Islam View

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Dying and Death: Islamic View ...

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Dying and Death: Islamic View

To talk about dying and death in Islam, one first has to understand what Islam is about. The following is a brief introduction to this religion. References are given at the end for further reading o the subject.

What is Islam?

The word *Islam* is an Arabic word that carries a load of meanings. The main two are submission and peace. Submission: *Total submission to and acceptance of the One and Only God (Allah) a His will*. Peace: *Inner peace (peace with oneself), peace with the Creator, as well as peace with all creations*. It is through the total submission to the will of God that one reaches this form peace. A Muslim is a person who believes in Allah as the One and Only God and in Muhammad as his last Prophet and Messenger.

Relationship between God and Human:

The human, like all of Allah's creations, is in a state of total submission (Islam) to the will of Allah. The difference between humans and other creations, however, is that we have been given t ability to choose. When our minds submit to Allah, then we would have completely submitted to Allah, and we would be referred to as "Muslims." At this level of total and complete submissio the relationship between Allah and the human is one of a complete peace. It is an Islamic characteristic to have complete obedience to Allah and acceptance of His will and commands. It is also Islamic characteristic to acquire a unique feeling of satisfaction, fulfillment, and content as a result of this obedience and acceptance.

The relationship between Allah and us humans in Islam is a direct one, with no mediators. In this direct relationship, we recognize that there is no other party that can help, give, take, suppo provide, or grant forgiveness but Allah. In such a direct relationship, we do not associate any other deities with Allah. Moreover, our faith and submission to Allah become complete and pure.

Islam teaches that all humans are born sinless. We are only responsible for the sins we commit intentionally. Recognizing our human nature, Allah the Most Merciful, accepts our sincere repentan and forgives our sins. Islam also teaches that true belief and righteous deeds are two key elements for one to attain Allah's pleasure and satisfaction. It takes both elements to establish healt individuals and healthy societies.

It is a fundamental Islamic belief that we were created to serve (worship) Allah. Allah has entrusted us with the great responsibility of being His deputies and representatives on this earth. As I entrusted us with our lives, our physical beings, our wealth, and our families, He also entrusted us with our communities, our environment, and our earth. It is our responsibility to care for a maintain that trust. Carrying on this responsibility is part of serving and worshipping Allah. It the sincerity of the Muslim's worship that gives it its effectiveness and usefulness. Islam teaches us worship Allah as if we were able to see Him, since although we do not see Him, He sees us.

Muslims believe the life on this earth is only a transition period that precedes the latter life. Winning the latter life is the goal of every Muslim. This is achieved through gaining Allah's satisfacti through believing in Him and following His commands and prescriptions. The reward for those who gain Allah's satisfaction and forgiveness is Heaven, and that for those who strayed is He Muslims are advised by Prophet Muhammad to work for this life as if we are living forever, and work for the latter life as if we are dying tomorrow. This saying highlights the balance that Muslir are to work towards achieving in their life on earth.

Islam is a Way of Life:

Islam is a religion for both the individuals and the communities (including that of the whole world). The teachings of Islam do not separate religion from human affairs. Politics, economics, la and all other aspects of human affairs are integrated into one system of worship to Allah. Islam provides both the individual and the state with a comprehensive "constitution." Through t constitution, ethics, righteousness, legitimacy, correctness, and similar fundamentals are well defined and are not left to individuals to experiment with or differ about. Having been legislated Allah, the Creator of this world, Muslims believe that the Islamic way of life is the most suitable one for us to follow.

In an Islamic community, the family system is very strong. Family ties and closeness are not limited to the parents and the children, they extend to include all relatives of differe degrees. Neighbors and friends play an important role in the family system. People do not interfere in each other's affairs, rather, counseling and advising within the Islamic fran constitute the basis of this closeness and relationship. As a result, the whole community, even the whole nation, becomes like one big family. With such attitude the elderly, t orphans, the disabled, or the needy (if there is any) do not face starvation, homelessness, or similar forms of suffering.

When members of the family, neighbors, or friend's circle grow old, they are looked upon as valuable members whom you can turn to for advice and council. When they get sick, they lose their ability to care for themselves, they are surrounded by a younger and more able generation who take the responsibility of care for them. Care is provided with lo and courtesy as to make them feel wanted. The belief within, that it is a phase of life that we will all experience, and that each has a responsibility and a role to play, highlights t spirit of this love and courtesy. No one feels that he is burdened by this older person and his needs. On the contrary, close people often challenge their limited resources and the finite will to make sure that a terminally ill person spends his last days in peace and in satisfaction. The motive is always seeking the pleasure and satisfaction of Allah.

Islam demands that children care for their aging parents. "Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him, and that you be kind to parents. Whether one or both of the attain old age in thy life, say not to them a word of contempt, nor repel them, but address them in terms of honor. And, out of kindness, lower to them the wing of humility, a say: My Lord, bestow on them thy Mercy even as they cherished me in childhood." This is taken from the translation of the meaning of the Holy Qur'an, 17:23-24.

Muslim's view of Life

Muslims consider themselves on a mission in this earth, and we are committed to this mission by our belief in our Creator. We have responsibilities to fulfill and we have trus

that we must maintain. One main trust that each of us has to take seriously is the commitment to life. It is our responsibility to care for life in all possible ways:

- Physically by keeping our selves as well as others out of dangers, and by caring for health and fitness.
- Spiritually by maintaining our faith. Worshipping Allah sincerely is guaranteed to purify the soul and to secure spiritual tranquillity and satisfaction.

The Sacredness of Life

Islam has made human life sacred and has safeguarded its preservation. According to its teachings, aggression against human life is the second greatest sin in the sight of Alla second only to denial of Him. The Qur'an declares, "..If anyone kills a person for any reason other than for (the killing of) a person or for sowing corruption in the land, it will be if he had killed the whole of mankind." (5:32)

"It is not permissible for the Muslim to frighten his brother." The sin of murder is not limited to the murderer alone. Each individual who participated in this crime, by deed, or l word, will be the recipient of Allah's punishment in proportion to his share in it. Even a person who happened to be at the scene of the murder will receive a share of the sin for n defending the victim.

Suicide

Whatever applies to the crime of murder likewise applies to committing suicide. Whoever take his life by any means whatsoever has unjustly taken a life which Allah has mac sacred. For since he did not create himself, not even so much as a single cell of his body, the life of an individual does not belong to him; it is a trust given to him by Allah. He is n allowed to diminish it, let alone to harm or destroy it.

The Islamic teachings require the Muslim to be resolute in facing hardships; he is not permitted to give up and to run away from the hardships of life when a tragedy befalls some of his hopes are dashed. Indeed, the believer is created for striving, not for sitting idle; for combat, not for escape. His faith and character do not permit him to run aw from the battlefield of life, and he possesses a weapon that never fails and ammunition that is never exhausted: the weapon of his unshakable faith and the ammunition of h moral steadfastness.

Our duration here on this earth is not for us to determine or control. A Muslim believes that he has no right neither does he have the power to determine his nor any body else time to die. Our lives belong to the creator, and we can neither shorten it nor prolong it. Although it might appear that a person committing suicide is ending his own life or that rescue squad or a medical treatment has prolonged a person's life, it is a basic Islamic belief that a person's life ends only when Allah decides for it to end.

Can we end the suffering..?

A controversial discussion is taking place nowadays in this and other countries of the world related to the right of individuals to end a life under certain circumstances. This is a critical issue particular in our days with many cases of terminally ill individuals where the person, his family, or the doctor need to take a decision related to medical treatments and when to "pull the plug." Islam, this controversy is looked upon in the light of three basic criteria:

- We must do our best to maintain the trust given to us by Allah as he gave us life. We must do our best to maintain life.
- Doing our best in maintaining life is within the limits of knowledge and financial resources.
- We have to ensure that whatever we do does not introduce unbearable pain or suffering to the human in consideration.

In other words, if an affordable medical treatment is available, it must be administered to the patient provided it does not expose the patient to unusual pains and suffering. On the other hand, usi devices or drugs aimed at ending a person's life is not allowed in Islam no matter how much is the illness or the suffering.

Emotional factors should not be used in making the treatment decision since belief in the Will and Mercy of Allah should provide the patient, his family, and his friends with the needed suppo Muslims look upon such hardships as tests from Allah. Patience, persistence, and hope in Allah's Mercy not only are prescribed for the patient and his family and friends but also are bet rewarded by Allah.

Treatment decisions are typically discussed between the doctor and the immediate family members. The doctor is trusted to have the scientific medical knowledge. An Islamic rule which is releva to state here is that as long as the efforts are sincere and the intentions are to abide by the Islamic rules and follow the commands of Allah, no one is held responsible for the results. No one is ask to do things beyond his true means and his true abilities.

In summary, knowing that every single one will die when Allah wills him to die, we all are asked to only do our best, within the Islamic regulations, in whatever treatment decisions we take.

Death:

When death approaches, the close family and friends try to support and comfort the dying person through supplication as well as remembrance of Allah and His will. The attendance is to help t dying person to iterate his commitment to unity of God.

Upon death, the eye lids are to be closed, the body should be covered, and preparation for burial takes place as soon as possible. The whole body is washed and wrapped in a shroud. Muslir gather and a prayer is performed for the dead. The body is to buried soon after the prayer. The wrapped body is to be laid directly at the bottom of the dug grave. The body is to be laid on its rig side facing the direction of Makkah. A ceiling is attached to the grave and then covered with dirt. The grave is to be marked by raising its top level of dirt above surrounding grounds. A stone m be used to mark its location, but no writings are allowed. Buildings or other forms of structures are not allowed on top of the grave.

The family of the dead has a responsibility to fulfill any debts he had as soon as possible. They have the commitment to maintain contacts and courteous relationships with close relatives and clo friends. They frequently pray and supplicate for him. Charity, fasting, prayers, and pilgrimage is often performed on behalf of the dead. Visiting the graves is recommended for the living remember death and the day of judgment.

For further reading:

The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Amana Corporation, Brentwood, MD, 1989. ISBN 0-915957-033-5

The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam, Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, American Trust Publications, Indinapolis, IN. ISBN 0-89259-016-5

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