

The Duty of Man Towards Himself

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No matter what policy or course of action man pursues in his life, indeed he looks after nothing but his happiness and prosperity. The recognition of the happiness of something is of minor importance with regard to—the recognition of the thing itself; that is, unless we know ourselves, we will not know our actual needs whose fulfillment provides us with happiness. Therefore, the most essential duty of man is to know himself so as to perceive his happiness and prosperity and endeavor to fulfill his needs by the means that are at his disposal. He must not waste away his valuable life which is his only treasure.

The Holy Prophet (S) states: "whoever knows himself knows his Allah". And Amir al-Mu'minin, 'Ali (as), states: "whoever knows himself, attains the highest position of knowledge."

After knowing himself, man realizes that his greatest duty is to value highly the essence of his humanity and not to trample upon such a valuable treasure. He also finds that he must strive for his physical and mental health so as to attain a prosperous and delightful eternal life. Amir al-Mu'minin, 'Ali (as) states: "Carnal desires will be low and insignificant to whoever respects himself."

The entity of man is comprised of two things: self or personality and body. It is man's responsibility to try to keep both these essential parts, i.e., the self or soul and body healthy and stable. He is duty bound to endeavor for the health of his soul and body in accordance with .the adequate and precise orders given on both of them by the holy religion of Islam

Physical Health

Abstaining from Harmful Things: Through a series of rules and regulations, the holy religion of Islam has adequately safeguarded the physical health such as enjoining people not to eat corpse, blood, flesh of some animals, and poisonous food; prohibiting them from drinking alcoholic beverages and polluted water; over eating; causing harm to the body; and other directives which are beyond the scope of this chapter.

Keeping Clean: Cleanliness is one of the most important principles of health. For this reason, great importance has been attached to this principle in the holy Shari'ah of Islam. The importance given by Islam to cleanliness cannot be found in any other religion.

The Holy Prophet (S) has stated: "Cleanliness is a part and parcel of Islamic faith" and this, by itself, is the greatest praise for cleanliness.

Repeated recommendations have reached us from the leaders of Islam in regard to taking bath. Al-'Imam Musa ibn Ja'far (as) states: "Taking a bath every other day makes man healthy and stout."

Al-'Imam 'Ali (as) states: "Bathroom is a very good place since it removes the dirtiness of man."

In addition to giving general orders concerning cleanliness and neatness, Islam enjoins in particular for each and every cleanliness; for instance, it orders the people to pare the nails of their hands and feet, to shave and remove the excess hair on their bodies and heads, to wash their hands before and after meals, to comb their hair, to gargle with water and inhale water, to sweep their homes, and to keep clean the roads, house doors, ground under the trees, etc.

Beside these orders, Islam has specified certain actions which are linked with permanent taharah and neatness such as for reciting salat and having sawm, removing the najasahs (impurities) from the body and the clothes, performing several times everyday the wudu' before reciting the salawat, and performing various ghusls (taking bath according to the specified Islamic manner).

From the fact that water should reach the surface of the body during wudu' before salat and ghusl and that the body should not be dirty and greasy, it becomes clear that the cleanliness of the body is implicitly essential.

The Neatness of Clothes: The Surat al-Muddaththir is one of the suwar which was revealed to the Holy Prophet (S) in the early stages of his prophetic mission. In the fourth verse of this surah,

Allah orders the people for taharah of their clothes: "And do taharah of your garments (74:4)."

The taharah of garments is wajib for salat according to specific Islamic jurisprudential order, but, in general, taharah from uncleanness and dirtiness is always recommended. Many recommendations have reached us from each of the Fourteen Ma'sumin (as) in this regard. The Holy Prophet (S) states: "Whoever puts on clothes should clean them as well." Amir al-Mu'minin, 'Ali (as) states: "Washing garments relieves one from grief and anxiety and neat clothes are a means for acceptance of his salat."

It has been narrated from al-'Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (as) and al-'Imam Musa al-Kazim (as) that possessing ten or twenty shirts and changing them is not extravagance.

In addition to the cleanliness and taharah of garments and body, a Muslim must also be well-dressed and must meet the people with the best possible appearance and looks. Al-'Imam 'Ali

(as) states: "Put on beautiful clothes and dress yourself up, for Allah is good and likes the good things, but these should be religiously lawful." Then, al-'Imam 'Ali (as) reads the following verse: "Say: Who has prohibited the embellishment of Allah which He has brought forth for His servants and the good provisions...(7:32)?"

Gargling with Water and Brushing the Teeth: Being a channel for food, the mouth of man gets contaminated due to eating food. Food particles remain in the roots of the teeth, on the tongue, and in all other parts of the mouth thus rendering the mouth contaminated and malodorous. Sometimes, as a result of fermentations and chemical actions and reactions that take place in food particles, poisonous matters are formed which get mixed with the food and then enter the stomach. Moreover, the breath of such a person in a gathering pollutes the air and annoys other people.

Therefore, the holy religion of Islam has ordered the Muslims to brush their teeth everyday (especially before each wudu') gargle their mouth with pure water, and clean their mouth from contamination.

The Holy Prophet (S) states: "If it were not for the fear of hardship and indigence, I would have made brushing the teeth wajib upon Muslims." Elsewhere, the Holy Prophet (S) states: "Jibril always recommended brushing the teeth to an extent that I even imagined it would become incumbent upon the Muslims later on."

Breathing: Breathing is one of the essential needs of man in his life. Quite often, the current of air surrounding man's residential area is not without dust and dirt. Surely, breathing such an air is harmful for the respiratory system. To protect against this harm, the Compassionate Allah has provided hair inside man's nose. This hair prevents the entrance of dust and dirt into the lungs.

Nevertheless, sometimes the hair of the nose cannot fully perform its function because of the accumulation of dirt and dust in the nose. For this reason, Islam has issued orders for Muslims to inhale water several times a day while having wudu' so as to protect the health of their .respiratory system by inhaling clean water through their nostrils

Mental Health

Moral Refinement: With his Allah-given conscience, man perceives the value of praiseworthy ethics and realizes its significance from the individual and social viewpoints. Thus, there is no one in the human society who does not praise good ethics and who does not respect those who are endowed with praiseworthy ethics.

The value that man attaches for praiseworthy ethics needs no further explanation and the

elaborate orders of Islam on ethics are thoroughly clear for everybody. The Almighty Allah states: "And the soul and Him Who made it pure, then He inspired it to understand what is right and wrong for it; he will indeed be successful who purifies it, and he will indeed fail who corrupts it (91:7-10)." While interpreting this verse, al-'Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (as) has stated: "The Almighty Allah has revealed to man the things which are good for him and must be put into effect and the things ".which are bad for him and must be avoided

Receiving Education and Knowledge

One of the praiseworthy intellectual attributes is to have knowledge. The virtue and superiority of a knowledgeable man over an ignorant person is absolutely clear. Wisdom and knowledge distinguish a man from other animals. Other animals, with their particular characteristics, are endowed with invariable instincts in accordance with which they meet the needs of their lives. There is no scope for elevation and progress in the lives of animals and they cannot open up new gates to themselves and to others. It is only man who augments his existing knowledge with new knowledge through his wisdom and attains a new value and splendor for his materialistic and spiritual life by discovering the laws of nature and metaphysics. It is only man who takes a deep look into the past periods and lays the foundation for his own future and the future of others. More than all the new and old social systems of all religions and faiths, Islam encourages the people to acquire knowledge and learning. In order to establish a fundamental culture and civilization, Islam has made receiving the education as wajib upon every Muslim man and woman. Many orders have been handed down to us from the Holy Prophet (S) and religious leaders in this regard. The Holy Prophet (S) states: "Education is wajib upon every Muslim." In this hadith, knowledge is described in an absolute form and includes all branches of science. There is no exception even as far as women and men are concerned. Thus, the acquisition of knowledge and learning in Islam is not intended to apply only to a particular nature or type. On the contrary, the duty of acquiring knowledge is universal and all-embracing. The Holy Prophet (S) also states: "Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave." Every religious precept has a specific time and for all of them maturity is a necessary condition: i.e., the person, for whom the religious principles are applicable, must have reached maturity. The religious precepts are not wajib upon a person unless he has reached maturity. Some of the religious wajibat are no longer applicable during old age and at the time of

weakness, but acquiring knowledge and learning is wajib for man since his birth until his death. In other words, acquiring knowledge is wajib at all the stages of man's life. On the basis of this principle, a Muslim should acquire knowledge all through his life and should add to his knowledge day by day. This hadith, too, has extended and generalized the time of this wajib obligation.

The Holy Prophet (S) also states: "Go for seeking knowledge even if it may be in China (i.e., far away)." Another hadith states: "Knowledge is the most valuable thing that the believer has lost. He should go after it, even if he finds it in China (the farthest points in the world)." According to this commandment, every Muslim is obliged to acquire knowledge even if long journeys are required for this purpose. Finally, he should endeavor to find at any cost what he has lost. The Holy Prophet (S) also said in another hadith: "knowledge is what a believer has lost. He must get it back from wherever he finds." However, in acquiring knowledge, the only condition is that it should be appropriate and beneficial to the societies.

Islam highly recommends man to know the secrets of creation and to think about the heavens, the earth, the human nature, the history of nations and peoples, and the works of former generations (philosophy, mathematics, natural sciences, etc). Also, learning moral and religious matters (ethics and Islamic laws) and different kinds of arts which shape man's life are highly encouraged and stressed by Islam.

Indeed, the importance of knowledge is so great from the viewpoint of the Holy Prophet (S) that in the Battle of Badr when the Muslims took a group of the unbelievers as captives, the Holy Prophet (S) ordered every captive to be released by paying exorbitant sums of money. Only a group of the captives, who were literate, became exempt from paying such money provided that each of them teaches ten Muslim youths to read and write.

Thus for the first time, adult schools (adult classes) were established in the world and this great honor was ascribed to the Muslims in the history of the world. Interestingly enough, once for all in the history of man, teaching knowledge was accepted instead of war-spoils by the order of the Holy Prophet (S). Neither before nor after that had anyone in the world witnessed a victorious commander except the teaching of children instead of ransom and war-spoils.

The Holy Prophet (S) went to those adult classes in person and took with him those who knew reading and writing. He asked them to test the children to find out how much progress they had made in their lessons and practice. The Holy Prophet (S) used to encourage more any child who was found more diligent in learning.

Even one of the historians writes: "A woman named 'Al-Shifa'," who had learned reading and writing during the "period of ignorance," used to go to the house of the Holy Prophet (S) and

teach the wives of the Holy Prophet (S) how to read and write. For this reason, she was
".(appreciated, encouraged, and rewarded by the Holy Prophet (S