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# Health



# بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

## Holistic Health: A Desired Way of Life

*A man too busy to take care of his health is like a farmer too lazy to plant his field*

*Good health is a crown worn by the healthy that only the ill can see*

There are countless examples in the Islamic tradition that stress the importance of health. One such example is the oft-quoted *hadith* wherein the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, advised people to seize five before five. One of these is to take care of your health before falling sick (Aḥmad). Similarly, another *hadith* reminds us that humans are heedless and neglectful of two particular blessings, namely, health and free time (Bukhārī). Unsurprisingly then, the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, informs us that seeking *‘āfiya*, wellbeing, in this world and the next is one of the best supplications one can make (Tirmidhī).

We are living in times unlike any before. Of the many paradoxes of the modern age, the world is becoming ever smarter and yet there has been an alarming increase in health issues. Among these are obesity, stress, hypersensitivity, anxiety, depression, and the general feeling that something is missing in our lives. It is no wonder then that the biggest complaint people have is of chronic fatigue and restlessness in the heart, mind and soul. We are suffering from a distraction epidemic. Simply put, we find it hard to focus on our goals and consistently work hard to achieve them. All these forms of illness are weighing us down. Something urgently must be done! It is only when we regard our health as much more than simply the absence of physical ailment that we can begin to restore our overall wellbeing. Much healing can be achieved when we present health and wellbeing more broadly. Seen holistically, health encompasses five dimensions.

We can use the following overview as a starting point to assess our overall wellbeing:

#### 1 - Physical wellbeing.

It is to eat healthily, drink lots of water, fast according to the prophetic recommendations, get adequate sleep as well as rest, and exercise moderately (my suggestion is a 12-minute workout to begin with: XBX for women and 5BX for men).

#### 2 - Spiritual wellbeing.

It is to pray the obligatory prayers, recite some Qur'an – which is *shifā'*, a magnificent healing (Q 10:57; 17:82; 41:44) – daily with contemplation, recite a morning and evening liturgy (*wird*), and practice meditation (*murāqaba*).

#### 3 - Intellectual wellbeing.

It is to study thoroughly and broadly as well as to seek to understand the modern context in relation to our religion.

#### 4 - Emotional and mental wellbeing.

It is to identify our stress triggers, trauma or mental health issues, and to find personal stress relievers (going for regular walks in open green spaces is one example), to keep positive and smile abundantly, learn to be more grateful, and get support when struggling.

#### 5 - Social wellbeing.

It is to identify toxic relationships and take the onus to deal with these, nurture strong family

ties (*ṣilat al-raḥim*) and to balance academic life with a dose of good company (*ṣuḥba*).

To maximise our wellbeing for the longest possible time we must plan our days and nights accordingly. Below are five steps to consider in our journey to holistic wellbeing.

Fully understand the concept 'holistic health'.

1 - Realise the interconnectedness of the five dimensions and how any form of illness in any of these dimensions will negatively impact our productivity. For instance, a person may have been struggling with ill-health thinking it is simply a physical ailment to only then realise its underlying cause is their emotional suffering.

2 - Take ownership of your health.

Do not be afraid to admit you are suffering. It is only when we can admit something is wrong, that the right steps can be taken. Nobody else can take the steps for you. Develop a self-care plan, commit yourself to it, and see the changes that will gradually emerge.

3 - Adjust your lifestyle to maximise your health.

Look at the recommendations for each of the dimensions of holistic health, or research some of your own and begin to gradually create the changes needed to stick to them.

4 - Prioritise your spiritual health.

Whilst this article is by no means exhaustive, it should spur food for thought. Of all the dimensions, the most important is our spiritual wellbeing. Nothing matters more than working on our relationship with the Divine and presenting a sound heart to Him at the end of our lives. The

Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, said, “Truly in the body there is a morsel of flesh which, if it be sound, all the body is sound and which, if it be diseased, all of it is diseased. Truly it is the heart.’ (Bukhārī). Imam Ghazali said, ‘The heart is that which, if a man knows it, he knows himself, and if he knows himself, he knows his Lord.’ Hence, knowing oneself is crucial to overcoming the factors that detriment our wellbeing. It is through this that one will begin to make progress in gaining love of, and nearness to, the Divine.

#### 5 - Reach out for help when needed.

Some people need professional help in one or more of these dimensions because they know deep-down that something is not quite right. As a rule of thumb, if you do not feel your usual self for more than two weeks, or something is interfering with your ability to carry out normal day-to-day tasks, consider seeking help as soon as you can. For example, if the issue is a social one, there are courses and coaches to reach out to. Likewise, if the struggle is with the foundational elements of the exoteric and esoteric elements of religion, there are multiple avenues open to you. The best type of help will be from professionals who are grounded and experienced in dealing with two or more dimensions simultaneously. These professionals deal with the whole as opposed to single parts of the human. At the same time, we should not assume that all help is sought because ‘there is a problem with me’. Non-judgemental spaces that offer complete confidentiality are often exactly what is needed for us to tap into the depth of our souls. Having a professional who can listen and mirror your emotions provides the opportunity for much healing and growth.

Oh Allah, we ask You for *‘āfiya* in this world and the next. *Āmīn*.

*Ustadha Safiyya Dhorat*

# A Life Becomes Heavier When it's the Universe Condensed

*Based on true events*

## I - Home is Where the Heart Is

The cold from the toilet bowl seeped up my palms and into my very bones and I shuddered and shuddered. Retching over, the hammering on the door became audible once more, along with Abba's yells demanding that I open up. I climbed my way to a standing position and, taking a deep breath and steadying myself, unlocked the door and turned the handle.

The next thing I knew, I was on the floor, and this time it was sobs that racked my body. The sting on my face was all that remained as the only memento of the moment my brain had rejected to register. I doubled over further as a kick landed in my abdomen, and I caught sight of my mother standing by the doorframe, saying nothing.

## II - Locked Out

She rounded the corner of the hall and I tried to smile as her eyes found mine, failing spectacularly at masking my troubled thoughts. Although we'd only been friends for a few months, as her mouth tightened far short of her own smile, it confirmed a suspicion I hadn't yet consciously acknowledged. But I soldiered on – I had long since accepted that this war with myself would have casualties. With an ache in my chest I exited the dial screen displaying the number of the mosque; the imam, as always, had been busy today too.

She sat down, her shoulders tense. The canteen bustled but the moment's silence between us was heavy, thick with apprehension for yet another difficult conversation. Pulling over a saltshaker, she placed it between us, her fingers fiddling with it. I felt the space between us had widened

already. I waited, knowing her announcement would trump anything I had to say.

Having looked up at me once, she avoided my eyes as she spoke. “I know you’ve been going through a lot. But the last few months have been really draining for me, emotionally. Every time we talk, everything gets drowned in what’s happening with you, what’s happening to you, how you’re feeling, what you should do, how you can cope. And nothing we say ever seems to help.”

Opening up to her had been hard, but hearing this was much more difficult. I gulped down a lump that was forming in my throat.

“It does help... I just need to work through everything but it’ll take time... and you’ve been there for me when I’ve needed it most – and I know I don’t say it enough but I really appreciate it.” I blinked away hot tears.

She sat up straighter, shaking off the guilt, steeling herself for the last blow. “Hanging around with you – it’s affecting my grades, and my life in general. I want to relax when I’m with friends, and you’re just going through too much for that to happen. I think you really need to get some help – and I can’t help you with what you need.”

I tried talking her around. I tried keeping that shutter up, but it seemed I’d knocked on it one time too many and it slammed down for good, catching a good few of my fingers as it descended. The pain and its memory would prevent me from knocking on any others for a long while.

### III - Admitted

I’d refused lunch again and I knew the consequences today. I crouched in the corner of the room, hiding my eyes from the blinding whiteness of the walls, that characterized my every waking moment in this place.

The nurses knocked and entered cautiously, the older one still wearing scratch marks from our altercation last week. They hunkered down, trying to talk me up and into eating something,

anything. But they were only monsters to me, invading my choices, my body, my mind, and their speech was just white noise to me in my terror.

They ended up strapping me to the bed to put the feeding tube in – to stop me harming myself or others. I'd use my hands, my head, my feet, anything to repel them, but they were used to my struggles. As they started the feed pump, tears tracked down my cheeks. One of the staff there reached across with a tissue but I turned my head away. I yearned for escape, for never seeing these uniforms again, for my life to be normal again.

#### IV - Honour, Truth and Justice

The staff had seen my bruises so I'd told them what had happened. It was Abba driving me to the police station to make the report. The tension on his face never went away now, but I could tell that he was in pain too. He just couldn't hear my pain and didn't know how to say sorry. And if he wouldn't hear my pain and couldn't say he was sorry then how could things between us really heal?

His hands tightened on the steering wheel to lend him resolution in his appeal to me. He said his career would be in shreds if I made this report. I stayed silent.

But when I went into the station I told them I'd been lying.

#### V - The Dancing Shoes

I read a story once when I was small about a girl who coveted a pair of red shoes. They were cursed so that once she started dancing she couldn't stop. They took her through fields and forests, wounding her as they brushed her past bushes and brambles and branches. I felt like that girl, unable to stop on the path I had taken, wounding myself and everyone else around me on the way.

Every day I willed myself to get up out of bed, start a new day, but my limbs felt heavy and my thoughts were sluggish. Most of the time I felt unworthy to pray or even touch the Quran. When I did open up the pages, the first words I read started up the pain in my chest and blurred my eyes with tears, and I put it away.

I could see the vicious cycle of my body, my mind and my soul starving in turn, and each making the other worse. I had to break this cycle somehow. But how could I begin? What could I try that I hadn't already? I didn't know.

*Ramia Jameel, Arabic Intensive*

## Health? That's Mental

Health is not a subject that I ever thought I'd talk about. I never really felt the urge to, if I'm being honest. Sure, there's no doubt at all about the significance of health and the importance of maintaining it. It is, after all, the crown that sits atop a person's head, shining with all its glory, only to be seen by the sick and unwell.

But see, that's the issue. When the topic 'Health' was selected, I instinctively thought about the physical, tangible health and all things related. Illnesses, medications, prescriptions (yes, I know - indoctrination at its absolute finest), exercise, 'clean' eating, dieting, superfoods, new trends. Avocados. My God, so many avocados.

"The topic is health? Seriously?! That's mental!" ... but what if that's exactly the point I've been missing? And I'm sure I'm not the only one.

We often paint the physical ailments with vibrant colours, overlooking the subtler shades on the palette which represent the unseen shades of the mental realm. Suffering from any degree of mental health has always been a double-edged sword within various communities. Talk about it and you're labelled a madman; avoid talking about it and the issue at hand aggressively worsens, suffering amplified. The fear and secrecy surrounding mental health has only added to the already heavily stigmatised topic (not worthy) of discussion. A taboo topic that shouldn't be the case, mental health is seldom talked about openly. It is that elephant in the room, often swept under the carpet.

The stigma surrounding mental health has prevented open talk, education, and aid. The attitudes within our society put physical illness above a mental illness; it's seen as more acceptable, it gains more support, sympathy and sensitivity. But most of all it's an illness that allows for the tools of recovery, with easily accessible support and treatments, at a faster and higher rate.

It's a common opinion that if your illness is physical and in some cases visible then it is real - an unfortunate, but still real and merited situation. However, with mental illness, due to the lack of understanding or the inability to 'rationalise' the illness without visible facts, it often creates a label of 'abnormality' in a person – it is not deemed to be a 'real' illness though it can be equally debilitating. So, why is it the case that if our illness occurs in the mind, it is regarded as somewhat of a taboo to discuss and vocalise, whatever the aim of conversation? Is it simply due to people's perception of a physical illness being real and a mental illness being a product of one's own fiction? Or is there more to it than that?

With an 'abnormal' connotation attached to any action, thought, or emotion, the human psyche innately begins to feel, shame, embarrassment and guilt. It's a connotation that creates isolation for many people within society, preventing the ability to gain help, speak out and eventually make progress in their personal recovery. We've labelled and segregated people in need, we've made people feel that it's abnormal to be ill, we've made people feel ashamed to be the person they are. We need to educate ourselves and understand that it doesn't matter where in the body an illness occurs - the effects on the soul are just as detrimental and damaging.

*“Take care of the positive work and some of the necessary negatives will work themselves out.”*

A gem shared during a collective tutorial a while back – I know what you're thinking; this must have grossly been taken out of context. Perhaps... but, there's no denying the universal message behind it. After all: العبرة بعموم اللفظ لا بخصوص السبب - The general wording is taken into consideration and not the specific cause of revelation.

This statement highlights an underlying message applicable to all: the need for a paradigm shift. Periods of darkness throughout our lives are a given. We all wander down the road of life,

each of us facing our own set of difficulties. Some stay in that darkness longer than others, but that doesn't warrant despondency and a complete lack of hope. It, by no means, demands feeling ashamed or embarrassed. Because just like the day overtakes the night, the light too will overwhelm the darkness. Eventually.

Yes, there will be struggle; problems are, after all, a sign of life. It's how you deal with those problems that reflect the quality of your life. More often than not, that process begins inside your mind. Part of your spiritual growth is to be aware of your mental health, where you choose to direct your attention and focus to. Gathering the internal strength to shift our minds to focus on the little, positive aspects within the struggle will slowly but surely build the resolve to power through any given challenge that may come our way. Take care of the positive work and some of the necessary negatives will work itself out. It's all a matter of perspective.

So it goes without saying that maintenance of mental health is tantamount to your growth as person; it is the foundation at the very core of your being, the base you touch back on when you feel uneasy, or jittery, or anxious. Or when your mind feels dark and cloudy, murky at best - like it's been tirelessly lifting much-too-heavy weights for an extended period of time. As important as it is to tend to such states of mind, it's equally important to know that it's okay to feel that way.

And it's okay to let others know how you feel. It's perfectly fine to express that which clouds your judgement, that constant thought that plagues your mind.

For indeed, true courageousness lies with the one who is brave enough to have battled in the darkness and still be true to their authentic selves. To express one's vulnerability does not equate to weakness; rather, it is a testament to the strength of your character and a manifestation of your acceptance of yourself – your raw, authentic self. And there is nothing more beautiful than that.

*Khadijah Begum, Alimiyyah Three*