

The spiritual dimension and its impact on health

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Great advances to puzzle out the causes of illness and improve the quality of life and achieve higher levels of wellness within the physical, mental, social, and spiritual dimensions are rapidly taking place in the field of scientific and medical research. Furthermore, scholars in spirituality studies have contributed to the wealth of both qualitative and quantitative data that exist (1). All these have enriched therapeutic and preventive measures in combating illnesses. However, despite the advanced knowledge and technology which are disseminated through the mass media today, statistical data show that mankind still suffers from an endless series of physical, psychological and social diseases, particularly behaviour-related disorders (2). Examples are hypertension, smoking, sexually transmitted diseases, violence and drug use. Traffic accidents associated with alcoholism, drug addiction, anxiety, depression, suicide, divorce, rape, illegitimacy, homosexuality, lesbianism, broken homes, murder, crime and the like. All these problems are related to disturbances and failure in behavioural aspects of events in social life.

In this respect a number of questions will be raised. For example, although people may be well acquainted with the preventive methods and treatments that are available today they may be unable to keep to the advice given by concerned physicians. This indicates that certain ideas and attitudes may have already been

formed which influence and determine people's behaviour in health and sickness. These ideas and attitudes will obviously be more positive, and will have a greater impact on human behaviour, if they are spiritually bound and religiously based; ideas and attitudes within a religious context will have a more dynamic and broader impact on the promotion of health and the prevention of behaviour related diseases. Yet most psychologists have little if any training on spiritual and religious issues. Perhaps psychologists and other health care professionals could potentially use spiritual and religious principles to better serve their clients (3). This calls for a concept of health within its wider physical, social and psychological aspects, as well as within its spiritual dimensions. Therefore, spiritual care is inseparable from physical, social and psychological care because together they form the whole. Promoting spiritual well-being supports clients in their journey to find meaning and hope in life and peace in death (4).

The role of religion

Recently many studies show increased interest in examining the role that religion might play in preventive holistic health care. Since the dawn of history, religion has been well recognised for its preventive role. Its preventive determinants were tied to faith in the Almighty Creator (2). It was explained by the prophets that the preventive measures are orders from the Almighty who has created the human

being and knows what benefits or harms him. This faith, which had a very powerful effect in the past, should be increasingly reinforced now that we have realised the great dangers to which humanity might have been exposed, had it not adhered to the religious orders with absolute faith. This absolute faith was very central in the role of prevention.

Alcoholism for example, was partly responsible for the deterioration which befell prehistoric civilisations. Islam faced that grave evil and succeeded step by step in overcoming its dangerous effects. It linked faith in God with the orders to abstain and succeeded in persuading the believers to give up the long standing habit and compelling dependence of alcohol. The true Islamic communities up till now are relatively free from the evils of alcoholic addiction. This is from the effect of the deep faith that true Muslims keep as regards the Quranic orders. This was also applied to other physical, psychological and social evils.

Faith

The spiritual dimension is described and is interpreted as the need for: meaning, purpose and fulfillment in life; hope/will to live; belief and faith (5). Thus faith, once established in its proper spiritual dimension, worked as a strong preventive weapon and at the same time had sustained reinforcement through the relationship of the individual with the

“إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ لآيَاتٍ لِأُولِي الْأَبْصَارِ”

“Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day are signs for those of understanding” (Al-e-Imran, 3:190) (6).

This meditation creates in man a treasure of insight that the Almighty God is not only a creator, but is also the absolute donator of health and all other

Almighty. This was the secret behind its success in the lives of people and in its influence on their behaviour, and consequently on their state of health. It is important to note that it is religious faith alone that can convert a man into a true believer and can suppress his selfishness and self-seeking under the impact of a doctrine and an ideology. Though faith is of varying degrees, spiritual faith often creates in man satisfaction and pleasure depending only on the all-powerful God. A good example of this satisfaction and pleasure is manifested in the behaviour of the true believer who faces a very dangerous situation, but who is urged by his faith to go through it, in many cases succeeding. Without this faith, such an endeavour could not be fulfilled. The early stages of faith are manifested in the child's love of his mother as long as she takes care of him. If this care disappears faith is lost. So love and faith are interrelated. Throughout life this relation matures and develops until it reaches its highest point in divine faith. This faith is acquired step by step through love and satisfaction, meditation and contemplation of the universe and insight about life. The greatness and splendour of the creation all around us, of the earth and the universe, is the magnificent and enriching source which feeds this spiritual faith. Once attained this faith is surely a strong and vital force for leading a healthy and spiritually rich life (2).

endowments. It is He who created disease and it is He who created relief. Immunity is one of His blessings and medical resources throughout the ages are His

gifts. This is the spiritual faith to which we refer, and by it we are urged on to conduct further and continual research in this endless field. So the believer is not just a passive receiver, but should participate in

This meditation is also responsible for the creativity and development of many of our morals such as patience, courage, love, forbearance, generosity, pity, sacrifice and the like. These morals constitute the spiritual elements which foster and support the physical, mental and social aspects of health. Thus a high standard of health is created by spiritual constituents which are a feature of the true believer (7). The essentials of the spiritual factors in health are unfortunately overlooked in our scientific and medical teaching, and are left to be taken care of by the religious teachers who are not generally conversant with this subject, nor are they in direct touch with scientific research. Scientific experiments with placebos based on faith have yielded some good results when controlled therapeutic measures were evaluated. These experiments as well as others clearly demonstrated the patient's

positive research for curative aids which the Almighty has created for him. Thus faith is not idle, but is charged with energy (2).

Morals and health

faith in the placebo (capsules, etc.), in the modality of treatment and the provider of the drug, even when it was an inactive chemical. We need not stress here that faith in the treating physician is well known to cause many cases to improve spontaneously. This phenomenon should be given more attention to explore its essential basic elements and make more use of its potential powers. Thus it is to be realised that within the spiritual dimension there is a great potential of compassion and power of healing which needs more care and attention to be fully utilised. Consequently, when we speak about health, it is to be emphasised that faith is one of the foundations upon which health should be conceived and firmly built (8). The Holy Qur'an is the first Book which has described religious faith as a sort of concord between man and the entire creation:

" أَفَعَيَّرِ دِينَ اللَّهِ يَبْغُونَ وَلَهُ أَسْلَمَ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ طَوْعًا وَكَرْهًا وَإِلَيْهِ يُرْجَعُونَ " (آل عمران 83).

"Do they seek anything other than the religion of Allah? But to Him submits whosoever is in the heavens and the earth." (Al-e-Imran, 3:83).

The Holy Qur'an has also described religious faith as a part of the innate nature of man:

فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا فِطْرَةَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ (الروم 30).

"Be devoted to the upright religion. That is the nature in which Allah has created man." (Ar-Rum, 30:30) (9).

Model of faith practice

A more searching look into the dimension of faith will enrich our scientific

knowledge to the benefit of humankind. At this point we should assess, for

example, the effects of the practices basically set by the Prophet Muhammad, which he gave as a model and asked all the believers to follow and maintain with deep faith. Fundamentally these practices were crowned by absolute faith in the Almighty. This is stated verbally and devotedly in whatever the believer performs when he says "God is greater" (Allahuakbar). The second constituent of that programme of faith and practice is ablution and praying five times daily. So the true believer should always keep clean and meditative, thus combining a healthy state of physical and mental well-being. The third is giving to others at large. It constitutes volunteering to give others money, treatment, help, care, a smile and even clearing any obstacles obstructing the pathway. The fourth is fasting one month a year. In essence fasting implies avoiding indulgence in the daily necessities of life after satisfying the basic and essential ones, including food, drink, pleasures, sex, etc.

The fifth is pilgrimage and the visit to the holy city Makah, and it reinforces the feeling that the human being is always confronting the Almighty and should confess his ill behaviour and ask for forgiveness and relief. It also urges one to meditative recreation, deep insightful reflection for a better and healthier life, and it mobilises social feeling and the coming together with others for a noble cause (10). The combination of the physical and spiritual techniques in Islamic ideology brings the healthy and balanced believer to his full potential

Since the early days of Islam, the mosque has been used to practise worship as well as practising other everyday life activities.

physically, psychologically and socially. This programme was responsible for creating the healthy Muslim needed in the dawn of Islam to help to develop a healthy society in the entire of Islamic world. It is the essence of prevention and the backbone of a successful healthy life. It is also the catalyst for potentiating the other three foundations of health (11). Every culture should make use of the dominant spiritual endowments to create a healthy community based on physical, psychological, social and above all, spiritual factors. This is why we ask for the addition of the spiritual factor to the other acknowledged factors. There are various ways and means for mobilising the compassion of the people with ennobling ideas within the spiritual dimensions of health, and for this purpose it is timely for the medical profession to set the relevant programme for undergraduates and for ongoing education (12). There are also a number of programme areas for the promotion of the health system based on primary health care within the context of the spiritual dimension. The role of religious institutions, for example, in the promotion of health and the prevention of behaviour-related health problems has not been adequately explored, and should be optimally utilised. A model of utilising mosque facilities and religious teachers, for example, in the prevention and treatment of drug abuse has clearly demonstrated the useful potentialities of this institution, and this could be enhanced for wider application in the health field (13).

Practical application

It was a centre for teaching, welfare, rehabilitation, guidance, medical care, planning for defence tactics, and so on.

During the last decade, Muslim reformers, psycho-social workers and specialists in the medical professions called for a revival of the previous function of the mosque, to cope with the different problems facing the community. To realise this it was necessary to focus on the function of the mosque to adapt it to suit the newly arising demands. Mosque is an institution. It is the source of spiritual and material guidance; it is the hall for worship, the school for knowledge and the centre for literacy pursuits. This was however put into practice by IbnTulūn who built a world famous mosque in Egypt with a well-equipped dispensary and library attached. The library was believed to have been stocked with a hundred thousand books on medicine and the dispensary used to witness many people who queue to receive treatment on Fridays (14). Modern mosques that will accommodate library, dispensary, multipurpose hall and other facilities should be given utmost attention by individual Muslim community. The design of the recently built mosques should take a

- The spiritual approach vitalises the different activities adopted in the mosque, so the fourth dimension of health is well observed.
- Statistical data and continuous follow-up help to explore and define the benefits obtained for these activities.

During March 1984 the regional WHO conducted a seminar inviting responsible

new trend to suit the requirements of the mosque's new function. Thus, the new mosques should be made up of multi-storeys, each performing a different function. The ground floor is for praying, the second comprises different medical clinics. The third includes a library, social welfare centre, teaching classes, a rehabilitation office and a social centre to solve problems. This model satisfies the following needs:

- It is a centre for the healthy upbringing of children.
- It includes teaching classes, a club and a library for the benefit of the attending youth and thus gives the youth a breathing area in crowded cities caring for their general health.
- The different clinics charging nominal fees take care of a wide class of people who cannot afford the high expenses of treatment in special clinics or hospitals.
- The mosque is continuously propagating and spreading preventive means and so is very potent in this field.

individuals in different ministries to activate that approach, and a project has been authorised for three years to conduct epidemiological studies about drug addiction in two of these mosque centres. This is the beginning of a movement in the Islamic countries to make use of the potentialities of the mosque for the welfare of health in general, and mental health in particular.

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