CHAPTER 9

Islam

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Introduction

The word *islām*, which designates the last of the Abrahamic religions, literally means 'submission to God's will.' Muḥammad (born 570 CE), the Prophet of Islam and the founder of Islamic public order, proclaimed Islam in the seventh century CE in Arabia. The beginning of Islam in 610 CE was marked by a struggle to establish a monotheistic faith and create an ethical public order embodying divine justice and mercy. Muḥammad as a statesman instituted a series of reforms to create his community, *umma*, on the basis of religious affiliation.

Within a century of Muḥammad's death in 632 CE, Muslim armies had conquered the region from the Nile in North Africa to the Oxus in Central Asia up to India. This phenomenal growth into a vast empire required an Islamic legal system for the administration of the highly developed political systems of the conquered Persian and Byzantine regions. Muslim jurists formulated various methodological and conceptual devices to set up a comprehensive legal code. They extracted and utilized the ethical and legal principles set forth in the Qur'an, the collected revelations of Muḥammad; the precedents set by the Prophet and the early community, the Sunna; and the local customs of the conquered regions.

Differences of opinion on critical issues emerged as soon as Muḥammad died in 632 CE. The question of succession to Muḥammad was one of the major issues that divided the community into the Sunnī and Shī'a. One candidate for the position of caliph (political 'successor') was Abū Bakr (d. 634), an elderly associate of the Prophet who gained the support of the majority of the community, who gradually came to be known as the Sunnis (followers of communal 'tradition'); those who acclaimed 'Alī (d. 660), Muḥammad's cousin and son-in-law, as the 'Imām' (religious and political leader) designated by the Prophet formed the minority group, known as the Shī'a ('partisans' or 'supporters' of 'Alī).

The dispute had profound implications beyond politics. The Qur'an's persistent injunctions of obedience to the prophet endowed him with enormous personal power in shaping the present public order and, hence, the future course of Muslim life. In the post-prophetic period the dispute left the community endlessly searching for a paradigmatic authority: the Sunnis located it in the 'tradition' and the 'community,' whereas the Shī'ites found it in the charismatic person of an Imam. The full title used by the Sunni Muslims to designate themselves as the bearer of the only true and real Islam is *ahl al-sunna wa al-jamā'a*, meaning the 'people of tradition and community.' The Shī'ites use *sh`īat 'Alī* as their proper designation, meaning 'supporters' of 'Alī. Hence, their claim to validity is connected with the acknowledgement of a rightful Imam from among the descendants of the Prophet. The last in the line of these Imams is believed to be living an invisible existence since his disappearance in 940 CE.

Fundamental teachings

The two authoritative sources of Islamic teachings are the Qur'an, regarded by Muslims as the 'Book of God,' and the Sunna (the Tradition), the exemplary conduct of the Prophet. The Qur'an consists of the revelations Muḥammad received intermittently from the time of his call as the prophet in 610 CE until his death in 632 CE. Muslims believe that the Qur'an was directly communicated by God through the archangel Gabriel; accordingly, it remains an infallible text for Muslims. The Qur'an is not a book of systematic theology or ethics; nevertheless, it has been the key source of Islam's theological and ethical doctrines, and its principles of public organization. The Sunna (meaning 'well trodden path') has functioned as the elaboration of the Qur'anic revelation, providing interpretive counsel about every precept and deed, with ostensible precedents in the Prophet's own practice. The narratives that carried such information were designated as *ḥadīth* ('report, narrative'). In the ninth century Muslim scholars developed an elaborate system for the theological and legal classification, and verification of these *ḥadīth* reports, deducing from them various prescriptions for belief and practice.

The 'Five Pillars'

The tradition describes the Muslim creed and practice as 'The Five Pillars of Islam.' These include fundamental doctrines and religious practices that all Muslims endeavour to perform as part of their commitment to the faith community.

The *First* Pillar is the *shahāda* ('bearing witness'), the profession of faith. The *shahāda* consists of two statements: 'There is no deity, but God, and Muḥammad is the messenger of God.' These two avowals are repeated by anyone who wishes to join the community

of the faithful. Belief in God is the foundation of the individual's private and social existence. The Qur'an speaks about God as the being whose presence suffuses all worldly things and events. Faith in God engenders security and peace of mind.

Life is the gift of God, and the body is the divine trust given to humankind to enable it to serve God fully. The Qur'an describes a humble origin for humans, who were created from 'dry clay of black mud formed into shape' (Q. 15: 26). Through the well-proportioned creation of human beings in God's image (*'alā Ṣūratihi*) [1] and the perpetual guidance to strive for moral and spiritual perfection, human beings have been given the trusteeship of their bodies. On the Day of Resurrection, all parts of the human body will have to account for the actions of the person whose bodily organs they formed (Q. 36: 65). God has set limits on what human beings may do with their own bodies. Suicide, homicide, and torturing one's body in any form are deemed acts of transgression against God.

Muslims believe in resurrection of the dead on the Day of Judgment, when they will account for their deeds, and reap the rewards or punishments warranted by their life on earth. The Day of Resurrection or Reckoning is a central doctrine in the Qur'an, reminding human beings of their ultimate return to God. The belief in bodily resurrection has determined many a religious-ethical decision regarding cadavers. Dead bodies should be buried reverently as soon as possible. The Qur'an affirms reverence for human life in a commandment similar to those that govern other monotheists: 'We decreed for the Children of Israel that whosoever kills a human being for other than manslaughter or corruption in the earth, it shall be as if he had killed all humankind, and whoso saves the life of one, it shall be as if he saved the life of all humankind' (Q. 5: 32).

Belief in God's guidance entails the responsibility to further God's purposes on earth. Human beings are endowed with the innate disposition (*fiṭra*) or ability to know right from wrong and the will to accept the responsibility for perfecting their existence by understanding and working with the laws of nature. The Qur'an emphasizes God's benevolence, all-forgivingness, and mercy. However, it also highlights God's justice and stresses that humanity should develop moral and spiritual awareness (*taqwā*) in fulfilling everyday requirements of life.

Human existence is not free of tension and inner stresses; they result from the rejection of truth (*kufr*) and impairment of moral consciousness. To help humanity, God sends prophets 'to remind' humanity of its covenant with God (Q. 7: 172). There have been 124,000 prophets from the beginning of history, among whom five (Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad) are regarded as 'messengers' sent to organize their people on the basis of divine revelation.

The *Second* Pillar is daily worship (*Ṣalāt*, lit. 'to pray, to invoke'). The Islamic concept of 'worship' or 'serving' (*'ibāda*) God is much broader. Any good deed or thought is regarded as 'service' to God. However, *Ṣalāt* is a prescribed ritual that is performed as a 'service' to God with an explicit intention of 'drawing close to God.' All Muslims who have attained the prescribed age of maturity (fifteen for a boy and nine for a girl) are required to offer their prayers five times a day: at dawn, midday, afternoon, evening, and night. These prayers are very short, and require bowing and prostration. A Muslim may worship anywhere, preferably in congregation, facing Mecca. Muslims are required to worship as a community on Fridays at midday and on two major religious holidays. The congregational prayer gives expression to the believer's religious commitment within the community. Women are exempt from this obligation of congregational participation, and the tradition recommends that they worship in the privacy of their homes. Although segregated from men, they have always worshipped at designated areas in the mosque.

The Qur'an prescribes a state of physical purity for the worshipper prior to prayer, requiring the performance of ablutions and a full washing after sexual intercourse or a long illness. Women are required to perform a full washing after the menstrual cycle and childbirth because blood is regarded as ritually unclean. Islamic law prescribes regular cleansing and physical hygiene as expressions of one's faith.

In Islam prayer is therapeutic. In addition to seeking medical treatment, Muslims are encouraged to seek healing, especially for psychological problems, by invoking God's mercy through supplication. Many illnesses, according to the teachings of the Prophet, are caused by psychological conditions like anxiety, sorrow, fear, loneliness, and so on. Hence, prayer restores the serenity and tranquility of the soul.

The *Third* Pillar is the mandatory 'alms-levy' (*zakāt*, literally 'purification,' but more broadly 'sharing of one's wealth by practicing charity'). The Muslim definition of the virtuous life includes charitable support of widows, wayfarers, orphans, and the needy. Islamic law includes technical regulations about how much *zakāt* is due and upon what property it is to be levied. These legal rulings, which originated in early Islam, before the disintegration of the Islamic public order, do not necessarily prevail in contemporary Muslim nations. Although *zakāt* has for the most part been left to the conscience of Muslims, the obligation to be charitable remains an important ethical imperative of Islam.

The *Fourth* Pillar is the fast of Ramaḍān, the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar, in which Muḥammad received the Qur'an. During the fast, which lasts from dawn to dusk for each day of the month, Muslims are forbidden to eat, smoke, and drink; they must also refrain from sexual intercourse and acts leading to sensual behaviour. The fasting alters the pattern of life for a month generating a spiritual state that leads to mental and bodily health. The end of the month is marked by a festival, *'Id al-fiṭr*, after which life returns to normal. The discipline engendered by Ramadan varies from individual to individual. It certainly helps individuals to cultivate spiritual and moral self-control. The communal aspect of Ramadan provides a community experience in which families and friends share both fasting and evening meals in a spirit of thanksgiving. Like prayer, fasting also has a therapeutic effect. Prophetic guidance prescribes fasting for treating various ailments, including psychological problems, such as fear, anxiety, and overactive sexual drive.

The *Fifth* Pillar is the annual pilgrimage, the *ḥajj*, to Mecca, which all able-bodied Muslims are required to undertake at least once in their lives, if they can afford to do so. The pilgrimage takes place at a fixed time during the twelfth month of the lunar calendar. This collective ritual performed by thousands of Muslims in Mecca lasts for three days, culminating in the Festival of Sacrifice, which marks the end of *ḥajj*. The three-day rituals that commemorate Abraham's sacrifice of his son Ishmael have the essential spiritual objective of inculcating a form of asceticism by teaching the pilgrims to learn self-control in pursuing worldly desires. The rituals and the special

prayers during the *ḥajj* are a source of spiritual healing and inner peace. The experience brings together Muslims of diverse cultures and nationalities to achieve a purity of existence and a communion with God that exalts the pilgrim for the rest of his/her life.

Healing through spiritual morality

Because suffering can result from either natural or moral evil, we are obliged to examine the concept of good health in Islam, especially insofar as this is regarded as part of a person's obligation to avoid undue pain and suffering. The Arabic word *Ṣiḥḥa* ('sound' or 'health') is rich in connotations. Like the word *salāma* (also 'sound' or 'health'), it conveys the wholeness and integrity of a being that generates a sense of security. Furthermore, it connotes a life of balance and moderation that avoids behavioural extremes. Disturbing this balance of *Ṣiḥḥa* causes physical ailment. The Qur'an lays down the golden rule about moderation: 'O children of Adam,... eat and drink the good things you desire, but do not become wasteful' (Q. 7: 31). Imbalance or overindulgence in the enjoyment of God's bounty will lead to both physical and moral suffering. In the moral sense, human volition may result in the overconsumption of certain foods because of sensual indulgence rather than attention to good health. The Prophet is reported to have advised his disciples to avoid overeating and recommended that one stop eating before feeling full.[2] Another tradition traces all sickness to a lack of moderation in eating. On this view, it is physical or psychological conditions beyond one's own control that dictate lifestyle adjustments in the interests of physical wellbeing.

The Qur'an prescribes the pursuit of self-knowledge as a part of maintaining good health. Physical and psychological health cannot be taken-for-granted—they are a divine benefaction that depends on human moderation in food and drink, and regular physical activities, including swimming and horse riding, as the Prophet instructed his followers. Yet there are people who suffer from illnesses that are genetically inherited, in which they have exercised no choice whatsoever. It is this kind of suffering that raises questions about God's will and the existence of evil in the world.

Islamic spirituality

The belief in God's omnipotence is the most important idea in Muslim theology. God is the creator of all things, including human destiny on earth, and rewards and punishments in the hereafter. Such a deterministic concept of human action gives rise to the problem of reconciling divine predetermination of human action with divine justice, which entails God's punishment of the wicked and his rewarding of the righteous. This aspect of the problem of theodicy arose out of statements from the Qur'an and the Tradition. In the context of health care, the idea of God's omnipotence has enormous implications, breeding a quietism that discourages the ill from prying into God's unfathomable ways and encourages resignation to suffering.[3] With modern medicine's enormous strides in healing the sick and alleviating suffering, the inexorability of God's decrees provides little comfort to those who want to see an end to agonies of incurable diseases.

Yet, despite the phenomenal advancement in medical treatment today humans need to come to grips with what I constantly hear in my duties as a hospital chaplain: undeserved suffering. The need to understand the divine decree and cultivate necessary faith in God's goodness brings me face to face with the role of Islamic spirituality.

In Islam the realm of spirituality is located within human experience of transcendence. It does not matter whether one is anchored in an organized religious tradition or not. The experience of transcendence is positioned in the depth of the human heart, which needs to be explored by each individual through the natural endowment that all humans have been created with. This endowment—the innate capacity (*fiṭra*) to incline towards transcendence—is the source of human spiritual and moral awareness (*taqwā*), which is created the moment humans are fashioned as humans (Q. 97: 7–10). At various points in their journey toward spiritual and moral perfection humans receive portents that are present both in their own selves (*anfus*) and in the environment (*āfāq*) for them to realize the stages of their journey towards becoming perfected (Q. 16: 78). In this sense, their personal perfection is tied to the perfection of environment that requires the undivided attention of humanity since its preservation and its beautification is existentially connected with humanity's own survival and internal beauty. The more one understands this indispensable connection between internal and external sources of human spiritual and moral development the more one commits oneself to achieve the equilibrium that this understanding generates in actual life situations. This is the universal dimension of one's nature and spiritual and moral journey.

In this sense, spirituality and morality are intertwined because the former is the internal dimension of the being's identity, and hence, individual and subjective; whereas the latter is the external aspect and grounds for a person's overall performance in corporate existence, and hence, collective and objective. Claims of being spiritual can coexist with the calamity of self-righteous attitudes in faith communities, and are ultimately inaccessible to outsiders for scrutiny. It is for this reason that, in Islam, morality (doing what is right and avoiding what is wrong) must accompany spirituality as its consequence, and take objective and accessible forms for others to establish the validity of the claim to be moral. If spirituality generates peace and confidence, then morality becomes its objective manifestation when one deals with other humans as equals, endowed with the same dignity regardless of one's faith connection. In this estimation, then, spirituality is not only a precondition to one's inner peace and healthy state of mind; it is functionally indispensable to developing moral sensibilities, which enable a person to deal with others in fairness and justice.

However, this morality-orientated spirituality is overshadowed by exclusionary Muslim theology, which finds its major application in the Islamic religious law. The juridical tradition is founded upon this theology, which, paradoxically, also advances the idea of a common human family that can be traced back to the first human couple on earth, Adam and Eve. Human beings need one another to enable them to live in peace and harmony—the very foundation of human wellbeing. Hence, the critical need for spirituality is underscored by the mystical tradition in Islam, namely, Sufism, which neutralizes the exclusionary theology in its emphasis upon the Prophetic teaching that the Children of Adam are like one body, because they share the same essence in their creation. One of the striking features of religiously-based spirituality is its emphasis on human relationships and the ethics that governs these. By its very emphasis on the ethics of relationship, this spirituality is dialogical. It is not only to dialogue with other humans that it inevitably leads;

it also leads to dialogue with the entirety of nature. It requires humans to engage not only in beautifying nature in a reciprocal mode (if I am beautiful, so is my environment); it also mandates its preservation, in the same way as it treats one's own preservation as a moral and religious duty. Dialogue allows the relationship of equality to emerge, which is potentially able to confront the sources of conflict generated by the culturally advanced dichotomy of superiority/inferiority, saved/damned theology. To defeat the negative forces of this cultural theology, human endeavours need to be equipped with the spirituality that orientates a person to ethical action. The Prophet of Islam was asked about the meaning of religion and he is reported to have replied: 'It is obedience to God and kindness to creation (*makhluq*).' The 'creation' is used here in its generic sense to include the entirety of created beings, not just humans. It is for this reason that when human relationships are fractured they need to be mended through healing that comes by way of reaching out to fellow humans qua humans.

The correlation between spirituality and morality provides a unique way of estimating the relationship between faith and law. Law is certainly connected with the human experience of living with one another and in community. In Islam, God's will is expressed in God's commandments delivered through the supernatural medium of revelation. God's law guarantees salvation to those who obey God's commandment. In some unique sense, fulfillment of the legal-ethical rulings restores total human wellbeing leading to a blissful hereafter. In order to fully appreciate this interdependent relation between spiritual and moral wellbeing, we need to turn our attention to the normative legal system in Islam, which functions as a divinely ordained scale of what it means to be a spiritually and morally healthy community.

Islamic law

Islamic law covers all the actions humans perform, whether toward one another or toward God. The Sharī'a is the norm of the Muslim community. It grew out of Muslim endeavours to ensure that Islam pervaded the whole of life. Two essential areas of human life define its scope: acts of worship, both public and private, connected with the pillars of faith; and acts of public order that ensure individual and collective justice. The first category of actions, undertaken with the intention of seeking God's pleasure, is collectively known as 'ritual duties' toward God (*'ibādāt*, literally 'acts of worship'). These include all religious acts, such as daily prayers, fasting, alms-giving, and so on; the second category of actions, undertaken to maintain a social order, is known as 'social transactions' (*mu'āmalāt*, literally 'social intercourse'). The religious calibration of these two categories depended upon the meticulous division of jurisdiction based on the ability of human institutions to enforce the Sharī'a and provide sanctions for disregarding its injunctions. In Islamic law all actions should be performed to secure divine approval, but human agency and institutions have jurisdiction only over the social transactions that regulate interpersonal relations.

In order to create such an all-comprehensive legal system founded upon revealed texts, Muslim scholars went beyond the Qur'an to the person of the founder and the early community. The Qur'an required obedience to the Prophet and those invested with authority, which included the idealized community made up of the elders among first and second generations. In this way, the Qur'an opened the way for extending the normative practice beyond the prophet's earthly life. Such an understanding of the normative tradition was theoretically essential for deriving the legal system that saw its validity only in terms of its being extracted from the Prophet's own paradigmatic status. Hence, the Prophet's life as understood and reported by the early community became an ethical touchstone for what the Muslims call the Sunna, the Tradition. The intellectual activity surrounding the interpretation of God's will expressed in the Qur'an and the evaluation of the *ḥadīth* reports that were ascribed to the Prophet and the early community became the major religious–academic activity among Muslims, laying the foundation for subsequent juridical deliberations—what became known as *fiqh* ('understanding'), or jurisprudence.

By the 9–10th centuries, Muslim community was affiliated with one or the other leading scholars in the field of juristic investigation. The legal school that followed the Iraqi tradition was called 'Ḥanafī,' after Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 767), the 'imām' (teacher) in Iraq. Those who adhered to the rulings of Mālik bin Anas (d. 795), in Arabia and elsewhere, were known as 'Mālikis.' Al-Shāfi'ī, who is also credited as being one of the profound legal thinkers, is the founder of a legal school in Egypt whose influence spread widely to other regions of the Muslim world. Another school was associated with Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal (d. 855), who compiled a work on *ḥadīth* reports that became the source for juridical decisions of those who followed him. Shī'ites developed their own legal school, the Ja'fari school, whose leading authority was Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 748). Normally, Muslims accepted the legal school prevalent in their region. Today most of the Sunni Muslims follow Ḥanafī or Shāfi'ī rite; whereas the Shī'a Muslims follow the Ja'farī school. In the absence of an organized 'church' and ordained 'clergy' in Islam, Islamic legal rite is inherently pluralistic. The determination of valid religious practice is left to the qualified scholars of religious law, collectively known as ulema.

Muslim legal theorists were thoroughly aware of moral underpinnings of the religious duties that all Muslims were required to fulfil as members of the faith community. In fact, the validity of their research in the foundational sources of Islam (the Qur'an and the Tradition) for solutions to practical matters depended upon their substantial consideration of different moral facets of a case that could be discovered by considering conflicting claims, interests, and responsibilities in the precedents preserved in these authoritative sources. What ensured the validity of their judicial decision regarding a specific instance was their ability to deduce the universal moral principles like 'there shall be no harm inflicted or reciprocated' (*lā ḍarar wa lā ḍirār)*[4] that flowed downward from their initial premise to support their particular conclusion without any dependence on the circumstances that would have rendered the conclusion circumstantial at the most. However, the power of these conclusions depended on the ethical considerations that were operative in the original precedents and the agreement of the scholars that sought to relate the new case to the original rationale as well as rules.

Customarily, when faced with a moral dilemma juridical-ethical deliberations are geared toward a satisfactory resolution in which justifications are based on practical consequences, regardless of applicable principles. For instance, in deciding whether to allow dissection of the cadaver to retrieve a valuable object swallowed by the deceased, Muslim jurists have ruled in favour by simply looking at the consequence of forbidding such a procedure. The major moral consideration that outweighs the respect for

the dignity of the dead is the ownership through inheritance of the swallowed object for the surviving orphan. Dissection of the cadaver is forbidden in Islam; and, yet, the case demands immediate solution that is based on consequential ethics. Or, in the case of a female patient who, as prescribed in the Sharī'a must be treated by a female physician, in an emergency situation the practical demand is to override the prohibition because the rule of necessity (*ḍarūra*) extracted from the revealed texts outweighs the rule about the sexual segregation extracted from rational consideration. There are numerous instances that clearly show the cultural preferences in providing solutions to the pressing problems of health care in Muslim societies in which communitarian ethics considers the consequence of any medical decision on the family, and community resources and interests.

Health-related beliefs and values

People with different backgrounds approach suffering through illness and death with a wide range of diverse attitudes about its causes and consequences, attitudes that often have been cultivated and transmitted by their respective cultures and religions. Sometimes these attitudes undermine the efficacy of those treatments which require the patient to have the necessary will to fight the disease. A holistic medical approach, which treats both psychosomatic and physical conditions, necessitates that clinicians be aware of the patient's emotional condition and cultural background in order to formulate an accurate diagnosis and successful treatment plan. [5] What should the health care worker know about her Muslim patient's religious and moral presuppositions about the nature of suffering?

Generally, a situation that is negatively described as suffering refers to an objective state of affairs ('It is unbearable!') and the subjective response ('It is harmful for the patient!') of a judging individual. In other words, when one assesses suffering as a form of evil—either objectively or subjectively, one needs to take into account the agent, the act of suffering, and the resultant harm that is objective enough for a positive or a privative understanding of evil. When both subjective and objective elements are present, suffering in the context of illness is described as the experience that is undesirable and maleficent. Both physically and morally, the description immediately captures an objective standard that most people would judge as tragically harmful to the agent, without reference to any ontology or complex metaphysical or theological explanation. We are in a realistic way able to assert that a person is suffering unrequited pain and destruction. Evil then reveals the undesirable and maleficent aspects of human suffering. Understood in this way, we can now probe into theodicy and begin to unfold the divine mystery regarding the infliction of destruction upon innocent life through natural evil.

The quest to unfold the divine mystery about human suffering paves the way for a meaningful conversation between the religious beliefs and medical aspects of illness where metaphysical and physical dimensions of medical care struggle to come to terms with the human condition and the limitations of human undertakings to alleviate that suffering. The difference between religious and medical assessment of the situation is stark. Whereas faith in the divine will nurture humility and reveal human limitations in comprehending the ways of the powerful God who gives and takes life, medicine, taking the responsibility for removing the evil of pain and suffering, continues its search to find the cure and prolongs dying. The stark difference is further underscored by the way religion inculcates personal piety in dealing with illness, which is to inculcate faith in God's goodness and accept suffering as part of the overall divine plan for humanity's spiritual and moral development. Although medicine enters the field of human suffering with enormous confidence and determination to treat ailments by undertaking necessary training and research, religion emphasizes the finitude of human life. It reminds humanity not to arrogate God's functions of taking life at a fixed point in history, whose knowledge rests with God alone.

'How fortunate you are that you died while you were not afflicted with illness.' Thus said the Prophet addressing the person whose funeral rites he was performing. Such an assessment of death without illness coming from the founder of Islam indicates the value attached to a healthy life in Muslim culture. To be sure, good health is God's blessing for which a Muslim, whenever asked: 'How are you?' (lit. 'How is your health?') responds: 'All praise is due to God!' This positive appraisal of good health might, however, seem to suggest that illness is an evil that must be eliminated at any cost. No doubt, illness is regarded as an affliction that needs to be cured by every possible legitimate means. In fact, the search for a cure is founded upon unusual confidence generated by the divine promise that God has not created a disease without creating its cure.[6] Hence, the purpose of medicine is to search for that cure and provide the necessary care to those afflicted with diseases. The primary obligation of a Muslim physician is to provide care and alleviate suffering of a patient. Decisions about ending the life of a terminally ill patient at her/his request are beyond his moral or legal obligations. The Qur'an states its position on the matter in no uncertain terms that 'it is not given to any soul to die, save by the leave of God, at an appointed time.' (Q. 3: 145) Moreover, 'God gives life, and He makes to die' (Q. 3: 156). Hence, 'A person dies when it is written' (Q. 3: 185, 29: 57, 39: 42).

Death, then, comes at the appointed time, by God's permission. In the meantime, humans are faced with the suffering caused by illness. How is suffering viewed in Islam? Is it part of the divine plan to cause suffering? With what end? These general questions about the meaning and value of suffering should lead us to appraise the suffering caused by prolonged illness in an individual's personal and family life. The need to take the decision to end one's life arises precisely at that critical point when the sick person is undergoing severe discomfort and desperation, and when all forms of advanced medical treatments have failed to restore hope in getting better.

Closely related to such a consideration on the part of the sick person is whether the unbearable circumstances caused by one's interminable illness makes existence worthwhile at all. Does such an existence that is almost equivalent to non-existence because of an intense sense of helplessness in managing one's life, possess any value for its continuation? Beneath these concerns remains a deeper question about the quality of life that individuals and society regard as worth preserving.

The discussion about quality of life points to the cultural and religious attitudes regarding human existence and the control over life and death decisions when an individual is overcome by suffering. Furthermore, it underscores the view that a human being has the stewardship, not the ownership, of his body to enable him to assert his right to handle it the way he pleases. He is merely the

caretaker, the real owner being God, the Creator. As a caretaker, it is his duty to take all the necessary steps to preserve it in a manner that would assist him in seeking the good of both this world and the next. In light of such a stipulation about human duty toward his earthly existence in Muslim theology, the problem of human suffering through illness assumes immediate relevance. The Qur'an provides essential philosophy behind human suffering by pointing out that suffering is a form of a test or trial to confirm a believer's spiritual station:

> O all you who believe, seek your help in patience and prayer; surely God is with the patient ... surely. We will try you with something of fear and hunger, and diminution of goods and lives and fruits; yet give thou good tidings unto the patient who, when they are visited by an affliction, say, 'Surely we belong to God, and to Him we return'; upon those rest blessings and mercy from their Lord, and those—they are the truly guided. (Q. 2: 153–7.)

Suffering in this situation is caused by the divinely ordained trial. More pertinently, it functions as an instrument in revealing God's purpose for humanity and in reminding it that ultimately it is to God that it belongs and to God it will return. Accordingly, suffering from this perspective cannot be regarded as evil at all. In a well-known tradition, the Prophet is reported to have said: 'No fatigue, nor disease, nor sorrow, nor sadness, nor hurt, nor distress befalls a Muslim, even if it were the prick he received from a thorn, but that God expiates some of his sins for that.'[7]

Hence, understanding suffering is central to Islamic understanding of health and illness. As pointed out earlier, in Muslim theology human suffering in any form raises the question about God's power and knowledge over what befalls human beings. The belief in God's overwhelming power is the most important doctrine in Muslim theology. God is not only the Creator of all things, including human destiny (*qadar*), God also determines the ultimate outcome of human decisions. Such a deterministic theology primarily gives rise to the problem of reconciling God's justice with existing evil. It has tendencies toward resignation and almost passivity in dealing with illness and other forms of afflictions. Our everyday experience with death and disease provides us with plenty of grounds to complain about the sad fact that, in view of what modern medicine promises to do for the sick, faith in the inscrutable ways of God's decree provides little comfort to those who want to see an end to the agonies of incurable diseases.

Muslim theologians have striven to comprehend the rationale for the suffering, for instance, of children or even animals. Explaining the causes of suffering of bad people, even if unconvincing, has been easier because of the causal link drawn between sins and suffering by the majority of Muslim theologians. But what sins can account for the suffering of innocent children? The suffering of children in reproductive technologies and genetics, and the unprecedented devaluation of defective foetuses in contemporary biomedical advancement await full accounting of the ethics of fertility clinics and prenatal genetic screening.

Islamic bioethics[8]

Secular bioethics in the Muslim world today has severed its partnership with faith communities in providing solutions to the moral problems that have arisen in clinical situations as well as public health around the world. International bodies like WHO and UNESCO, which support local efforts in developing culturally sensitive bioethical curriculum, still appear to be unaware of the essentially religious nature of bioethical discourse in the Muslim world and the need to engage religious ethics in the Muslim context to better serve the populations whose cultures take religion more seriously. Examining the emerging literature on Muslim bioethics, mostly authored by interested Muslim physicians, it is obvious that those who represent Muslim bioethics do not take local cultures, and their religious ingredients seriously enough to speak with necessary acumen and sensitivity about Muslim culture-friendly bioethics. Secular bioethics, with its emphasis on liberal Western values does not fully resonate with local and regional Muslim values.

Fundamental principle of public good in Islamic bioethics

The principle of public good consists of each and every benefit that has been made known by the purposes stated in the divine revelation. Because some jurists have essentially regarded public good as safeguarding the Lawgiver's purposes, they have discussed the principle in terms of both the types and the purposes they serve. The entire Sharī'a is instituted in the interests of Muslims, whether these interests pertain to this life or to life in the hereafter. In order to safeguard these interests and achieve God's purposes for humanity the Sharī'a seeks to promote three universal goals. The three goals are discussed under the following universal principles whose authority is based on a number of probable instances and supporting documentation in the revelation:

1. *The essentials or the primary needs* (al-ḍarūriyāt): these are indispensable things that are promulgated for the good of this and the next world, such as providing health care to the poor and downtrodden. Such actions are necessary for maintaining public health and the good of people in this life and for earning reward in the next. Moreover, without them, life would be threatened, resulting in further suffering for people who cannot afford even the basic necessities of life. According to Muslim thinkers, the necessity to protect the essentials is felt across traditions among the followers of other religions, too. The good of the people is such a fundamental issue among all peoples that there is a consensus among them that when one member of a society suffers, others must work to relieve the afflicted[9–12]
2. *The general needs* (al-ḥājiyāt): these are things that enable human beings to improve their lives, removeing those conditions that lead to chaos in one's familial and societal life in order to achieve high standards of living, even though these necessities do not reach the level of essentials. These benefits are such that, if not attained, it leads to hardship and disorder, but not to corruption. This kind of common good is materialized in matters pertaining to the performance of religious duties, managing of everyday life situations, maintaining interpersonal relationships, and upholding a penal system that prevents people from causing harm to others[13]
3. *The secondary needs* (al-Taḥsīnāt): these are the things that are commonly regarded as praiseworthy in society, which also lead to the avoidance of those things that are regarded as blameworthy. They are also known as 'noble virtues' (*makārim al-akhlāq*). [14] In other words, although these things do not qualify as 'primary' or 'general' needs, they improve quality of life. The goal is to make them easily accessible to average members of a society,

and even embellish them in order to render these noble virtues more desirable.[15]

One of the issues in the Muslim world that is assessed in terms of the principle of public good is sex selection, particularly in assisted reproduction. Sex selection is any practice, technique, or intervention intended to increase the likelihood of the conception, gestation, and birth of a child of one sex than the other. In the Muslim world, some parents prefer one sex above the other for cultural or financial reasons. Some jurists have argued in favour of sex selection, as long as no one, including the resulting child, is harmed. However, others have disputed the claim that it is possible for no harm to be done in sex selection. They point to violations of divine law, natural justice, and inherent dignity of human beings.[16,17]

The principle of public good has also been examined in terms of collective or individual goodness. When the juristic rule of *istiḥsān* (i.e. choosing between two possible solutions of a case within the context of recognized sources of Islamic law) is evoked to justify a legal–ethical solution, the actual rationale is considerations of common welfare that is unrestricted and that reaches the largest number. However, it is sometimes likely that an individual benefit could become the source for a ruling that could clash with another ruling that entails morally superior consequences. To put it differently, the only criterion for legislation on the basis of public good is that the ruling must lead to the common good even when it is prompted by a specific individual good. The underpinning of primary ordinances (e.g. saving human life or maintaining just order) in the revelation is this kind of good. However, the consideration of individual welfare is provided by the context of change for a ruling from primary to secondary (e.g. prolongation of life without any hope for cure), so that it can benefit that particular individual in that particular situation. To be sure, elimination of the primary ordinance that requires saving life, and its change to a secondary ruling which allows discontinuing extraordinary care, takes place in the context of a particular situation. In this sense, common interests function as criteria for legislation, whereas individual interests function as the context for secondary rulings. This change from common to individual good causes disagreement among Muslim jurists in determining the benefits and harms of the situation under consideration.[18]

Autonomy and piety

There has been a growing interest in the international community Islamic perspectives on bioethics. It is important to keep in mind that it was in the West that autonomy as an overriding right of a patient found institutional and legal–ethical support. Western notions of universal human rights rest on a secular view of the individual and of the relations between such individuals in a secularized public sphere. The idea of individuals as bearers of something called rights presupposes a very particular understanding and reading of the self essentially as a self-regulating agent. The modern idea of the autonomous self envisions social actors as self-contained matrices of desires who direct their own interests. In Islamic communitarian ethics autonomy is far from being recognized as one of the major bioethical principles. The Islamic universal discourse conceives of a spiritually and morally autonomous individual capable of attaining salvation outside the nexus of community-orientated Sharī'a, with its emphasis on integrated systems of law and morality. The Sharī'a did not make a distinction between external acts and internal states because it did not regard the public and the private to be unrelated in the totality of individual salvation. Islamic communal discourse sought to define itself by legitimizing individual autonomy within its religiously-based collective order by leaving individuals free to negotiate their spiritual destiny, while requiring them to abide by communal order that involved the play of reciprocity and autonomy upon which a regime of rights and responsibilities are based in the Sharī'a. Practical piety and reliable character are emphasized in connection with all professions. Although a physician does not have to be a pious individual in order to be a competent physician, because a physician's work is essentially to take care of his/her patient; nevertheless, piety and good character aid in the general acceptance of the physician's advice. Bad character would detract from its value. A physician should be a cultured person, aware of the sensibilities of the people among whom he/she works. In Muslim culture, a physician has to work hard to gain the trust of the patient and cultivate professional confidence.

Islam lays great emphasis on virtues and obligations in connection with medical profession because medicine deals with the most valued aspect of existence, namely, preservation of human life. Bad character in a physician is seen as a mortal poison and a sure path to perdition. The sicknesses of heart and the diseases of soul are regarded as a great threat to the normal professional role assumed by a physician. Moreover, the society and the institutions that provide medical care have certain expectations of a person to whom they entrust their physical wellbeing. Muslim ethicists lay down canons by which virtues become ingrained in the practice of a skillful physician. Techniques of meditation and prayers are suggested for medical professionals to focus their attention on the wholeness of human care, and not simply their physical condition. In this way a medical professional in a Muslim community is expected to learn not only the origins and causes of sicknesses, which cause loss of corporeal life, but also pay attention to the diseases of heart and soul. In this latter diagnosis, the Muslim physician goes beyond role-related technical skills, and equips him/herself with a character built on a virtuous life to understand the religious/psychological dimensions of the profession. The two most important virtues emphasized in Islamic professional ethics are: spiritual and moral consciousness (*taqwā*), and patience (*Ṣabr*). The physician must cultivate these two virtues by leading a balanced and moderate life, and not waste time and energy indulging in pleasure and amusements.

The question of professional ethics is directly connected to a religious problem of the relationship between action and its impact upon human conscience. To state it briefly, human acts have a direct impact upon the development of conscience that, in Islamic tradition, is regarded as the source for determining the rightness or wrongness of human undertakings. The conscience must constantly guard against becoming corrupted. When conscience becomes corrupted as a result of neglecting ethical matters related to the production of daily sustenance, then there is no moral safeguard left to prevent these professionals from engaging in more serious acts that could lead to the destruction of the very fabric of social relations founded upon a divinely ingrained sense of justice and fairness. Both intention and reflection must precede all human acts that infringe upon the spiritual and physical wellbeing of others.

Here, it is important to keep in mind that both patient and physician are required by Islam to observe ethical discipline.

Patients should strictly follow their physicians' orders and respect their physicians. Patients are exhorted to regard their physicians better than their best friends. Patients should have direct contact with their doctors and should confide fully in them concerning their sickness. In fact, it is better for people to stay in touch with a physician who can advise them about their health before they actually need treatment.

Spiritual care of Islamic patients

Spiritual care begins in providing settings that permit, and preferably encourage, religious observance and observe the rules of interpersonal behaviour in providing care and carrying out interventions. Spiritual care, however, also involves supporting appropriate decision-making. Healthcare practitioners need the capacity to provide patients and families with information that is appropriate to religious, communitarian ethical decision-making, and to respect the process such decision-making must take. As part of this process it may be necessary for the patient and family to consult a trusted physician and/or imam, and communication protocols may need to be adapted to include these key people. The negotiable and local character of Islamic communitarian ethics should be a reminder to healthcare practitioners that a 'fact file' approach to care is at best inadequate.

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