of additions, including commentaries and texts from the *sharia*, and explanations of the *hadith* that were included and that were restricted to those that attained the grade of being either genuine or good.

In closing this foreword, it only remains for me to entreat God, the most generous of those from whom we seek help, to make the contents of this book knowledge from which benefit can be gained and which will inspire the reader to adhere to the health principles therein that have been derived from the *sharia* texts, and to enable the writer to continue to revise the chapters and make it a more complete book with further details on health that will ensure the maximum benefit from it.

God is behind all endeavour and He whose help is sought.

A handwritten signature in Arabic script, likely belonging to the author, positioned to the right of the text.

Terms used in the Health Education through Religion series

The following notes are intended for readers who do not know Arabic and who do not have an Islamic background.

<i>fatwa</i>	A formal religious legal opinion.
<i>fiqh</i>	Islamic jurisprudence (literally: understanding and acquisition of knowledge).
<i>hadith</i>	Saying(s) or action(s) ascribed to the Prophet ﷺ or act(s) approved by the Prophet ﷺ.
<i>haram</i>	Prohibited, banned, illegal, impermissible, from a religious standpoint. Epithet applied, in general, to actions or things considered sinful to Muslims.
<i>hijra</i>	The emigration of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, from Mecca to Medina in AD 622. The event is used as the starting point for the Islamic Calendar.
<i>Prophet</i>	The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the Messenger of God. Any reference to the Prophet is usually followed by the symbol ﷺ, meaning “Peace be upon him”.
<i>Quran</i>	The Holy Book of Islam; the highest and most authentic authority in Islam. Quotations from the Quran are normally followed by a reference to the number of the chapter (<i>sura</i>) and the number of the quoted verse (<i>aya</i>). All Quranic texts in this publication are printed in italic.
<i>schools of fiqh</i>	The schools of Islamic thought or jurisprudence, the four most important of which were founded by Malik, Abu Hanifa, Al-Shafie and Ahmad ibn Hanbal.
<i>sharia</i>	The body of Islamic law based on the Quran and the <i>sunna</i> (see below).
<i>sunna</i> ﷺ and	Practices undertaken or approved by the Prophet ﷺ and established as legally binding precedents.

1

Setting the balance

This is a discourse in the *fiqh* of health.

Fiqh, as we all know, is knowledge of practical Islamic rulings as deduced from detailed statements and religious text.

Health, as we define it today, is a state of complete physical, psychological, social and spiritual well-being.

We have in our great reference books on Islamic jurisprudence gems of knowledge in the *fiqh* of worship (*ibadat*), *fiqh* of commercial transactions (*muamalat*), *fiqh* of marriage (*nikah*) and *fiqh* of prosecution (*aqdiah*); but we have no chapter on the *fiqh* of health. Its absence is not because it does not exist or is too difficult to find. In fact, it is available everywhere in these reference works. Perhaps it has come to be overlooked because of its immediate availability. It is sometimes said that very close proximity hides an object like a screen.

This book is a modest attempt to bring out this *fiqh* and to find its threads. I am helped in this by the great change that has occurred in the general concept of health throughout the world. This has led to a general consensus among people responsible for health the whole world over to work together for a single aim, namely, Health for All by the year 2000 and to adopt the primary health care approach in order to achieve it. Muslims, whom God has honoured with the task of being the advocates of the message of civilization to mankind, should have been in the forefront of this blessed task. They would be simply advocating principles which they have been reading for centuries. God has described them as being *The best community ever produced for mankind*. (3:110) This presupposes that they can find the best solutions for the problems of humanity and define the best methods for its advancement. I hope

you will agree with me that in the attempt to formulate the *fiqh* of health, we will find the best way to safeguard and enhance human health.

When we speak of health, we do not restrict ourselves to medicine as it is commonly understood nowadays, meaning curative medicine. Doctors of former and present times agree that there are two types of medicine: preservation of the health of those who are healthy, and restoration of health to the sick through medication and rehabilitation. A number of *hadith* have come down to us from the Prophet ﷺ prescribing certain medicines for certain discases. Scholars have given these statements due importance, treating them as part of the divine revelations and consequently as part of the religion of Islam. But we find that some of them reflect only what the Arabs at the time had, by experience, found useful. An example of these is the authentic *hadith*¹: “If there is any good [or he might have said ‘cure’] in any of your medication then it will be that in an incision to bleed, or in a drink of honey, or in cauterization, matching the illness [of which one complains]. As for me, I do not like cauterization”. Some of these are suitable in a particular environment, considering its climate, temperature and other factors, such as the desert environment of Arabia. They cannot be applied universally, as explained by Imam Ibn Al-Qayyim in *Zaad al-ma’ad*: “God’s messenger has been sent as a guide to mankind, calling on them to believe in God and follow the way which ensures their admittance to heaven. He has explained to people about God, and clearly pointed out what pleases Him, enjoining people to do it. He has also pointed out to them what incurs God’s displeasure emphasizing that they must refrain from it... .. As for medication for physical illnesses, this is complementary to his message. It is meant to serve a different purpose”.

What is important in this aspect of medicine, which is the curative aspect, is that the Prophet ﷺ approved the principle of medical treatment and encouraged us to seek it. In an authentic *hadith*, he is quoted² as saying: “Seek medical treatment”. In another version of this *hadith*³, he says: “Yes, servants of God! Seek medical treatment”. He raised the hopes of patients, making clear that all

¹ Related by Al-Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of Jaber.

² By Abu Dawood following Usama ibn Shareek.

³ Related by Al-Tirmizi.

diseases may be cured. In an authentic *hadith*¹, he says: “God has not created a disease without creating a cure for it”. He also urged doctors to try to identify cures, pursuing the necessary scientific research for this purpose. A *hadith*² quotes the Prophet ﷺ as saying: “Every disease has a cure. If treatment is administered with the right cure, the patient will recover by God’s grace”. In a different version³: “God has not created a disease without creating a cure for it, which may be known to some and unknown to others”.

Also important in relation to curative medicine is the fact that the Prophet ﷺ placed the whole issue of the treatment of illnesses in its proper perspective. He was once asked⁴: “Do our supplication, medication and methods of prevention prevent anything that God has willed?” He replied: “These are also part of God’s will”. Thus he has made it clear that one aspect of God’s will may be prevented by another. It is evident that Islam leaves no room for fatalism, even though it may be mistaken for reliance on God. Although disease occurs by God’s will, every Muslim is commanded to try to protect himself against it utilizing methods of prevention which also work by God’s will. In that, as always, they should place their trust in God.

A similarly important point in relation to curative medicine is that the Prophet ﷺ opposed so-called faith-healing. He approved medicine that relies on study and experimentation, seeking to relate causes to effects. He spoke against the practices of the pagan Arabs who discarded evident causes and laws of nature in preference for mysterious causes and powers, such as charms, talismans, incomprehensible jabbering and tricks practised by sorcerers and quacks. In a *hadith*⁵, he is quoted as saying: “Whoever wears a charm is guilty of associating partners with God”. In another version⁶, he says: “Whoever wears a charm, may God never fulfil his purpose, and whoever wears a talisman, may God never let him enjoy peace of mind”.

¹ Related by Al-Bukhari following Abu Huraira.

² Related by Muslim and Ahmad following Jaber.

³ Related by Ahmad.

⁴ According to Al-Tirmizi following Abu Khizama.

⁵ Related by Ahmad following Oqba ibn Amer.

⁶ Related by Abu Dawood, Al-Nasa’i, Ibn Majah and Al-Hakim.

This is some of the Prophet's guidance in respect of seeking medical treatment. The other objective of medicine, which is preserving the health of those who are healthy, comes out clearly in his guidance. The rules that relate to health protection are general rules which fit in well with the natural laws that God has put in place to promote the well-being of His creation. God says in the Quran: *Praise the name of your Lord, the Most High, who has created all things and proportioned them.* (87:1–2) *O man! What has enticed you from your gracious Lord who has created and well proportioned you, and given you a perfect moulding?* (82:5–7) *By the soul and Him who has moulded it in perfect proportions.* (91:7) To preserve this situation of perfect moulding and right proportion is an important objective of Islamic law. The eminent scholar Izz Eddin ibn Abdussalam says in *Qawaid al-ahkam fi masaleh al-anam*: “Islamic law aims to serve the interests of people and to prevent everything which adversely affects them”. He explains this by saying: ‘The achievement of what is beneficent is the pivot round which Islamic law turns: it either prevents what is harmful or enhances what is good. When you hear God say ‘O you who believe’, reflect on what comes after His address. You are bound to find something good which He encourages you to do, or something evil from which He prevents you, or you may find a combination of encouragement and prevention. He has outlined in His book some of the evils and the benefits addressed by His legislation in order to encourage people to keep away from evil and do what is good”.

This eminent scholar is right. God says to the Prophet ﷺ in the Quran: *God knocks truth and falsehood together. As for the scum, it vanishes without trace; what benefits mankind lingers on in the earth.* (13:17) God, then, defines what benefits mankind, in this present life and in the life to come, as the truth which He sent with His messenger. He says: *Mankind, the messenger has come to you with the truth from your Lord.* (4:17) He also says: *What has been sent down to you by your Lord is the Truth* (13:1) and *Those who are endowed with knowledge believe that what has been revealed to you by your Lord is the Truth* (34:6).

Perhaps one of the best discussions of this subject is the one by Imam Najmuddin At-Toofi of the Hanbali school of thought. In his commentary on the Prophet's pronouncement: “Do not harm yourself or others”, Imam At-Toofi says: “It requires the promotion of whatever benefits the individual and

the community and the abolition of whatever works against their benefit”. He supports his argument with a number of detailed statements from the Quran and the *sunna*. He then presents his method which seeks to make judgments “on the basis of clear text in the Quran and the *hadith*, as well as the consensus of scholars, with regard to matters of worship, and on the basis of utility in transactions and other matters”. He goes on to explain: “We give priority to utility in transactions and similar matters, rather than in worship, because worship is a duty we owe to the Legislator Himself. We are unable to determine what we owe to Him, its quantity, quality, time and place without His direct explanation. Everyone of us then knows what he is required to do. The rights of other people are different. They are determined through a legal policy which is established to serve their interests, which are of paramount importance in this regard”.

“All scholars, indeed all creeds”, as Inam Shatibi says, “are unanimous that the aim of the *sharia* is to safeguard the five essentials of life, namely: faith, body, offspring, property and mind”. These are indeed the essential human rights.

It needs little reflection to conclude that three out of these five essentials, namely, body, offspring and mind, cannot be completely safeguarded without maintaining good health. Good health, however, is only one of a number of important elements which are absolutely necessary for maintaining these essentials. To maintain good health also requires the provision of other developmental needs, such as good food, drink, clothing, shelter, marriage, transport, security, education and income. The Prophet, however, assigns top priority to good health. He instructs us to: “Pray God for forgiveness and sound well-being. No blessing other than faith is better than well-being”¹. The Prophet ﷺ says: “Wealth is appropriate to a God-fearing person, but good health is better for the God-fearing than wealth”². He further says: “He of you who finds himself enjoying good health, secure in his community and has his daily sustenance, is as if he had the whole world at his finger tips”³.

¹ Related by Ibn Majah following Abu Bakr.

² Related by Ibn Majah, Al-Hakim and Ahmad following Mouaz ibn Abdullah ibn Khubaib after his father following his uncle.

³ Related by Ibn Majah following Abdallah ibn Mihsan al-Ansari following his father.

Therefore, it is no wonder that we find in the Quran, and in the traditions of the Prophet, many statements which help to protect and promote health, preserving the proper, balanced position in which man is created. If we study these statements carefully and apply them properly, as we are required to do, we will find at our disposal a large volume on the *fiqh* of health. This is based on the fact that the *sharia* is embodied in clear statements, while the *fiqh* is the result of careful study of such statements and implementing them.

The first of these blessed statements is a unique one which no one other than the Prophet ﷺ has ever made. This is the highly authentic *hadith*¹ in which Abdullah ibn Amr quotes the Prophet ﷺ as saying: “Your body has a [human] right”. Fourteen centuries after the establishment of human rights by Islam, the world issued the International Declaration on Human Rights. However, mankind has not yet declared rights for the human body. The human body may rightfully claim from its owner to be fed when hungry, rested when tired, cleaned when it gets dirty, protected against harm and disease, treated when suffering an illness, and not overburdened. This is a rightful claim which imposes a duty on every one of us. It must never be neglected or made subordinate to other rights and claims, including those belonging to God Himself.

One of the most important texts from which we may deduce the *fiqh* of health is the statement of God in the Quran: *And He enforced the balance. That you exceed not the bounds; but observe the balance strictly; and fall not short thereof.* (55:7–9) This comprehensive statement mentions the balance which God has established in the universe, with its different forces and influences, including man. It draws our attentions to this balance which applies to everything, making clear that any disturbance of the balance, whether by increase or decrease, may lead to terrible consequences. God says: *Mankind! Your transgression will rebound on your own selves* (10:23). The Muslim doctor fully understood this and applied it to health, referring to this dynamic equilibrium as a “*state of equilibrium*”. Ali ibn al-Abbas, who lived one thousand years ago, in his book, *Kamil as-sina’ah*, gave health a very brief definition: “Health means that the body is in a state of equilibrium” (volume 2, page 3). Ibn Sina, in A.D. 1093 in his famous book *Al-qanoon*, expresses the

¹ Related by Al-Bukhari and Muslim.

dynamism of this balance, saying: “The state of equilibrium which a human being enjoys has a certain range with an upper and a lower limit”. It is, then, like a balance which moves between two extreme limits.

To maintain this health balance in the state of equilibrium, protect it against imbalance, and restore it to its proper position every time it is disturbed, a human being must have a “health potential”, so to speak. This is referred to in the *hadith*¹, quoting the Prophet ﷺ as saying: “And store up enough health to draw on during your illness”. This health potential may take the form of proper nutrition, or good immunity, or physical fitness which enables a person to cope well with the stress which the body may face. Health potential may also be in the form of mental and personal security and stability which enables people to deal with the mental stress that may beset them. Indeed, the health potential is all these aspects put together.

* * *

What I have discussed so far concerning the *fiqh* of health is something that we in the World Health Organization consider to be among the great discoveries of the modern era, giving health two important dimensions, namely, health balance and health potential. We refer to the means we take to maintain the health balance as “health protection” while the means that aim to increase health potential are referred to as “health promotion”. Within these two dimensions the World Health Organization approved its definition of health just fifty years ago as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”. This definition reminds us of the Prophet’s ﷺ statement²: “Pray God for well-being. No blessing other than faith, is better than well-being”. WHO’s definition of health has had a great impact. Previously, doctors used to define health as the absence of disease, just as someone who defines life as the absence of death! The great Western doctors in the first half of this century ignored what the doctors of the Arab Islamic civilization said hundreds of years ago. The Islamic and medical scholar Ibn Rushd defined health in his book *Al-kulliyat*, some 800 years ago, as: “A state in which an organ performs its normal function or undergoes its normal reaction”. In *Kamil as-sina’ah*, 1000 years ago, Ali ibn al-Abbas stated

¹ Related by Al-Bukhari following Ibn Omar.

² Narrated by Ibn Majah following Abu Bakr.

that health is: “A state of the body in which functions are run in the normal course”. In *Al-moojaz fi-tibb*, Ibn al-Nafees, 700 years ago said: “Health is a state of the body in which functions are normal *per se*, while disease is the opposite state”.

All our medical scholars, then, made health their starting point, while illness was the opposite to it. This is a reflection of their understanding of what God says in the Quran: *...Your gracious Lord ... has created and well proportioned you, and given you a perfect moulding (82:6–7) Your Lord ... has created all things and well proportioned them. (87:2) We have created man in a most perfect image. (95:4) By the individual and Him who has moulded it in perfect proportions. (91:7)*

A noteworthy feature of the WHO definition is the fact that it speaks of complete well-being not merely well-being. In Arabic, the term used is derived from a root that indicates plenty and high quality. This is indeed the kind of health we would like to prevail: human beings enjoying the best condition, physically, mentally, socially and spiritually.

2

Health: a blessing from God

Islam considers health to be one of the greatest blessings to have been given to human beings by God. Indeed, it is considered the greatest blessing after faith itself. The Prophet ﷺ said: “There are two blessings which many people do not appreciate: health and leisure”. He also said: “No blessing other than faith is better than well-being”. As an aspect of grace, man should express gratitude to God for it, and it should be properly looked after.

Good health is something for which we are accountable to God. The Prophet ﷺ said: “The first thing every servant of God will have to account for on the Day of Judgment is that he will be asked by God: Have I not given you a healthy constitution and have I not quenched your thirst with cold water?”¹ The Prophet ﷺ also said: “No one will be allowed to move from his position on the Day of Judgment until he has been asked how he spent his life; how he used his knowledge; how he earned and spent his money; and in what pursuits he used his health”.²

It is part of the duty of every Muslim, therefore, to safeguard this blessing and not to allow any change to overcome it through ill usage. Otherwise, he will be severely punished, according to God’s immutable laws. The Quran states: *Anyone who tampers with God’s grace after it has been bestowed on him will find God to be stern in punishment. (2:211) and God would not alter any grace He has bestowed on a folk unless they alter what they themselves have. (8:53)*

¹ Authenticated by Al-Hakim and agreed upon by Al-Zahabi as narrated by Al-Tirmizi, Ibn Hibban, Al-Hakim and others.

² Authenticated by Al-Tirmizi as reported by Abu Barza al-Aslami.

The preservation of this blessing can only be achieved through taking good care of one's health and taking every measure to maintain and enhance it. On the basis of this principle, every Muslim should make sure of doing whatever doctors confirm to be conducive to the preservation of good health. Moreover, the Quran and the *sunna* contain teachings which show every Muslim how to protect his health generally and how to take care of each of his organs. Numerous examples can be given. Prominent among these is *wudhu* (ablution), which Islam regards as compulsory whenever it is invalidated. We are strongly recommended to repeat it in many cases and situations. The Prophet ﷺ said: "The door to prayer is opened with purification"¹. Another version of this *hadith*², states: "The door to prayer is opened with ablutions". Indeed, the Prophet ﷺ "used to perform his ablutions for every single prayer"³. He used to say: "Only a believer maintains his ablutions",⁴ and also: "Ablution is part of being faithful"⁵. Moreover, a person who is in a state of ritual impurity after sexual intercourse (*janaba*) is recommended to perform ablutions if he wants to eat or to go to bed. The Prophet ﷺ was asked whether such a person may sleep, eat or drink before having a bath. He answered: "Yes, if he has performed his ablutions as he does for prayer"⁶. He is also recommended to perform ablutions if he wants to have intercourse with his wife a second time: "If any of you has sexual intercourse with his wife and wishes to repeat it, he should perform ablutions first"⁷. We are recommended to perform ablutions before we go to bed: "When you go to bed perform ablutions as you do when you want to pray"⁸. Also if we get angry or have slandered another, when entering the mosque, making the call to prayer, delivering a sermon, after visiting a graveyard, or touching or carrying a dead person, and before reading the Quran.

Another act of worship which also helps to maintain good health is taking a shower, or *ghusl*. This is compulsory when one is in the state of ritual impurity.

¹ Narrated by Ibn Majah and Al-Tirmizi following the Caliph Ali.

² Related by Al-Tirmizi on the authority of Jaber.

³ Narrated by Al-Tirmizi following Anas ibn Malik.

⁴ Narrated by Ibn Majah following Thawban.

⁵ Authenticated by Al-Tirmizi as reported by Abu Malik al-Ashari.

⁶ Narrated by Ibn Majah following Jaber ibn Abdullah.

⁷ Narrated by Muslim and Ibn Majah following Abu Saeed.

⁸ Agreed upon as reported by Al-Bara ibn Azib

We read in the Quran: *If you are defiled (following sexual intercourse or a wet dream) then purify yourselves.* (5:6) God also says: *Believers, do not attempt to pray when you are under the influence of drink, until you know what you are saying; nor in a state of impurity, except when just passing through a mosque, until you have taken a shower.* (4:43) The Prophet ﷺ also recommended his followers to have a shower on many occasions such as on Fridays. He said: “It is a duty owed to God by every Muslim to have a full shower once every seven days, during which he washes his head and his body”¹. He also said: “He who comes to Friday prayer should first have a shower”². Bathing is also recommended on the occasion of the two feasts. Taking a shower is also recommended for entering into the state of consecration (*ihram*), whether for pilgrimage or *umra* (mini-pilgrimage), after washing the body of a deceased person in preparation for burial, for praying for rain or eclipse of the sun, before secluding oneself for prayer, when body odour becomes too strong, and before attending any social gathering.

Islamic teachings are not confined to general cleanliness, but also take care of local cleanliness, such as washing one’s hands. The Prophet ﷺ “used to wash his hands before eating”³. We are also recommended to clip our nails, for the Prophet ﷺ said: “Five practices are part of natural cleanliness: circumcision, shaving the pubic hair, plucking out the armpit hair, cutting the nails and trimming the mustache”⁴. A Muslim is also supposed to keep the feet clean, for the Prophet ﷺ “used to rub in between his toes with his little finger when he performed his ablutions”⁵. He also said: “Woe to heels (from the punishment of hell if they are not washed). Perform the ritual of ablution properly”⁶.

Islamic teachings also take care of the cleanliness of one’s mouth. We are required to rinse our mouths, as the Prophet ﷺ said: “When you perform ablutions, rinse your mouth”⁷. He also said: “Rinse your mouth after drinking

¹ Agreed upon as reported by Abu Huraira.

² Agreed upon as reported by Ibn Omar.

³ Narrated by Ibn Majah following Abu Huraira.

⁴ Agreed upon as reported by Abu Huraira.

⁵ Narrated by Abu Dawood following Al-Mustawrid ibn Shaddad.

⁶ Narrated by Abu Dawood following Abdullah ibn Amr.

⁷ Narrated by Abu Dawood following Lakit ibn Sabira.

milk, because it contains fat”¹. We are also required to keep our gums clean. The Prophet ﷺ said: “Clean your gums from food and brush your teeth”². Similarly, we are strongly encouraged to brush our teeth. The Prophet ﷺ described the process of cleaning one’s teeth as “purification of one’s mouth, and an act that is pleasing to the Lord”³. The Prophet ﷺ also said: “If I were not afraid that it would be too hard for the community, I would have asked Muslims to brush their teeth whenever they prayed”⁴. Two other versions of this *hadith*⁵ mention that the Prophet ﷺ would have commanded us to brush our teeth “every time we performed ablutions”. These last two versions clarify what the Prophet ﷺ means when he recommends brushing one’s teeth for every prayer. It is clear that this should be done at the time of performing ablutions, and not as those people do who use a tooth stick to brush their teeth as they stand to offer prayers. All that happens in this case is that a person removes any dirty particles stuck on or in between the teeth and swallows them. The Prophet’s own practice is the best guide to explain his meaning. In a *hadith*⁶ we are told that: “The Prophet ﷺ used to pray two *rakaah* late at night, and then go and brush his teeth”⁷. Another *hadith*⁸ mentions that the Prophet ﷺ “would brush his teeth before performing ablutions, every time he woke up from sleep, whether at night or during the day”. When the Prophet ﷺ went into his home, the first action he did “was to brush his teeth”⁹. Moreover, “the Prophet ﷺ used to brush his teeth whenever he rose at night to worship”¹⁰.

Indeed, the recommendation to brush our teeth frequently does not exempt any one who is fasting. In fact, it may be even more encouraged during fasting. Al-Tabarani, a highly renowned scholar of *hadith* who has his own collection

¹ Narrated by Abu Dawood and Ibn Majah following Ibn Abbas.

² Narrated by Al-Hakeem al-Tirmizi in his book *Nawader al-usul* following Abdullah ibn Bishr al-Mazini.

³ Narrated by Al-Nasa’i following Ibn Khuzaima following Aisha.

⁴ Agreed upon as reported by Abu Huraira.

⁵ Ibn Khuzaima following Abu Huraira, and Al-Tahawi, Al-Baihaqi and Ahmad following Abdurrahman ibn Louf

⁶ Related by Ibn Majah on the authority of Ibn Abbas.

⁷ Narrated by Ibn Majah following Ibn Abbas.

⁸ Related by Abu Dawood on the authority of Aisha.

⁹ Narrated by Muslim following Aisha.

¹⁰ Agreed upon as reported by Huzaifa.

of authentic *hadith*, quotes Abdurrahman ibn Ghanm asking Mu'az ibn Jabal, the Prophet's companion, "Should I brush my teeth while fasting?" He said, 'Yes'. I asked, 'At what time of day?' He said, 'Morning or late afternoon'. I said, 'But people discourage that and say that the Prophet ﷺ has said, 'The smell of the mouth of a fasting person is more pleasant in God's sight than the smell of musk'. He said, 'Glory be to God! The Prophet ﷺ has ordered them to brush their teeth, and he would not order them to deliberately let their mouths have a foul odour. Nothing good comes of that. Indeed it is bad''.

Another aspect of health protection is to keep clean one's ears, eyes, nose, hair and genitals. It has been authentically reported that the Prophet ﷺ "wiped his ears, using his forefingers to clean them from inside and his thumbs on the outside, thus wiping them both inside and out"¹. It is also authentically reported concerning cleanliness of the eyes that the Prophet ﷺ "used to wipe the inner corner of the eye"². We are also recommended to clean our noses, for the Prophet ﷺ said: "When any of you perform the ablutions, introduce water into the nose and then blow it out"³. With regard to keeping the hair clean, the Prophet ﷺ said: "He who has hair should take good care of it"⁴. Local cleanliness particularly includes the genitals and private parts. The Prophet ﷺ said: "When you defecate, wipe yourself three times"⁵. Anas, the Prophet's ﷺ servant, said: "When the Prophet ﷺ defecated, I brought him water to wash with"⁶. Aisha, the Prophet's ﷺ wife, told Muslim women: "Tell your husbands to wash their private parts with water, for I am too shy to tell them so. The Prophet ﷺ used to do that"⁷. There are many more *hadith* on this subject.

* * *

Among the most important of God's blessings is marriage, which is conducive to the promotion of sexual and psychological health, while it builds the family, the basic unit of society. Hence, God mentions it among His many

¹ Narrated by Ibn Majah following Ibn Abbas.

² Narrated by Ibn Majah following Abu Umama.

³ Narrated by Muslim following Abu Huraira.

⁴ Narrated by Abu Dawood.

⁵ Narrated by Ibn Hazm in *Al-muhalla* following the chain of the Zuhri's nephew Muhammad ibn Abdullah ibn Muslim.

⁶ Agreed upon as reported by Anas.

⁷ Narrated by Al-Tirmizi following Aisha.

blessings saying: *And among His signs is (the fact) that He has created spouses for you from among yourselves, so that you may console yourselves with them. He has planted affection and mercy between you (30:21) and He has created you from a single soul, and from that soul He created its mate. (4:1)* Marriage is the normal practice of God’s messengers, as God has stated in the Quran: *We have sent other messengers before your time and given them wives and children (13:38)*. The Prophet ﷺ urged his followers to get married, saying: “Marriage is part of my tradition; those who do not follow my tradition are not of my followers”¹. He also said: “I also marry women; those who do not follow my tradition do not belong to me”². Addressing the young men among his followers, the Prophet ﷺ said: “Young people, those who can afford to marry should do so”³. He censured the deliberate avoidance of marriage⁴, and said: “I was not ordered to be committed to celibacy”⁵.

Islam goes a step further than emphasizing that marriage is an individual duty and makes it a social duty as well. Addressing the Muslim community, God said: *Facilitate the marriage of those of you who are single. (24:32)*. He has required those who are unmarried to maintain their chastity until they have the means to get married: *Let those who cannot afford to marry live in continence until God enriches them. (24:33)* Islam considers celibacy and the refusal to facilitate marriage as leading to depravity. This is evident in the *hadith*⁶ which quotes the Prophet ﷺ as saying: “Should a person whose strength of faith and honesty are, in your view, satisfactory come to you with a proposal of marriage, get him married. Otherwise, there will be persecution in the land and much corruption”.

Such an important matter is not left to chance. Hence Islam takes all precautions to ensure its success physically, psychologically, socially and sexually. It specifies the criteria for choosing a wife, as is made clear in the *hadith*⁷ which quotes the Prophet ﷺ as saying: “A wife is chosen for four

¹ Narrated by Ibn Majah following Aisha.

² Narrated by Muslim following Anas.

³ Narrated by Ibn Majah following Ibn Masoud.

⁴ Narrated by Al-Nasa’i following Aisha and Samura ibn Jundub.

⁵ Narrated by Al-Darimi following Saad ibn Abu Waqqas.

⁶ Narrated by Ibn Majah following Abu Huraira.

⁷ Agreed upon as reported by Abu Huraira.

qualities: her faith, family status, wealth and beauty. Choose the one who is strong in faith”. This does not belittle the importance of a wife’s family, property or beauty, but it emphasizes the most important quality, without which all other considerations lose importance, that is, strength of faith. Two more criteria are added in another *hadith*, one of which guarantees the continuity of family security, stability, love and compassion, as well as the satisfaction of the sexual urge in a legitimate way. That is one of the two objectives of the marriage institution. The other criterion ensures the continuity of human life. The Prophet ﷺ says: “Marry a loving woman who can give birth to children”¹.

One way of ensuring that the marriage is successful is found in the fact that Islam advises a prospective husband to see the woman to whom he is proposing. It does not recommend blind selection. The Prophet ﷺ says: “If any of you proposes to a woman, he should try to see of her what encourages him to marry her”². In another *hadith*³, the Prophet ﷺ is quoted as saying to one of his companions: “Look at her, for that helps to bring you closer together”.

Islam also encourages a similarity in ages between the couple. Both Abu Bakr and Umar proposed to marry Fatima, the Prophet’s daughter. He said to them: “She is too young for you”. Then Ali, who was much younger than them, proposed to marry her and the Prophet ﷺ accepted his proposal and married them.⁴

Another factor highlighted by Islam is the need to ensure the well-being of offspring. Both men and women are advised to choose their marriage partners on sound basis. The Prophet ﷺ says: “Make a wise selection for your sperm”⁵. The factors which help to make the selection a wise one may naturally differ from time to time, so that every means that ensures a wiser choice is taken into consideration, including medical tests.

Islam finds no fault with the sexual relationship within lawful marriage, and does not consider it to be worthy of any reproach or censure. On the contrary, it considers it something which earns reward for the couple. The Prophet ﷺ says:

¹ Narrated by Al-Nasa’i and Abu Dawood following Maakil ibn Yassar.

² Narrated by Abu Dawood following Jaber.

³ Related by Al-Tirmizi, Al-Nasa’i and Ibn Majah following Al-Mughira ibn Shuaba.

⁴ Narrated by Al-Nasa’i following Buraida.

⁵ Narrated by Ibn Majah, Al-Daraqutni and Al-Hakim following Aisha.

“In your intercourse there is a benefaction”. His companions asked him: “Messenger of God, would one of us have a reward for fulfilling his desire?” He said: “Would he not incur a sin if he were to seek its satisfaction in some unlawful relationship? Similarly, when he fulfils it in a legitimate relationship, he earns a reward”¹.

Islam also encourages sexual play before intercourse. The Prophet ﷺ says: “Let no one of you fall like a camel over his wife, and let there be an emissary between them”. When he was asked what he meant by an emissary, he said: “A kiss and a word of tenderness”². Married couples are encouraged to wait for each other until they have satisfied their desire. The Prophet ﷺ said: “When you have intercourse with your wife, be true to her. If you have finished your purpose before her, do not rush her but wait until she is satisfied”³. This should be added to the general rule stated in the Quran: *The rights of wives (with regard to their husbands) are equal to the (husbands’) rights with regard to them.* (2:228)

Islam forbids intercourse during menstruation, as God says in the Quran: *Stay away from women during their menstrual periods.* (2:222) It allows all positions of intercourse, provided that it is in the vagina. This is evident in the Quranic verse: *Your wives are as a tilth unto you: so approach your tilth when or how you will.* (2:223) The Prophet ﷺ says in this connection: “Do not approach women through their anuses”.

* * *

A highly important factor of health promotion is proper nutrition. Choosing wholesome food and avoiding what is unwholesome are essential to health. God says in the Quran: *Eat of the good things which We have provided for you.* (2:173) *Eat of what is lawful and wholesome on the earth.* (2:168) Describing the Prophet ﷺ God says: *He prohibits them from all that is foul.* (7:157)

To abstain from eating without a valid reason is contrary to health protection. Hence, Islam does not approve of it. God says in the Quran: *Do not forbid yourselves the wholesome things God has made lawful for you.* (5:87)

¹ Narrated by Muslim following Abu Zarr.

² Narrated by Al-Dailami in *Musnad al-firdous*.

³ Authenticated by Abu Yaala and narrated by Al-Sanaani in *Al-musannaf* following Anas.

Healthy nutrition means having a balanced diet, in order to maintain the balance that God has established in all matters, and to which reference is made in the Quran: *And He enforced the balance. That you exceed not the bounds; but observe the balance strictly; and fall not short thereof. (55:7–9)*

Healthy nutrition means a diet balanced in quantity. Eating too much is harmful, as it causes disorders of the digestive system. It is also an indirect cause of diseases of affluence such as diabetes, hypertension and vascular diseases leading to angina and heart attack, as well as diseases of the brain arteries, causing stroke and paralysis. This proves the old saying that the “stomach is the home of ill health”, whether directly or indirectly, and is responsible for some of the most serious diseases. Eating too much is contrary to Islamic teachings. In the Quran we read: *Eat and drink, but avoid excess. (20:81)* According to a *hadith*¹, the Prophet ﷺ said: “No human being fills a container to worse effect than he fills his own stomach. It is sufficient for a human being to have a few bites to keep himself fit (which means that it is sufficient to have only what one needs to maintain strength and well-being). If he must eat (or according to another version “If a human being cannot resist the temptation...”), then let him use one-third for food, one-third for drink and one-third for breathing”. Another authentic *hadith*² quotes the Prophet ﷺ as saying: “The food of one person will be sufficient for two, and the food of two people will be sufficient for four, and the food of four will be sufficient for eight”.

Healthy nutrition also means a diet balanced in its contents. This means that it must have a mixture of the different types of food which God has graciously provided for His creation, so that it satisfies all the body needs in terms of proteins, fat, carbohydrates, salts and vitamins. Most of these are mentioned in the Quran: *He created cattle which give you warmth, benefits and food to eat. (16:5) It is He who subdued the seas, from which you eat fresh fish. (16:14)* Referring to vegetarian food, God says: *It is He who sends down water from the sky... with which He brings up corn, olives, dates and grapes and other fruit. (16:11)* Milk and honey are also mentioned: *In cattle too you have a worthy lesson. We give you to drink of that which is in their bellies, between the chyle and the blood: pure milk, a pleasant beverage for those who drink it. (16:66)*

¹ By Al-Miqdam ibn Maady Karib as related by Al-Tirmizi and others.

² Narrated by Muslim following Jaber.

From within their (i.e. the bees') bellies comes forth a fluid of many hues, that provides people with a cure (of illnesses). (16:69) Elsewhere in the Quran God says: We have made the camels a part of God's rites. They are of much benefit to you. (22:36) Eat of these fruits when they ripen. (6:141) And from it (the earth) we produced grain for their sustenance. (36:33)

Islam prefers wholemeal food. An example is the Prophet's preference for wholemeal bread, as reported in a *hadith*¹ which mentions that Umm Ayman once refined some flour to bake bread for the Prophet ﷺ. He asked her what she was doing, and she replied: "This is a type of food which we used to make back home, and I thought of baking it for you". He said: "Put it (the bran) back in then make the dough".

Washing one's hands before eating is a basic principle. It ensures the cleanliness of the food we handle, so that it is not contaminated with what may be harmful. This protects the stomach from infections. A *hadith*², the Prophet's wife, mentions that "the Prophet ﷺ used to wash his hands before eating".

Another health rule stresses the need to ensure the cleanliness of food and drink. Islam urges that food should be covered so that nothing falls in it. A *hadith*³ includes the instruction: "Cover your water container". And in another version⁴: "Cover your food and drink". The Prophet ﷺ prohibited the contamination of food and drink with what human bodies discharge, because these discharges carry germs and spread infection. He said: "Let no one urinate in stagnant water"⁵. He also "prohibited anyone to urinate where he bathes"⁶. He warns us: "Avoid the two actions that bring people's curses". When he was asked what these were, he said: "The one who defecates in the road and the shade"⁷. In a different version he warns against "three actions that bring people's curses: defecation in water sources, on roads and in the shade"⁸.

¹ Related by Ibn Majah.

² Related by Al-Nasa'i on the authority of Aisha.

³ Related by Ibn Majah following Jaber.

⁴ Related by Al-Bukhari following Jaber.

⁵ Narrated by Ibn Majah following Abu Huraira.

⁶ Narrated by Al-Tirmizi following Abdullah ibn Mughaffil.

⁷ Narrated by Muslim following Abu Huraira.

⁸ Narrated by Abu Dawood following Muaaz ibn Jabal.

Needless to say, defecation in or near water sources is a major factor in transmitting disease, either directly through the polluted water, or indirectly through fruit and vegetables that are irrigated with such water. The reference to the shade in these *hadith* is significant; a shaded place is a breeding area for germs, as it does not benefit from the sun which kills many germs.

This prohibition on polluting water sources and roads is only one of the Islamic directives which aim to keep the environment healthy. We have a complementary order to keep it clean and pollution free. The Prophet ﷺ said: “The removal of harmful objects from the road counts as an act of benefaction”¹. In an authentic *hadith*, the Prophet ﷺ is quoted as saying: “I have been shown the deeds of my followers: both good and bad ones. I found among their good deeds the removal of harmful objects from people’s way”². Muslim also relates a *hadith* following Abu Huraira which says: “Faith includes over seventy branches, ... the simplest of which is the removal of any source of harm from the road”.

In several places in the Quran, God warns against corrupting the earth. To corrupt or pollute the environment is one aspect of such corruption. Indeed it is the first thing that comes to mind when we read God’s directives, such as: *Eat and drink of the sustenance God has provided and do not corrupt the earth with evil. (2:60) Do not corrupt the earth. (7:85) Do not strive for corruption in the land. (28:77)* Indeed all prophets have warned their communities against spreading corruption on earth.

Moreover, God specifically mentions the type of corruption which threatens the life of plants and animals. He says: *There are some people whose words about this present life may please you. They even call on God to witness what is in their hearts; whereas in fact they are the deadliest opponents. As soon as they hold authority they go over the earth to spread corruption, destroying tilth and progeny. God does not like spoil. (2:205)*

On the basis of this verse, Imam Ibn Hazm said: “To deny animals the sort of feed or grazing they need to live and to neglect the irrigation of plants and fruit trees until both die constitute, as God specifically says, the spreading of

¹ Narrated by Abu Dawood following Abu Zarr.

² Narrated by Muslim and Ibn Majah following Abu Zarr.

evil and corruption in the land and destruction of crops and cattle. That is something that God immensely dislikes”.

The Prophet ﷺ was always keen to increase agricultural resources and to expand the healthy environment. He said: “Any trees a Muslim may plant, and any seeds he may cultivate from which man or animal, or any other creature, eats, count as an act of benefaction”¹. He also said: “Whoever cultivates land that has been dead, that land becomes his own”². However, he strictly forbade the cutting of trees. He said: “Whoever cuts a tree (unnecessarily) will have his head thrown directly into Hell”³.

The Prophet ﷺ was the first to create protected areas in which it was prohibited to cut any tree or kill any animal. The Prophet ﷺ declared Medina within a 12 mile belt as a natural reserve: trees were not to be felled or cut, except to cut a stick to drive a camel⁴. Another *hadith*⁵ mentions that the Prophet ﷺ used to “prohibit the felling of any trees in Medina”. He also said of Medina: “Its game may not be frightened, and none of its trees may be cut, except what a man may cut of it to feed his camel”⁶. He also said: “I prohibit all the district in between the two volcanic areas: its trees may not be felled, and its game may not be killed”⁷. He also protected the valley of Wajj in Taif, saying: “It is prohibited to kill or fell the game and trees of Wajj”⁸.

* * *

An important means of health protection and promotion is to give to each part of our bodies its due. The Prophet ﷺ said: “Your eyes have a claim against you”⁹. One must not overburden oneself: “Bear only what you can cope with”¹⁰. This should be accompanied by increasing physical fitness through exercise

¹ Narrated by Muslim following Jaber.

² Narrated by Al-Tirmizi following Jaber.

³ Narrated by Abu Dawood following Abdullah ibn Habashi.

⁴ Narrated by Abu Dawood following Adi ibn Zaid.

⁵ Related also by Abu Dawood following Saad ibn Abu Waqqas.

⁶ Narrated by Abu Dawood following Ali.

⁷ Narrated by Imam Ahmad following Saad ibn Abu Waqqas.

⁸ Narrated by Imam Ahmad and Abu Dawood following Al-Zubair.

⁹ Agreed upon as reported by Abdullah ibn Amr.

¹⁰ Agreed upon as reported by Aisha.

and sport. The Prophet ﷺ said: “A physically able believer is better than a weak believer”¹. He also said: “Your body has a [human] right of you”, and “Be keen to do what is of benefit to you”³.

* * *

In return for all these ways and means of protecting and promoting our health that have been mentioned above, we are strongly warned against making any attempt to alter this aspect of God’s grace. If we do, we will pay a very heavy price. This is clearly highlighted in the *hadith*: “When gross immoral conduct becomes widespread in any community to the extent that they unashamedly publicize it, plague and other diseases unknown in their past generations will spread quickly among them”. God has categorically forbidden all foul and sinful practices, regardless of their nature. He says in the Quran: *You shall not commit foul sins, whether openly or in secret. (6:151)* Another Quranic directive states: *Say: My Lord has forbidden all atrocities, whether overt or disguised, and harm. (7:33)*

¹ Narrated by Muslim following Abu Huraira.

² Narrated by Muslim following Abdullah ibn Amr.

³ Narrated by Muslim and Ibn Majah following Abu Huraira.

⁴ Narrated by Ibn Majah and Abu Nouaim following Abdullah ibn Amr.

3

There shall be no harm

A unique, brief and highly authentic statement by the Prophet ﷺ may be translated as follows: “There shall be no infliction of harm on oneself or others”¹. This constitutes a principle which is further emphasized by other statements by the Prophet ﷺ, such as the hadith which says: “Cursed be everyone who causes harm to a believer or schemes against him”². The Prophet ﷺ also said: “God will inflict harm on anyone who harms others”³. Another version of this last *hadith* states: “Anyone who causes harm to a believer shall suffer harm brought against him by God”⁴.

Perhaps the most lucid definition of causing harm was stated by Rasheed Reda in his commentary on *sura 5*, entitled The Repast (*Al-maida*): “It means that all harm, whether affecting an individual or a group of people, must be removed”. It is from this principle that we derive the all important rule which stresses the need to prevent all evil and safeguard personal and communal interests, always observing the aims of Islamic legislation.

The prohibition on causing harm is clearly stated in the Quran: *Say: My Lord has forbidden all atrocities, whether overt or disguised, and harm (ithm).* (7:33) Another verse in the Quran states: *Abandon all harm (ithm), whether committed openly or in secret.* (6:120) In reference to intoxicating drinks and gambling, God says: *There is great ithm (harm) in both although they have some benefit for people; but their ithm (harm) is far greater than their benefit.* (2:219) It is clear from this last verse that the term ‘ithm’ is used here, as well

¹ Narrated by Al-Daraqutni following Abu Saeed Al-Khudri.

² Narrated by Al-Tirmizi following Abu Bakr.

³ Narrated by Ibn Majah and Abu Dawood following Abu Sirma.

⁴ Narrated by Al-Tirmizi following Abu Sirma.

as in the other verses, as an antonym of benefit, which means that it is synonymous with harm. When we take all three verses together we realise that causing harm is forbidden in the Quran. It is not lawful for a Muslim to cause harm to himself or to other people. Evidence supporting this prohibition is to be found in plenty in the Quran.

Let us now consider how this principle relates to health.

1. Causing harm to oneself

This is forbidden, as God says: *You shall not kill yourselves.* (4:29) He also says: *Do not expose yourselves to ruin.* (2:195) The Prophet ﷺ said: “There shall be no inflicting of harm on oneself”. Similarly, it is not permissible to a Muslim to expose himself to the risk of illness or injury in any way or form. The Prophet ﷺ said: “No believer may humiliate himself”. When he was asked how any person would humiliate himself, he said: “By exposing himself to risks with which he cannot cope”¹. A man runs the risk of illness or injury if he leaves himself exposed to their causes, or by not taking the necessary precautions to prevent them, or by not taking proper care of his health. Islam has given us the necessary directives to steer away from all such risks, making it a duty of every Muslim:

- To be keen to do whatever is beneficial to his health, such as eating well, but not too much, and doing exercise to keep fit. People must also take the necessary care of every part of the body and have sufficient rest. They should do this in response to the Prophet’s statements: “Be keen to do what is beneficial to you”²; Store up enough health to draw on during your illness”³; “Whatever you feed yourself counts as a benefaction”⁴. Similarly, “Your soul has a [human] right against you; your body has a [human] right against you; your eyes have a [human] right against you”⁵.

¹ Narrated by Ibn Majah, Ahmad and Al-Tirmizi following Huzayfa.

² Narrated by Muslim and Ibn Majah following Abu Huraira.

³ Ascribed by Al-Bukhari to Ibn Omar.

⁴ Narrated by Al-Bukhari in *Al-adab al-mufarrad* following Miqdam ibn Maady Karib.

⁵ Agreed upon as reported by Abdullah ibn Amr.

- To take all preventive measures to guard against illness, for prevention leads to health protection, as the Prophet ﷺ says: “He who protects himself from evil shall be spared its effects”¹. That includes keeping away from whatever may cause illness, such as illicit sex, homosexuality and all lewd and immoral conduct. God says in the Quran: *Do not approach adultery, for it is a gross indecency and an evil way.* (17:32) He also says: *Do not approach any immorality, open or covert.* (6:151) In reference to the people to whom the Prophet Lot was sent, the Quran quotes him as saying to them: *You lust after men instead of women. Truly you are people given to excess.* (7:81) In a *hadith*² the Prophet ﷺ is quoted as saying: “The worst thing I fear for my community is the practice of the people of Lot”. Prevention also includes keeping away from *ithm* (harm). God says: *Abandon all ithm (harm), whether done openly or in secret.* (6:120) *Ithm*, as Rasheed Reda says in his commentary on the Quran, includes: “All that is harmful to self, property or anything else. The worst of these are social vices”. *Ithm* also includes intoxicants and drugs. God says: *They ask you about intoxicants and gambling. Say: There is great ithm in both.* (2:219) He also says: *Believers! wine and games of chance, idols and divining arrows, are abominations devised by Satan. Turn away from them.* (5:90) This last command is the strongest expression of prohibition. The Prophet ﷺ “has prohibited every type of intoxicating and narcotic substances”³. He is quoted as saying: “Every type of intoxicant is forbidden; every narcotic substance is forbidden. Whatever causes intoxication when taken in a large quantity is also forbidden to take in small quantities. Whatever influences the mind is forbidden”⁴. Preventive measures include keeping away from patients who are ill with infectious diseases and vaccination against communicable diseases is a great measure of prevention.
- To take every care to prevent injury. This is based on several *hadith* instructing people to make sure they do not expose themselves to any cause of harm or injury, such as: “If you have to sleep while travelling by night,

¹ Authenticated by Al-Khateeb in his history following Abu Huraira.

² Related by Ibn Majah and Al-Baihaqi following Jaber ibn Abdullah.

³ Narrated by Ahmad and Abu Dawood following Umm Salama.

⁴ Narrated by Abu Nouaym following Anas ibn Huzayfa.

avoid the main road, as it is the track of animals and the refuge of pests”¹. When you go to bed, shake your sheets. You never know what they may have inside”². The Prophet ﷺ also said: “Put out lamps when you go to bed, shut the doors, close the waterskins and cover water and food containers”³. In another *hadith*, he alerts people to the danger of fire, saying: “Fire is like an enemy to you: put it out before you sleep”⁴. He also said: “Whoever sleeps on the roof of a house which has no wall has no claim to make (for social insurance) if he comes to any harm”⁵. The Prophet ﷺ also “discouraged staying alone, urging his followers not to stay at night in a house alone and not to travel alone”⁶.

- To take suitable medicine when ill. The Prophet ﷺ says: “Seek medical treatment, for God has not created an illness without creating a cure for it”⁷.

2. Causing harm to one’s family

This means one’s parents, children and spouse. All this is forbidden since it all comes under the prohibition of causing any harm. Islam urges its followers to be kind to their parents. God says in the Quran: *We have enjoined on man kindness to one’s parents.* (29:8) The Prophet ﷺ prohibited⁸ “holding on greedily to money and asking for it persistently, being unkind to mothers and burying young girls alive”, as was the habit of certain Arabian tribes before the advent of Islam. The Prophet ﷺ said: “Cursed be he who is unkind to his parents”. No one can be more unkind to his parents than one who exposes their health to unnecessary risk. Similarly, Islam instructs parents to take care of their children, and instructs both husband and wife to take good care of each other, laying particular emphasis on a man’s duty to look after his wife. The Prophet ﷺ said: “Do take good care of women”⁹. He also said: “My Lord, I

¹ Narrated by Muslim following Abu Huraira.

² Agreed upon following Abu Huraira.

³ Narrated by Al-Bukhari following Jaber.

⁴ Agreed upon as reported by Abu Musa.

⁵ Narrated by Abu Dawoud following Ali ibn Shaiban.

⁶ Narrated by the Iman Ahmad following Ibn Amr.

⁷ Narrated by Al-Bukhari in *Al-adab al-mufarrad* following Usama ibn Shareek.

⁸ As narrated by Al-Bukhari in *Al-adab al-mufarrad* following Al-Mughira ibn Shuaba.

⁹ Agreed upon by as reported by Abu Huraira.

place particular importance on the rights of the two weak groups: orphans and women”¹. He also said: “Your wife has a [human] right against you and your children have a [human] right against you. Give to every one their rightful claims”. In another *hadith*, we read: “Your household has a [human] right against you”². The Prophet ﷺ explains the concept of mutual responsibility within the family, when he says: “A man is guardian of his family and he is responsible for them. A woman is guardian of her husband’s house and children, and is responsible for them”³.

To neglect the rights of parents, wife or children and not to take good care of their health and not to take the necessary measures to prevent their exposition to illness are certainly forbidden, on the basis of the following Quranic statements: *You shall not kill your own children. (6:151) You shall not kill anyone, for that is forbidden by God, except through the due process of justice. (6:151) Losers are those who in their ignorance stupidly cause the death of their own children. (6:140) No mother shall expose her own child to harm, nor shall any father expose his child to harm. (2:233)* Imam Ibn Hazm comments on this verse: “There is no doubt it is the child that parents are forbidden to harm”. God also says in the Quran: *Consult together with all reasonableness. (65:6)* Ibn Manzour says in his commentary on this verse: “It is the duty of each one of the parents to show reasonableness when consultation takes place with regard to what happens to the child”. Let us remember that this verse comes within the context of divorce. It means, therefore, that the divorced parents should consult with each other in order to protect the interests of the child. In the same context, the Prophet ﷺ said: “It is a sufficient harm for any man to allow his dependents to perish”⁴. He also said: “Whoever does not show compassion to our young ones does not belong to us”⁵. One of the most essential aspects of compassion to young ones is to protect their health and to prevent their illness. Among the most important measures to protect a child’s health is breast-feeding for the first two years of its life, because that gives the child the best possible nourishment, enhances its immune system, and helps to

¹ Narrated by Al-Nasa’i following Abu Shourayh.

² Narrated by Al-Bukhari following Wahb ibn Abdullah.

³ Agreed upon as reported by Abdullah ibn Amr.

⁴ Narrated by Abu Dawood and others following Abdullah ibn Amr.

⁵ Narrated by Al-Bukhari in *Al-adab al-mufarrad*.

provide reasonable birth spacing since breastfeeding often serves as a means to prevent conception. God says in the Quran: *Mothers shall breast-feed their children for two whole years if the parents wish the sucking to take its full course.* (2:233) God also says: *Its weaning comes in two years.* (31:14) Similarly, the pledge of loyalty which Muslim women gave to the Prophet ﷺ contained the all important clause that they *...shall not cause the death of their own children.* (60:12)

It is the duty of all Muslims towards the members of their household to:

- Take all necessary measures to prevent illness. This includes keeping them away from any source of infection, as well as their vaccination, as necessary, in order to immunize them against communicable diseases. When parents are complacent with regard to the vaccination of their children, they expose them to harm, which God has forbidden them to do. Similarly, a foolish or ignorant action from either parent could expose their child to death and make them losers, as God says: *Losers are those who in their ignorance stupidly cause the death of their own children.* (6:140)
- Do their best to provide them with the means of healthy living, such as good food and to teach them the habit of eating moderately and to do exercises which keep them fit.
- Seek medical treatment for them when they fall ill.

One of the worst hazards to which children may be exposed is for one of their parents to be a smoker, which means that they are forced to breathe in the smoke of cigarettes and are exposed to all the illnesses that smoking causes. It is no exaggeration to say that this is doubly forbidden as it means, in effect, neglect of the child's right to be protected against illness, and a forceful exposure to risk when still young and defenceless.

3. Causing harm to anyone, particularly neighbours

This is again forbidden, as the Prophet ﷺ said: "There shall be no infliction of harm on oneself or others". He also said: "God will inflict harm on anyone who harms others". Speaking to his companions, the Prophet ﷺ once said: "By God, he is not a believer". They said, "Who is this ill-advised loser, Messenger of God?" He said: "The one whose neighbour does not feel safe against his

designs”¹. Commenting on this *hadith* Imam Ibn Taimiyah said: “If this is the case when a neighbour simply does not feel safe against evil which may be perpetrated by his neighbour, what would it be like when such evil designs are actually perpetrated, in addition to that feeling of unsafety?” The Prophet ﷺ said: “When you restrain yourself from harming others, your action constitutes an act of benefaction that is credited to you”².

The Arabic term ‘*aza*’ is used frequently in this connection and most people use it as synonymous with causing harm. That is a mistaken usage. ‘*Aza*’ is much lesser than harm. It includes any material or moral annoyance and anything which disgusts or offends. If such matters are prohibited, causing harm is even more so. God says in the Quran: *Those who annoy believers, men or women, without having deserved it, assume the guilt of slander and commit a clearly sinful action.* (33:58) The Prophet ﷺ said: “Whoever believes in God and the Last Day must not offend his neighbours”³.

It is not permissible, therefore, for a Muslim to smoke in a confined place, or when he travels in a car, bus, or plane. By so doing, he causes harm to his neighbours and exposes them to the risk of this evil substance. While he must not smoke even when he is alone in order not to expose himself to various killer diseases, the prohibition is much stronger when smoking affects others as well. A person sitting next to you in a plane or a bus is your neighbour, and one who is close to you in a public place is your neighbour, and one who is inside your house or flat is a closer neighbour. God has ordered us to be kind to near and distant neighbours and to fellow travellers. The same applies to a person who throws rubbish in front of his house. It is annoying to neighbours and passers by. It equally applies to one who lets the effluent of his plant or factory run into streams or rivers. To all such unsafe practices the ruling which prohibits causing harm or annoyance applies. The Prophet ﷺ said: “Whoever offends Muslims in their roads deserves their curses”⁴. The Prophet ﷺ warned most emphatically against exposing any individual in society to any annoyance or harm. He also instructed his followers to take all precautionary measures to

¹ Agreed upon as reported by Abu Huraira.

² Agreed upon as reported by Abu Zarr.

³ Agreed upon as reported by Abu Huraira.

⁴ Narrated by Al-Tabarani in *Al-kabeer*.

prevent that. An example is the *hadith*: “Whoever passes through our mosques or markets carrying arrows should grasp them well with his hand so that he does not accidentally inflict injury on any Muslim”¹.

The question of disease transmission also comes under this heading. It is not lawful for a Muslim to transmit diseases to his brother, or to be complacent in this connection. Nor is it permissible for him to cause the spread of disease in society. All that is incorporated in the all embracing rule which forbids all harm. The Prophet ﷺ ordered that “no infected person should come close to a healthy one”². I am rather inclined to understand the *hadith*³ which states “No disease is to be communicated and no belief in evil omen entertained” as a prohibition rather than a denial of disease transmission and belief in evil omen. This understanding is further supported by another *hadith* which states: “No belief in omen is to be entertained, but the best of that is good omen”. This is certainly not a denial of belief in omen; otherwise, the Prophet ﷺ would not have added that the best omen is the good one. It is rather discouragement and indeed a prohibition of entertaining belief in any omen whatsoever. This understanding fits in well with the last part of the same *hadith* which instructs us to “run away from a person who has leprosy as one would run away from a lion”. One person in the audience was confused because he understood the Prophet’s statement as a denial of the whole idea of disease transmission. He asked the Prophet: “You see one camel that suffers from mange, and soon all the camels will have the same illness”. The Prophet’s answer to him shows his caution that people may wrongly attribute things to anyone or any cause other than God. He said: “That is God’s will; otherwise, who caused the first camel to become mangy”. Thus the Prophet ﷺ corrected a misconception.

This is further supported by the Prophet’s answer to a question put to him in the following form: “When we supplicate for recovery or take medicine or take some preventive measures, does any of that repel what God has willed?” He answered: “They are part of the operation of God’s will”⁴. This was the second Caliph, Umar’s own understanding when he refused to enter an area into which

¹ Agreed upon as reported by Abu Musa.

² Agreed upon as reported by Abu Huraira.

³ Narrated by Al-Bukhari following Abdullah ibn Amr and Anas ibn Malik.

⁴ Narrated by Al-Tirmizi following Abu Khizama.

the plague had spread. His army commander, Abu Obaidah asked him; “Do you run away from God’s will?” He said: “Yes. We run away from God’s will into God’s will”. In this Omar was in keeping, through his deep understanding of Islam with the words of the Prophet which he (Omar) had not heard before: “If you know that plague is raging in a specific land do not enter it and if it happens in a land where you are, do not seek to leave it”¹. It is important, therefore, that we should know that disease transmission is part of God’s will and combating it is also part of God’s will. Illness, medical treatment and preventive measures all work by God’s will. Having said that, I must humbly add that God knows best what the Prophet ﷺ wanted to convey to us.

All that I have said about causing harm to oneself or others falls under this all embracing statement by the Prophet: “Shall I tell you the definition of a believer? He is one with whom people feel themselves and their property to be safe. A Muslim is the one who does not abuse people by word or deed”².

¹ Authenticated by Al-Bukhari following Usama ibn Zayd.

² Narrated by Ahmad following Fadala ibn Obayd.

4

Community participation

Community participation is the most important element in the primary health care approach advocated by the World Health Organization. The true Islamic society, however, differs greatly from other societies. We need some further elaboration here. Community participation in the Islamic concept is founded on a number of pillars, the most important of which are: solidarity, cooperation, self-sufficiency and perfection or *ihsan*.

1. Solidarity

A building takes shape when each stone is turned into a brick in its structure. On the same basis, a society comes into existence when every individual becomes a person. That does not mean that individuals lose their identity within the community. It means rather that all its members keenly feel the solidarity which establishes a bond of unity between them. The Prophet's explanation is most lucid: "In relation to one another, believers are like a structure: each part strengthens the other parts"¹. When the Prophet ﷺ said this he clasped his fingers together. In commenting on this *hadith*, Al-Qurtubi said: "A structure does not stand up or become habitable unless all its parts mutually support one another". We cannot achieve that by putting all individuals in the melting pot but by sowing the seeds of unity within society, and strengthening the bonds between its members. This latter process has a special dimension which God mentions in the Quran, addressing the Prophet: *He it is who has made you strong with His help, and rallied the believers round you, making their hearts united. Had you spent all the riches on earth you could not have so*

¹ Agreed upon as reported by Abu Musa.

united their hearts, but God has united them together. He is indeed Almighty and wise. (8:63)

Drawing on this concept of the society of believers, the Prophet ﷺ gives us another beautiful simile: “In their mutual love, compassion and sympathy for one another, believers are like one body: When one part of it suffers a complaint, all other parts join in, sharing in the sleeplessness and fever”¹. Body cells do not live individually or in isolation; otherwise, they will soon die. There is a bond which brings them together so that they can live as a single entity. Let us reflect on the fine touches in this *hadith*, emphasizing the elements of solidarity which are all expressed in the mode of mutual interaction. This gives us the feeling that love, compassion and sympathy are felt by all, extended to all and reciprocated by all.

But why do we speak of solidarity when we have a fine, precise Islamic term, namely, ‘*zat al-bain*’. In his commentary on the Quran, Al-Qurtubi said: “*Zat al-bain* is the state of affairs which is conducive to community existence”. Rasheed Reda says: “Linguistically speaking, ‘*al-bain*’ signifies both coming together and parting company and all that may happen between two parties. The Quran describes the relationship between disbelievers in these words: “*All that exists between you has been severed*” using here the term ‘*bain*’. It is this total bond that is given the name of ‘*zat al-bain*’. God has commanded us in the Quran and the *sunna* to safeguard and strengthen this bond. That is, then, a religious duty which is geared to strengthen the Muslim community and protect its unity”. For this reason the Prophet ﷺ said to us: “Shall I tell you about a status which is better than prayer, fasting and giving charity?” They said: “Please do”. He answered: “To maintain *zat al-bain* in good order”. He then added: “When *zat al-bain* is corrupted, it destroys all”².

One important Islamic safeguard which enhances solidarity within the Muslim Community is congregational prayer. I do not think I need to speak here on the importance of this duty and the emphasis the Prophet ﷺ places on it. I want merely to say that congregational prayer serves as a reminder, repeated five times a day, that we belong to a community. The daily instructions or reminders repeated by the imam in every congregational prayer

¹ Agreed upon as reported by Numan ibn Basheer.

² Narrated by Al-Bukhari in *Al-adab al-mufarrad* following Abu Al-Dardaa.

touch on the very elements which we need to be reminded of, with regard to our community as a whole. These remind us to stand straight, not to differ or to allow gaps in between us: “Straighten your ranks, for that helps to make your prayer complete”¹; to deal easily with our brethren to maintain unity of hearts: “Straighten your rows and do not differ so that differences do not creep into your hearts”²; to close ranks: “Stand close together and make your rows close to each other”³; not to allow any defects or gaps within the ranks so that we do not give Satan a chance to infiltrate: “Stand in straight rows, shoulder to shoulder, leaving no defects ... and soften to your brethren and do not leave gaps for Satan to get in”⁴. Moreover, they include encouragement to join the Muslim ranks and warning against standing in isolation: “He who fills a gap in a row maintains a link with God”⁵. “The prayer of a single person behind the row of worshippers is not valid”⁶.

Congregational prayers provide useful training for every Muslim in proper discipline and good management. The imam takes care of his congregation, ensuring that they abide by the rules. He is also kind to them. Taught by the Prophet, he takes the weakest among them for his measure. He makes his prayers relatively short, for he knows that his congregation may include people who are elderly, weak or ill as well as those who are pressed for time. Everyone in the congregation is keen to be part of a straight row with his fellow worshippers. He is well disciplined and does not precipitate the imam’s actions.

The other important safeguard which ensures solidarity within the Muslim community is *shura* (consultation). God has commanded the Prophet ﷺ to *consult with them in the matter of government*. (3:159) He considers consultation an essential quality of the society of believers: *They conduct their affairs after consultations among themselves*. (42:38) He tells them: *Consult among yourselves in a reasonable manner*. (65:6) Consultation must be practised at all levels, beginning with the small social unit, and in all matters,

¹ Agreed upon as reported by Anas.

² Narrated by Muslim following Abdullah ibn Masoud.

³ Narrated by Al-Nasa’i following Anas.

⁴ Narrated by Abu Dawood following Ibn Amr.

⁵ Narrated by Al-Nasa’i following Abdullah ibn Amr.

⁶ Narrated by Ibn Majah following Ali ibn Shayban.

large and small, especially those which have their effect on the whole community.

2. Cooperation

The Prophet ﷺ said: “The best of men is the one who is of most benefit to them”. This *hadith*¹ explains the positive aspect of serving the interests of the community. It is of similar import to the *hadith* which states: “The person who is loved best by God the Almighty, is the one who is of most benefit to people”². The Prophet ﷺ also said: “He of you who is able to extend some benefit to his brother should do so”³. A Muslim is, then, supposed to help his brother and spare no effort in trying to serve his interests. Islam does not allow any of its followers to take a passive or indifferent attitude towards social responsibility. It unhesitatingly deprives of the privilege of belonging to the Muslim community anyone who shows no concern for the interests of others. It is sufficient here to quote the *hadith*: “He who does not care about the affairs of the Muslim community does not belong to it”.

Cooperation is based on the concept of the brotherhood of believers which is stated in the Quran: *Believers are indeed brothers.* (49:10) This is most clearly explained by the Prophet ﷺ who said: “None of you attains to the status of faith until he wishes for his brother whatever good he wishes for himself”⁴. But perhaps I should explain here that most people know this *hadith* in its more familiar version: “None of you attains to the status of faith until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself”. The addition “whatever good” is taken from a version related by Abu Awanah, Al-Nasa’i and Ahmad. This concept is further strengthened in the *hadith* which states: “One believer is the brother of another: he provides him with what he misses and backs him with unfailing support”⁵. The Prophet ﷺ also said: “One Muslim is the brother of another: he neither does him injustice, nor does he ever give him up”⁶. Another version of

¹ Narrated by Al-Daraqutni in *Al-afrad* and *Al-Diyaa al-maqdisi* following Jaber.

² Narrated by Ibn Abu Al-Dunya in *Qadaa al-hawaij* and Ibn Asakir following several of the companions of the Prophet.

³ Narrated by Muslim following Jaber ibn Abdullah.

⁴ Agreed upon as reported by Anas.

⁵ Narrated by Abu Dawood and authenticated by Al-Iraqi in *Takhreej al-ihyaa*.

⁶ Agreed upon as reported by Ibn Amr.

this *hadith* adds: “Nor does he let him down”¹. It is not lawful for any Muslim to stand idle when he sees any individual in the Muslim community being subjected to injustice. He must give him support. Unless he does, he is guilty of giving him up and letting him down. Indeed, he unjustly denies him a right which he can claim from all his brothers in the Muslim community.

Islam provides a fascinating safeguard which ensures that this cooperation remains present all the time in the Muslim community. This safeguard is the collective duty, or *fard al-kifaya*, which is not found in any other society.

Anything which ensures serving the interests of the Muslim community is a collective duty which must be fulfilled. If it can be done by a section of the community, it is not necessary to mobilize all efforts and to recruit everyone for its achievement. This safeguard is provided by the principle that if it remains unfulfilled, then the whole community is guilty of neglect. For this reason, every individual considers *fard al-kifaya* his/her own personal duty and competes for its fulfilment, thus implementing the divine commandment: *Wie with one another in doing what is good.* (2:148) He/she also obeys the instruction of the Prophet: “Hasten to do every good work”².

Speaking of this collective duty, the eminent scholar Izz Eddin Ibn Abdel Salam says that within the context of mutual responsibility and duties: “The overriding criterion here is to ensure the fulfilment of everything which is beneficial, be it a binding duty or merely recommended, and the prevention of everything harmful, be it forbidden or merely discouraged. These duties are divided into personal and collective duties, i.e. *fard ain* and *fard kifaya*, and personal and collective encouraged practices, i.e. *sunnat ain* and *sunnat kifaya*. Islamic law is full of all these. To all of them applies the divine commandment: *Help one another in furthering piety and God-fearingness, and do not help one another in furthering evil and aggressiveness.* (5:2) This is a clear prohibition of being an instrument helping evil and a commandment to help the fulfilment of everything of benefit to the community. God also says: *God commands justice, kindness and giving of dues to near relatives, while He forbids indecency, debauchery and oppression.* (16:90) The first part of this verse is an

¹ Narrated by Muslim following Abu Huraira.

² Narrated by Muslim following Abu Huraira.

order to do what is beneficial and the second part is a prohibition of what is evil”.

3. Self-sufficiency

This means that the Muslim community must always be in a permanent state of progress and development to give practical effect to the description expressed in the Bible and related in the Quran. This describes the Muslim community as *the seed which puts forth its shoot and strengthens it, so that it rises stout and firm upon its stalk, delighting the farmers.* (48:29) Every member of the Muslim community is, therefore, like a shoot or a branch of a tree, not representing a burden to it, but on the contrary, fulfilling its duty of strengthening it. With this support forthcoming from all, the community swells up, becomes stronger, stands straight and wins admiration.

The underlining principle in all this is that Islamic society places a duty on every individual to support the community until it has reached the stage of self-sufficiency. A Muslim, as the Prophet ﷺ said, “works with his own hands to benefit himself and to give others in benefaction”¹. We remember the *hadith* which states that “The food of one person is sufficient for two, and that of two is sufficient for four, and the food of four people sufficient for eight”. This concept of sharing is put on a much higher scale by the *hadith*: “He who has extra transport should give it to one who has none, and he who has more food than he needs should give it to those who do not have enough”. The companion who related this *hadith* mentioned that the Prophet ﷺ enumerated every imaginable type of property until “we began to think that none of us has any claim to anything he may have surplus to his needs”. On another occasion, the Prophet ﷺ gave this splendid example of a section of the Muslim community: “Whenever the Ashaarites suffered shortage of provisions when they were on an expedition or even in town, they collected together all the food they had and divided it equally between them. They belong to me, and I belong to them”².

Islam commands each one of its followers to work for his living. God says in the Quran: *Seek a portion of God's bounty.* (62:10) It encourages him to do any type of work which gives him an income to make him self-sufficient. The

¹ Agreed upon as reported by Abu Musa.

² Agreed upon as reported by Abu Musa.

Prophet ﷺ said: “He who seeks to be contented with his lot, God will help him to be so; and he who seeks self-sufficiency, God will make him so”¹. He also said: “For any of you to take a rope and go to a mountain where he gathers a bundle of dry wood and carries it on his back to sell it, thus sparing himself the need to beg, is better than seeking other people’s help, be it readily forthcoming or denied”². He also taught us that: “No one ever eats any type of food better than what he buys with his earnings from his own work. The Prophet Dawood used to eat of what he earned through his own work”³. Thus Islam builds a society which we can aptly term as “the society of the upper hand”, meaning the one which is productive. For the Prophet ﷺ said: “The upper hand is superior to the lower one”⁴.

Islam does not allow extravagance or wastage of resources. The Prophet ﷺ made it clear that wasting wealth is prohibited. God warns us against extravagant spending: *Do not hold your fist tight and do not open it fully and irrationally.* (17:29) He describes His good servants as *those who spend without extravagance or being stingy.* (25:67) He commands us: *Do not be wasteful, for He does not like the wasteful.* (6:141) The Prophet ﷺ ordered us to economize even when we use water for ablution. Moderation is the best practice in all affairs.

4. Perfection, or *ihsan*

In order to keep Islamic society in a sound and healthy state, Islam provides safeguards, the most important of which, in order of merit, are: setting things to right, *maarouf*, *sadaqa* and perfection. The first three of these are mentioned in the Quranic verse: *No good comes, as a rule, out of secret confabulations save for those who are devoted to enjoining sadaqa, or maarouf or setting matters to rights between people.* (4:114) Regarding the fourth one the Prophet ﷺ said: “God has decreed that whatever human beings do should be done with

¹ Narrated by Al-Bukhari following Abdullah ibn Amr.

² Narrated by Al-Bukhari following Al-Zubair ibn Al-Awwam.

³ Narrated by Al-Bukhari following Al-Miqdam ibn Maady Karib.

⁴ Narrated by Al-Bukhari following Abdullah ibn Amr.

perfection”¹. All these are important aspects of a civilized society and they contribute to its continued existence.

Sadaqa is a beautiful name which Islam gives to what we have come to term nowadays as “civilized behaviour”. Its very name makes it evidence of belonging to Islamic society. This is supported by the Prophet’s ﷺ statement, “*Sadaqa* is an irrefutable proof”². What this means is that it gives credibility in a variety of ways, with every behaviour being clearly indicative of one’s belonging to the community of believers and assured contribution to its consolidation, so that it is seen to be like a strong solid structure.

Islam requires every Muslim to give at least one proof each day of his conscious belonging to Islamic society with a minimum of one civilized action. This is expressed in a general directive by the Prophet ﷺ, great teacher of this community, which states: “Every individual must give with every rising sun *sadaqa* for his own soul”³. When the Prophet ﷺ made this statement, a man in the audience who understood *sadaqa* in its narrow financial sense asked the Prophet, “How can I give such charity when I have no money?”. The Prophet’s explanation outlined a number of charitable actions. He said, “*Sadaqa* can be given in many ways which includes *takbeer, subhan Allah, alhamdulillah, astaghfir Allah*”. These are all glorifications of God, praising Him, emphasizing His Oneness and seeking His forgiveness. “Also, enjoining the doing of what is right and forbidding what is wrong, removing harmful objects from people’s way, leading the blind, explaining things to a deaf or a dumb person, showing someone how to do things, rushing to the support of one who seeks help urgently, giving a helping hand to the weak—all these count as *sadaqa* which you do for yourself.

Nevertheless, the Prophet ﷺ did not neglect financial charity. When he was asked how a person who has no money can give *sadaqa*, he said: “Let him work with his own hands to benefit himself and give to charity”⁴.

¹ Narrated by Muslim following Abu Yaala Shaddad ibn Aws.

² Narrated by Muslim following Abu Malik Al-Ashaari.

³ Narrated by Ahmad following Abu Zarr.

⁴ Agreed upon as reported by Abu Musa.

In another *hadith* following Abu Zarr, the Prophet ﷺ said: “To smile when you meet your brother is *sadaqa*, to enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong is *sadaqa*, to guide a person who has lost his way is *sadaqa*, to lead a poorly sighted person is *sadaqa*, to remove a stone, thorns and bones from people’s way is *sadaqa* and to pour water out of your pail into that of your brother is *sadaqa*”¹.

A third *hadith* reported by Abu Zarr states: “I asked the Prophet ﷺ, what actions are best?”. He answered: “To believe in God and to go on *jihad* for His cause”. I asked: “Which slaves are best to free?” He answered: “The most expensive and highly valued by those who know them”. I said: “Failing that, what should I do?” He said: “Help someone to do something, or do it yourself for someone who cannot manage”. I asked: “And failing that?” He said: “Do no harm to anyone; for that is *sadaqa* which you do for yourself”².

In a fourth *hadith* the Prophet ﷺ said: “Every kind word is *sadaqa*, help given by one person to another is *sadaqa*, giving someone a drink of water is *sadaqa*, and removing harmful objects from people’s pathways is *sadaqa*.

* * *

“Doing what is right”, or *maarouf*, is a part of *sadaqa*. The Prophet ﷺ said: “Every right thing, i.e. *maarouf*, is *sadaqa*”³. To define what is meant by *maarouf*, or doing what is right, we refer to the Prophet ﷺ himself who said: “Do what is right, and refrain from what is wrong. Consider what you would like to hear from people when you leave them and do it. Consider also what you dislike people to say to you when you leave them and refrain from it”⁴.

The same message is also expressed in the *hadith*: “Right is good manners, and *ithm* is what you may harbour in your heart and would rather people do not come to know”⁵.

In this *hadith*, the Prophet ﷺ uses a word which is better translated as kindness; for, in Islamic terminology, doing right is synonymous with kindness.

¹ Narrated by Al-Tirmizi, Al-Bukhari and Ibn Hibban.

² Agreed upon as reported by Abu Zarr.

³ Narrated by Al-Bukhari following Jaber and by Muslim following Abu Huzayfa.

⁴ Narrated by Al-Bukhari in *Al-adab al-mufarrad* following Harmala ibn Abdullah.

⁵ Narrated by Muslim following Al-Nawas ibn Samaan.

Similarly, wrong is synonymous with *ithm*. Rasheed Reda defines *ithm* as: “All that is harmful to self, property or anything else. The worst of these are social vices”.

By *maarouf*, then, we mean an expression of conscience of good Islamic society. *Munkar*, in contrast, refers to everything which is rejected by this conscience. It is not surprising, therefore, that reminding one another of it is a duty which strengthens bonds and relations within Islamic society. This is what is meant by “enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong”. In order to protect society, individuals must take care of themselves: *Believers, take care of yourselves* [by enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong]. When they have done that, they are not affected by anyone who strays. They, who represent the majority which submits to God’s commandments, are then following right guidance: *Believers, take care of yourselves, so that you will not be affected by anyone who strays, if you follow right guidance. (5:105)*

This concept is most beautifully expressed in the well known *hadith* which speaks of the passengers in a ship and their attitude to a small group of them who want to open a hole in their area of the ship. It is also expressed in the Prophet’s ﷺ statement: “Support your brother when he commits or suffers injustice”. A man asked the Prophet ﷺ: “Messenger of God, I understand that I should support him when he suffers injustice. How do I support him when he is the committer of injustice?” The Prophet ﷺ answered: “You prevent him from doing injustice. That is the best support you give to him”¹.

* * *

Perfection, or *ihsan*, is the ultimate purpose of all that. It is defined in the well known *hadith*: “*Ihsan* is to worship God as if you see Him. As you do not, then remember that He sees you”². *Ihsan* is derived from *husn*, or beauty, and this provides a fine touch. It signifies a continuous attempt to do things well and to draw nearer to perfection. It is motivated by God’s own beauty: “God is beautiful and He loves beauty”³. Moreover, it is something to strive for in every action:

¹ Narrated by Al-Bukhari following Anas.

² Agreed upon as reported by Omar.

³ Narrated by Muslim following Ibn Masood.

Conduct yourself with beautiful patience. (70:5)
Grant to them beautiful forgiveness. (15:85)
Grant them (i.e. divorced women) beautiful release. (33:49)
Avoid them in a beautiful manner. (73:10)

It is a quality which is required in all the three other elements which represent safeguards to protect Islamic society. For this reason, these concepts or safeguards are frequently used interchangeably with one another. This is most clearly apparent in the frequent interchangeable usage of *ihsan* and *sadaqa*. Moreover, *maarouf* is also used in place of *ihsan* as in the Quranic verse: *Hold on to them in a goodly manner (i.e. with maarouf) or release them in a goodly manner. (2:231)* The same applies to the Quranic verse: *Then either hold on to them in a goodly manner (i.e. with maarouf) or set them free in a goodly manner (i.e. with ihsan.) (2:229)*

* * *

If all individuals in the Muslim community believe that it is their binding duty to perform at least one civilized action a day in order to prove their belonging to the Muslim community, these actions or *sadaqas* will undoubtedly include many which we can term as health *sadaqas*, such as removing objects which are harmful to health, providing things which benefit health, taking part in the establishment, supply and administration of health institutions, combating any pollution or contamination in the environment and any hazard which threatens public health, encouraging practices which are beneficial to health, such as vaccination, controlling the transmission of disease and helping the handicapped and disabled.

* * *

What I have presented so far is no more than a small number of chapters taken out of the vast volume of the *fiqh* of health. I must add, however, that, like all *fiqh*, the *fiqh* of health is a viable, self-renewing branch of Islamic study which can meet the needs of every place and age. Over the last decade, the World Health Organization has advocated primary health care as the proper approach to the attainment of its goal of health for all. All countries have welcomed this approach and have been trying to implement it properly. It is

still met, nevertheless, with a number of obstacles which impede the progress of health. The most important of these are:

1. lack of infrastructure and human resources
2. lack of intersectoral collaboration
3. lack of community participation
4. poor management and planning.

Our world today is in great need of an initiative to overcome all these obstacles if it truly wants to achieve the goal of health for all.

Islam, here, has a role to play in finding the ideal solution.

It is well known that Islam attempts to solve every problem within its proper context. It does not take it in isolation. This essential feature of the Islamic approach to social problems must be present in our minds when we talk about health, for it is well known that the standard of health in any community reflects its standard of social development. The health of the community cannot be improved unless there is a marked improvement in the supply and distribution of clean water, in sanitation and proper disposal of rubbish and in per capita income, education, nutrition, housing, clothing and other important human needs.

The Islamic approach to health care is based on the essential features of Islamic society which we have already discussed, namely, solidarity, cooperation, self-sufficiency and perfection. Self-sufficiency ensures the availability of both human and material resources. Every individual in the community will make their contribution and the work required will be completed with minimum expense. Cooperation ensures the removal of barriers that separate various sectors in society. It frees experts and specialists from the prison cells which prevent them from joining in an all out effort that benefits the whole community. We will then find the factory worker, the farm worker, the engineer, the businessman, the doctor and all others making a single team which cooperates for the achievement of what is good, beneficial and useful. Solidarity provides a good solution for the problems of poor management and planning of resources, especially through the proper implementation of the two principles of discipline and consultation. Perfection brings community participation to completion since everyone tries to do their jobs as perfectly as possible, knowing that God sees their work. They feel that their work is a

sadaqa which must be attended by the purity and sincerity which befit worship. They also take care of every detail as they learn the *hadith*: “Do not belittle even the smallest act of *maarouf*”¹.

This then is a call to get rid of the evil practices which have crept into human life as humankind has moved away from the Islamic way of life, and to adopt the good practices advocated by Islam. This is a permanently valid principle which the Quran states: *God will never change the status of any community unless they change themselves.* (13:11) A proper change in lifestyle will undoubtedly improve man’s health and greatly reduce the expenses of health care.

Moreover, it is also a call for the achievement of self-sufficiency in all essentials, not just those related to health only, because health is simply a part of a larger whole.

Basic development needs

The concept of ensuring that the basic development needs are met in society is one with deep roots in Islamic civilization. Anyone who reads the biography of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ will not fail to note that his first actions after having settled in Medina were aimed at providing the newly established community with its basic minimum needs for survival.

The first priority among all these needs was **security**. Indeed, if the condition of security of any community is not met, no other needs can be met and no progress can be made. The Quran makes the importance of security very clear, telling us of the supplication of the Prophet Abraham as he was building the Kaaba in Mecca which included this beautiful prayer: *My Lord, make this a secure land, and bestow plenty on its people.* (2:126) The Quran also tells us the Prophet Joseph said to his parents and brothers: *Enter Egypt. If God so wills, you shall be secure.* (12:99) God also reminds the Arabian tribe of Quraish of His great bounty: *Have We not established for them a sanctuary of safety to which fruits of every kind are brought as a provision from Us.* (28:57) God tells the Quraish: *Let them worship the Lord of this House, Who provides them with food lest they should go hungry, and with security lest they should*

¹ Narrated by Abu Dawood following Jaber ibn Saleem, and by Al-Tirmizi.

live in fear. (112:3–4) The Prophet ﷺ said: “He of you who finds himself enjoying good health, secure in his community, and has his daily sustenance is as if he had the whole world at his finger tips”¹. Because of the great importance of security to any community, the Prophet ﷺ established the bond of brotherhood between those of his companions who migrated from Mecca (the *muhajireen*) and those who were natives of Medina (the *ansar*) and concluded a peace treaty with the Jews who lived in Medina. The document which spells out the provisions of this famous treaty states: “The Jewish tribe of Auf (and thus all Jewish tribes in Medina) shall make up a community with the believers,” even though “The Jews have their own religion and the Muslims have theirs”. It also states that “He who leaves Medina shall be safe and he who stays shall be safe”.

Another basic need the Prophet ﷺ was keen to provide was that of **water**. A *hadith*² states that “When the Prophet ﷺ came to Medina, there was no source of potable water except the Ruma well. He said to his companions, ‘Who will buy the Ruma well to make it free for the Muslims and will have one better than this well in heaven?’ Othman bought it and made it free for all Muslims. The Prophet ﷺ said: “When you take water out of your pail to put in your brother’s pail, it counts as a benefaction, or *sadaqa*”³. He also said: “When you give someone a drink of water, it counts as a *sadaqa*”⁴.

Food is also an important basic need. In the Quranic verses and *hadith* quoted above, we find that both God and the Prophet ﷺ mention it side by side with security. The Prophet ﷺ also encouraged agriculture which is an important means of food production. He said: “Any Muslim who plants a tree or a crop of which any human being or animal eats will have that as *sadaqa* credited to him”⁵. He also said: “Should the Hour of the Day of Judgement arrive and one of you has a palm shoot in his hand, let him plant it, if he can”⁶.

¹ Narrated by Al-Tirmizi following Abdullah ibn Mihsan Al-Ansari following his father.

² Reported by the Caliph Othman.

³ Narrated by Al-Tirmizi following Abu Zarr.

⁴ Narrated by Al-Bukhari in *Al-adab al-mufarrad* following Abu Zarr.

⁵ Narrated by Muslim following Jaber.

⁶ Narrated by the Imam Ahmad following Anas ibn Malik.

The **mosque** is also an important basic need. In Islam, the mosque is a place of worship, a place for learning good behaviour, a school to educate, a meeting place for intellectual discussion and for social activities. The most authentic compilations of *hadith* relate the story of building the mosque in Medina, and how the Prophet ﷺ was a full participant in the building effort, carrying bricks on his shoulder, like his companions, and making as strenuous an effort as any of them, with a clear dislike of having any special privilege.

Another important need is **education**. The Prophet ﷺ encouraged his followers to seek knowledge through education. Indeed he made it a duty requiring, like all other religious duties, purity of purpose and dedication. He said: “Seeking knowledge is a binding duty on every Muslim”¹. All scholars agree that the term ‘Muslim’ includes both men and women. Indeed many scholars quote this *hadith* as “Seeking knowledge is a binding duty on every Muslim, male and female”. Needless to say, making education a binding duty imposes on every Islamic state an obligation to make education a requirement of all Muslims, boys and girls, men and women. Indeed it is part of *maarouf*. God requires all those to whom he gives power to establish Islamic duties and enjoin what is *maarouf*: *Those who, if We establish them firmly on earth, will attend to their prayers, and give zakat, and enjoin the doing of maarouf* (22:41) The Prophet ﷺ said: “People are of two types: those who are learned and those who are seeking to learn. All that is beyond these is useless”². After the Battle of Badr, when the Muslims took many prisoners, the Prophet ﷺ offered freedom to any prisoner who would teach ten Muslim children to read and write. He defined the sort of knowledge to be pursued in the following supplication: “My Lord, I request You to grant me useful knowledge”³, and, “My Lord, I appeal to You against any type of knowledge that is of no use”⁴. He defined the ideal method of gaining knowledge: “Knowledge is acquired through learning”⁵. The Prophet ﷺ instructed his companions in this way:

¹ Narrated by Ibn Majah following Anas ibn Malik.

² Narrated by Al-Darimi following Abu Al-Dardaa.

³ Narrated by Imam Ahmad following Umm Salama.

⁴ Narrated by Muslim following Zayd ibn Arqam.

⁵ Authenticated by Al-Khateeb in his history following Abu Huraira.

“Teach and make things simple. Make your message easily acceptable and do not cause people to run away from you”¹.

Finally, the **generation of income** is also an important basic need and this comes through work. The Prophet ﷺ said: “No one eats better food than that which he earns through his own work. The Prophet Dawood (David) used to eat of what he earned through his own work”². He also said: “The best earnings are what a worker earns when he works conscientiously”³. He also said: “The most blessed earnings are those that come through a person’s own work”⁴. The Prophet ﷺ also said: “Every Muslim has a duty to give *sadaqa*”. His companions asked, “What if he has nothing to give?” He said: “Let him work with his own hands to benefit himself and give to charity”⁵.

Today we greatly need to follow this approach, the foundation of which has been laid by none other than the Prophet ﷺ. We have no doubt whatsoever that it will prove highly successful, and that it will help the latter generations of the Muslim nation to set their affairs aright, as it did with earlier generations. We only call it the Basic Development Needs Approach to highlight the fact that its goal is development, which is one of the main objectives of human existence on earth. God makes this very clear when He says in the Quran: *It is He Who has brought you into being from the earth and gave you the means to build it.* (11:61) Ibn Khaldun, a highly renowned Muslim scholar who was endowed with great insight, expresses this in his famous *Muqaddima* (Introduction), saying: “Being in a community is essential for human kind. Otherwise, their existence would not be complete, and God’s purpose in building human life on earth would not be achieved. This is the meaning of ‘social structure’ which we have made the theme of this branch of scientific study”.

God has facilitated the building of life on earth, as is clear from the Quranic statement: *We have given you a bountiful place on earth and given you there means of livelihood.* (7:10) He also says: *He it is who has made the earth easy for you to live upon. Walk about all its regions and make use of His provisions.*

¹ Narrated by Al-Bukhari in *Al-adab al-mufarrad* and by Ahmad following Ibn Abbas.

² Narrated by Al-Bukhari following Miqdam ibn Maady Karib.

³ Narrated by Ahmad following Abu Huraira.

⁴ Narrated by Ahmad and Al-Tabarani in *Al-awsat* and by Al-Hakim following Rafie ibn Khadeej.

⁵ Agreed upon as reported by Abu Musa Al-Ashaari.

(67:15) It is natural, therefore, for Muslims to be obedient to their Lord in seeking to build life on earth, or, in modern terms, seeking development, exerting all their efforts in pursuing that goal. It is their Lord who orders them to do so: *When you have completed your task, resume your toil.* (94:7) and the Prophet ﷺ also tells them: “The upper hand is superior to the lower hand”.

Whether this method is accepted by official authorities or not, the mosque can play the leadership role which Islam has assigned to it. Imams, preachers and teachers may lead the whole community towards establishing its social status, and its health status in particular, on a proper foundation. It is, therefore, the duty of health institutions, and most importantly the Centre of Islamic Medicine, to prepare the scientific and learning materials necessary to provide the community with basic health information from an Islamic point of view, and also to adopt simple, low-cost teaching methods. The Prophet ﷺ himself was sent as a teacher and he instructed his followers: “Teach and make things simple. Make your message easily acceptable and do not cause people to run away from you”. He taught us to use the simplest of teaching methods, even for the illiterate community which knows nothing of reading, writing or arithmetic.

* * *

May I conclude by giving a simple example of an imam in a small village. He teaches his fellow villagers to make a better use of the food available to them. He teaches them and their children how to kill insects and vectors of disease, which the Prophet ﷺ ordered us to kill. He explains to them how to take precautions against accidents, making use of the Prophet’s guidance when he ordered a man to hold his arrows with his hand so that he would not injure anyone. He shows them simple methods to combat many diseases, such as the use of cold water to bring down temperature, following the Prophet’s guidance: “Fever is a touch of fire, so bring it down with water”¹. He instructs them in how to maintain a good standard of cleanliness in what they eat, drink and wear as well as in their homes. He explains to them that they must protect the environment and never spoil it because every aspect of corruption is forbidden. He teaches them to help one another and to be keen to do what is *maarouf*, i.e. good and beneficial, and to enjoy doing it, and to avoid evil. This imam teaches

¹Agreed upon as reported by Aisha.

his villagers how to adopt the Islamic way of life which ensures happiness for man in this life and the life to come.

To that imam in his small, remote village I send a heartfelt salute.

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