

In the name of
Allāh
the Beneficent,
the Merciful

Al-Furqān

the bi-weekly electronic newsletter from the office of
Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi

O Allāh,
Bless
Muhammad
& his progeny

Health Care in Islam

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Introduction

Islam is a *dīn*; it is a way of life which encompasses all aspects of human life: spiritual as well as physical, personal as well as communal, physical health as well as material wealth, and religious matters as well as political issues.

In Islam, our body and health is considered as an important gift of Almighty Allāh. Imam 'Ali (a.s.) said: "Health is the best of blessings." In another hadīth, he says, "One of the blessings [of God] is the abundance of wealth; however, better than abundance of wealth is the health of the body." Imam Ja'far as-Sādiq (a.s.) said, "A believer who is physically strong is better than a weak believer."

It is in this sense that our body is considered to be the trust given to us by Allāh. And we have to safeguard and protect this trust.

1. Exercise and Being Active

Being active and to exercise is not only acceptable in Islam but it is also recommended. Part of the instructions given by the Prophet and the Imams about upbringing of children is the issue of physical exercise. Swimming has been encouraged in our religious literature.

We have to realize that in Asia and Africa, walking was part of our daily routine, and doing our day-to-day job without use of modern machines was part of our life-style. And so lots of physical activity used to take place without planning or thinking on our part.

However, in North America, our life-style has changed. We are dependent on machines that do our work. Walking is not an integral part of our life: we get into the car inside our garages, and get off at the office parking lots. And so, even a simple thing like walking requires planning, scheduling and determination on our part.

Involvement in sports activities is one way of exercising and keeping fit. Joining the community sports groups also has the benefit of fostering brotherhood and fraternity among the Shi'as. (At this moment, I will make only one comment about sports in Islam: The commercialization of sports has taken away the real virtue in taking care of one's body as God-given trust to us. Sports heroes make more money in one year than the greatest Western scientist or scholar would in his or her lifetime!)

Note: if a person uses fitness facilities for physical exercise, then adherence to the rules of

hijab is important—this issue would be solved if we have shari‘a-sensitive fitness facilities in our centres.

2. Sleeping, Resting, and Avoiding Stress

Almighty Allāh has appointed the night as the time for resting and the day as the time for working *“He is the One who made for you the night so that you may rest in it, and the day with light; most surely in these are signs for the people who hear.”* (10:67) So sleeping is very important.

Avoiding stress: slow down; look at the present and enjoy it before you lose it. (Do not be like the person who drives through the DVP highway going to downtown Toronto and never even takes the time to look at the scenic nature around it.)

Give time for your family. Having a good family life will help you in dealing with stress.

And, finally, be in touch with Allāh, the Prophet and Imams; read the Qur’ān and the du‘as. This will greatly help in dealing with stress. *“Verily, in the remembrance of Allah, the hearts are at ease.”* (13:28) There are special du‘as in *as-Sahīfah as-Sajjādiyya* which can be helpful.

Unlike stress counselors or seeking psychiatrist, you don’t need to schedule an appointment or pay any fees—Allāh is always available to listen to you free of charge!

3. Food and Drink

(a) Moderation:

The Islamic guideline on food and drink is the rule of moderation. If you are moderate, then it does not matter what you eat or drink (of course, we are talking about halāl items).

It is said that once a doctor came to Medina and for a long time no one was visiting him as a patient. He inquired as to whether the people of Medina ever become sick or not. He was told that the people of Medina follow the Qur’ānic injunction which says: *“Eat and drink but do not be extravagant.”* (7:31)

During the days of Hārūn ar-Rashid, a Christian doctor became attached to the caliph’s court. One day he asked a Muslim scholar, ‘Ali bin al-Husayn bin Rāshid, “Your holy book does not contain anything about well-being of health even

though it is known that the knowledge is of two kinds: the knowledge concerning the soul, and the knowledge concerning the body.”

‘Ali bin al-Husayn bin Rāshid replied: “Almighty Allāh has summarized the health issue in just half of a verse of the Qur’ān by saying: *‘Eat and drink but do not be extravagant.’* And the Prophet of Islam (s.a.w.) has said that, ‘The belly is the house of diseases, while dieting is the best of all medicines.’” The Christian accepted the wisdom of the Qur’ān and the saying of the Prophet.

(b) Losing Weight:

One of the important teachings is to refrain from obesity and becoming overweight. This can be accomplished by moderation in eating. And if one wants to lose weight, then that can be accomplished, from the religious point of view, by fasting.

We are familiar with the term “zakāt” which means giving away a portion of your money in charity. In Islamic literature, they are different kinds of zakāts: zakātu ‘l-māl (wealth); zakātu ‘l-ilm (knowledge); zakātu ‘l-badān (body). The ahādith say that the zakāt of body is fasting.

There are many sayings that encourage the fasting (other than the month of Ramadhān). “Fast and you will be healthy.”

An advice of Imam ‘Ali (a.s.) to his son Hasan (a.s.) says: “Do not eat until you are hungry, and leave the table before you are fully satisfied.”

Imam Zaynul ‘Abidin (a.s.) wrote:

“It is the right of your stomach that you should not turn it into a receptacle of what is unlawful, whether it is a little or a lot; and that you should not overeat because that will turn eating into gluttony and shamelessness instead of giving you strength; and you should keep it under control when hungry or thirsty because overeating (which sometimes ends even in dysentery) causes laziness, hinders from work and cuts a man away from every goodness and nobility; and overdrinking (which ends sometimes into intoxication) makes a man look idiotic, ignorant and disgraced.” (*Risāltu ‘l-Huqūq*)

*Imam ‘Alī (a.s.):
“Do not eat
until you are hungry,
and leave the table
before you are
fully satisfied.”*

(c) Decreasing the usage of oily and greasy food in old age:

Hammād bin ‘Uthmān says that one day he was in presence of Imam Ja‘far as-Sādiq (a.s.) when an old person from Kufa came. He started talking to the Imam and he was stuttering. The Imam asked: “Why do I see that your speech has changed?” The visitor said that part of his mouth had been paralyzed (because of a stroke). The advice that Imam gave to him concludes with the following words: “Refrain from fat because it is not suitable for the old people.”

Hammād also quotes Imam Ja‘far as-Sādiq (a.s.) saying: “When a person reaches the age of fifty, then he should not go to sleep while there is fat in his stomach.” That is, the amount of fat in his food should be so less that by the time one goes to sleep, it would have been digested. (According to one narration, the age mentioned by the Imam was forty.)

According to statistics of Greater Toronto Area, the people of South East Asian origin suffer from heart disease proportionately more than people from other ethnic groups. Our lifestyle has changed to western (automated + less physical activity), but our diet is still eastern (fatty + greasy).

With the blessing of medical facilities in Canada, there is no reason for a person to ignore regular checkups. Prevention is the best of cures.

Sickness & Du‘ā

Does du‘a help in illness? Does prayers help in healing a sick person? Of course, as Muslims, we strongly believe in the power of du‘a and there also has been a scientific study in the USA in 1999. The *Journal of Archives of Internal Medicine* published the result of a scientific study done in Kansas City on this issue.

The doctors at the Mid American Heart Institute, for a period of 12 months, divided their heart patients into two groups: 1. half patients were assigned numbers, and those numbers were asked to pray for their patients. 2. the other half of the patients were left without this prayer (du‘a) experiment.

“The study concluded that the prayer group patients fared significantly better by 35 medical measurements.”

So a Muslim has to do *dawā* as well as *du‘ā*: seek medicine and pray that it works for you.

Smoking & Sisha

“While Islam has given a clear verdict about prohibition of intoxicating drinks, we don’t see much about smoking. What is the shari‘ah perspective on **smoking**?”

Since smoking was an unknown entity during early Islamic era, there is no mention of it in the Qur’ān or the ahādith of the Masumeen (a.s.).

As long as smoking was not known to have any bad effect on health, the Shi‘a jurists (*mujtahideen*) had classified it under “*jā‘iz* — permissible” acts. However, after the advance in medical science, this issue has been re-evaluated. Presently, there are a variety of opinions:

The late Ayatullāh Khumayni had decreed that those who are addicted may continue to smoke but the non-smokers are not allowed to start smoking. He hoped to see the next generation of his followers as non-smokers.

Most of the jurists of this era, including the late Ayatullāh Khu‘i, Ayatullāh Sistāni, Ayatullāh Khamenā‘i and others are of the opinion that *if* smoking is harmful to one’s health, *then* it is forbidden for that person to smoke or let the smoke reach others as the second-hand smoke. These jurists have put the onus on the individual to find out whether smoking is harmful or not.

Ayatullāh Nāsir Makārim Shirāzi also had the same opinion but then he moved away from that position and has declared that, based on convincing expert testimonies, smoking is *harām* in an absolute sense.

The prohibition of smoking —conditional or absolute— is based on the general guidance of the shari‘ah sources: the Qur’ān and hadith. For example, the Qur’ān says: “*And do not put yourselves by your hands into destruction.*” (2:195) **By looking at the statistics about diseases caused or accelerated by inhaling smoke, one does not hesitate in applying the above verse on smoking cigarettes.**

* * *

What about **shisha** which has recently become very popular among Muslim youths in North America? (Shisha also known as “huqqa” in Urdu and “qalyan” in Farsi.) If tobacco is used in shisha, and the use of tobacco in it has the same effect as in cigarettes, then the same rule would apply.

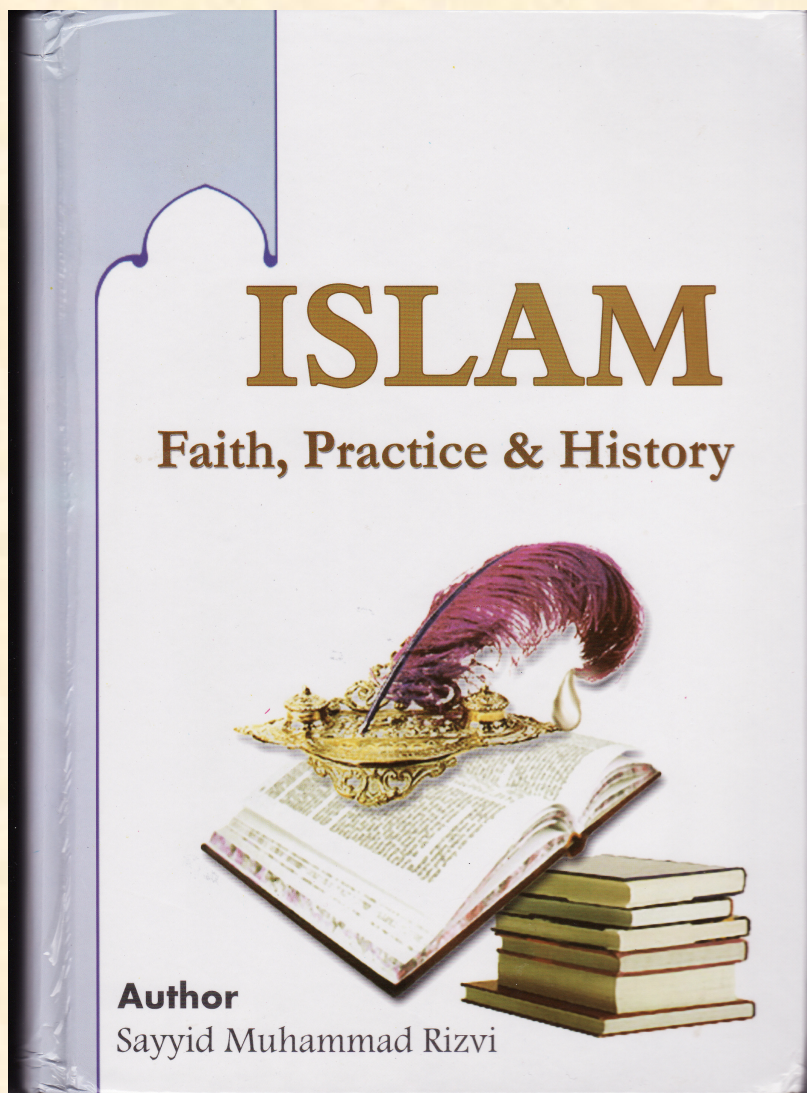
The great teacher, Shaykh Shahid Murtaza Mutahhari, talked about different kinds of *hijrat*—migration. He quotes a hadith: “An immigrant is one who abandons the evil.” So one type of *hijrat* is where a person abandons (‘migrates from’) an addiction. Then the Shahid described an interesting example of addiction to smoking:

“The late Ayatullah Hujjat (may Allah elevate his status) was a chain-smoker like whom I have never seen before. Sometimes, he would lit a new one even before his first cigarette would end... When he became ill, they took him to Tehran for treatment. The doctors advised him that since he also had respiratory problem, he should quit smoking. He initially joked and said, ‘I want these lungs for smoking; if I can’t smoke, then

what’s the use of these lungs?’ The doctors said that smoking is dangerous for you and really *muzirr*, harmful. He asked, ‘It is harmful?’ They replied, ‘Yes.’ Then he said, ‘I will not smoke.’ Just that one sentence ‘I will not smoke,’ was the end of the story. This was the example of will-power and decision-making. He was indeed an example of one who ‘migrates’ from habits [which he finds out to be harmful].” (*Guftar-hay-e Ma’ nawy*, p. 292)

Remember that the late Ayatullah Hujjat died in 1952, at a time when harmful effects of smoking were not yet commonly known. But as soon as he heard from an expert that smoking is harmful, he immediately quit.

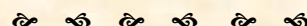
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The book is an introductory treatise on Islamic beliefs, laws and ethics as well as the early history of the faith in fifty lessons. These lessons were part of the Islamic Correspondence Course which were compiled, wrote and edited in the early nineties.

The course consists of three parts: Part One (twenty lessons) on Islamic theology explaining the basic beliefs of the faith, followed by Part Two (fifteen lessons) on Islamic jurisprudence explaining the spiritual and financial issues as well as the social and familial aspects of life, and concludes with Part Three (fifteen lessons) on the brief history of the first three centuries covering the lives of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.), his daughter Fatima and the Twelve Imams of Ahlul Bayt (a.s).

Each lesson is followed by a question paper.



Review by Diana (Massoma) Beatty at Imam Al-Khoei Online Book Store:

“I started taking this course years ago but never finished. This book is a compilation of lessons from an old correspondence course. It is a good introductory level comprehensive course into Islam divided into 50 lessons. It could be improved by having an answer key to the assignments so that it could be used easily by someone wanting to do self-study - having the key would remove doubts about some answers.”

HB 400 pages; published by Ansariyan Publication, Qum, Iran.