

Looking after the Self

O you who believe, take care of your own selves
(Sūratul Mā'idah, No. 5, āyat 105)

This verse tells believers to take care of themselves. Taking care of different aspects of his life that help him achieve perfection. The human being is responsible for himself and needs to work on his progress in life. This means being aware of what enhances his well-being and makes him function better as a servant of God. It also means being aware of what factors thwart his progress, so he can stay away from them.

The following are among the explanations given in *Tafsir Nur* for the verse above;

- first reform yourselves, then others.
- don't search for the faults of others; look only for your own.
- don't lose yourselves in the quest to save others.
- be such that the evil and negativity of those around you do not affect you.
- don't blame others for your failures, you alone are responsible.
- don't lose your spirit and enthusiasm due to the actions of others.

Self-care refers to actions and attitudes which promote well-being. It is sometimes described as emotional hygiene. Just like a shower cleanses the body, care of the mind and heart cleanses the self for internal cleanliness. It can also be compared to oiling a machine for more efficient production. Without the oil the machine wears out quickly and cannot do the work it is supposed to do. Self-care rejuvenates the human being and lifts the spirits, making the thoughts and actions much more productive.

Many hadith talk about the importance of leisure or relaxing activities that nourish the soul of the human being. Imam Ali (a) says; *The believer's time has three periods: The period when he is in communion with Allah; the period when he manages for his livelihood; and the period when he is free to enjoy what is lawful and pleasant* (Nahjul Balagha, H#390). In some versions of the hadith the last part says and '*that helps with the other periods*'.

Self-care could be different things for different people. It could be looking after the body, stimulating the mind, time spent on emotionally satisfying experiences . . . etc. Self-care can be anything that helps a person to relax, feel good internally, and face life with renewed enthusiasm. Self-care may differ from person to person. Each individual is unique and needs to do what their inner self is looking for.

Many people feel guilty at spending time and/or resources on self-care. Women especially are quick to care for others. They feel that time spent on themselves is time wasted. But self-care is important for being better able to care for others. The intention behind it should be that looking after the self is a responsibility towards Allah. It is to make better use of the mind and body that He has granted us. To be better equipped to carry out the role He requires of us. That makes self-care a necessity and not an indulgence.

Taking care of the self does not necessarily require that we spend a lot of time doing it. Or that we use up money or other resources for it. There are many small and simple things that make the self feel good. Doing these small actions regularly, even just a few minutes enjoying nature, add up and improve the quality of life.

Self-care helps with:

- spirituality and focus
- a positive attitude to life
- energy that motivates
- decision making
- spreading good in society
- handling life's problems

Areas of self-care

- 1) Physical – Includes hygiene, nutrition, exercise, sleep . . .
- 2) Spiritual – strengthening connection with God, learning, reflecting, discussing
- 3) Psychological – Understanding yourself, mindfulness,
- 3) Emotional – Managing stress, handling negative emotions, communicating
- 5) Social connections – strengthening relationships, contributing, participating
- 6) Work – knowing your role and responsibilities, enhancing skills

Self-care cannot happen unless a person is self-aware. Knowledge of the self, highly emphasized by Islam, helps a person know how to look after himself. This is the knowledge that leads a person to God. Allah says; *And be not like those who forgot Allah, so He made them forget their own selves; these it is that are the transgressors.*” (59:19). Dr Mohammed Ali Shomali says about this verse; ‘In this verse Allah is telling us to take care of ourselves, to pay attention to ourselves, that we must be careful about the well-being of our spirits, that we must be aware of the diseases of our souls, and how to cure them. He also tells us that we should pay attention to our duties, made obligatory on us as Muslims.’ Taking care of the self also includes taking care of that which is expected from us by God.



Some Quotes

Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes, including you.
Anne Lamott

Our bodies are like gardens and our willpower is like the gardener. Depending on what we plant—weeds or lettuce, or one kind of herb rather than a variety, the garden will either be barren and useless, or rich and productive.
William Shakespeare