

Cancer and its Cure

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Cancer is not a disease. It is not caused by infection, microbes or other external factors (though some may increase the likelihood). Cancer is caused by our own cells. And that is why our body doesn't fight it as it would naturally fight all external infection. Cancer is what we call those cells, our own cells, which decide to live and work without concern for what that does to their immediate neighbors or the larger whole – our entire body. It is interesting to note two inevitable things that result whenever this happens in the body i.e. when some cells start acting irresponsibly: it always, every time, results in disaster for the whole body and the cells who started it all, also die. There is no instance to the best of my knowledge, where any cancer resulted in anything beneficial for the person or where the cancer continued to live and flourish after the person died. We give these various types of cancers, names that refer to where they started. Leukemia (German: white + blood) for the cancer that prevents the manufacture of blood cells; Pancreatic, Prostrate and so on. I want you to remember these things as we progress.

I am sharing this reflection with you because today, our body humanity is suffering from cancer. It is a cancer because like cancer, it is caused by our own cells (ourselves) and has the potential to destroy us all. The name of this cancer, using the same nomenclature i.e. name according to location; is Individualism. We globally, are a very sick society. In the words of the Indian philosopher, J. Krishnamurti, "It is not a sign of health to be profoundly adjusted to a sick society."

To give you a snapshot of some symptoms, we have poverty which is the result of a very few (less than 100) people cornering global resources without sharing. We have hunger and starvation while we throw excess food crops into the sea. We have homeless people while enough houses stand empty to the extent that if they were to be distributed among the population, each person would have not one but three homes. We have the most advanced medical care in history (or so we like to believe) but not for those who truly need it. We claim to be at the peak of scientific knowledge and development and know all about the effects of global warming, greenhouse gases (we have all the names), environmental

pollution, habitat destruction and war but we are busily engaged in trying to destroy our world though we know perfectly well that we don't have anywhere else to go. What do you call it? I call it, cancer. Individualism. All of these are the result, not of lack of resources, but lack of compassion. Not lack of material wealth but poverty and destitution of moral character. That is why the cure for this cancer is to move from, 'The world is responsible for me to I am responsible for the world.'

Why am I talking about this cancer here? That is because we are today living at a time that is a reflection of the time when Rasoolullah ﷺ came into the world of Makkah and announced his mission of Islam. Makkah was a highly-sophisticated society of high finance, where business tycoons ruled the city. Makkan aristocracy was not feudal but a ladder that could be climbed by those who had the will and could make enough money. The old Arab values of Muruwwa, Haya, Ukhwa, Sidq, Dhiyafa, Sakha (Urdu: Sakhawat) and even Asabiyyah were all eroded and all but lost. Honor was a good word, spoken of mostly in the past tense. Stories like those of Hatim At-Taiyi were the stuff of legends. Of Paradise Lost; of good old days gone by.

The single criterion of success, status, visibility, influence and nobility in the Makkah that Rasoolullah ﷺ lived in, was your Net Worth – defined solely by how much money you had. Nothing else mattered. Not how you made that money, what you spent it on or how you used it. Simply having it was what mattered; no questions asked. Makkan businessmen did deals in Syria and Yemen and traded in goods which at today's value would amount to billions of dollars. They had a banking system, charged interest on loans, used promissory notes and letters of credit and loaned venture capital to startups. The definition of an HNI in 7th century Makkah was exactly the same as it is today in our 21st century world. Makkah was a society of high finance, ruled by financiers and bankers. Money defined your power in society and the law bent to your will. Violations of moral and ethical values were interpreted in terms of who did it, not what was violated. Those who were weak, poor or otherwise unsupported were mercilessly exploited and had no recourse to redressal of their grievances.

It is in this context that the pact of Hilful Fudhul came to be which Rasoolullah ﷺ was a witness to and which he honored and appreciated all his life. It was a pact made by a few of those who retained their moral character, in support of the weak who had been wronged by the powerful.

It is in this context that Islam came, as a cure for the cancer which threatened to destroy society. Islam changed the parameters of success, from ends to means. It changed the basis for superiority from money to piety (Taqwa). It changed the meaning of honor from possessions to character. It changed the goal of aspiration from Dunya to Aakhira. It changed the definition of HNI from Abu Lahb to Abu Bakr ؓ. It set the life of Muhammad ﷺ as the best example of the new way.

Allah ﷻ defined the new standards and Rasoolullah ﷺ implemented and demonstrated them. The result was not only that the entire nature of society changed but that the pioneers of this new way, who were the least influential and most persecuted minority to begin with, became the benchmarks and leaders of society; looked up to, honored and followed by others.

What were the standards that Allah ﷻ defined and which Rasoolullah ﷺ lived by?

Allah ﷻ said about the purpose of our lives:

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

Dhariyaat 51: 56. And I (Allah) created not the jinn and humans except they should worship Me (Alone).

The first standard that Allah ﷻ gave us is to fulfill the purpose of our creation which is to worship Allah ﷻ. This means to obey Allah ﷻ in every aspect of our lives. This means that every decision point in our lives, we must refer to Allah ﷻ's rule in that matter. If there is a rule, it must be followed. If we have the freedom to act, then we can act according to our judgment.

For the order of Allahﷻ we refer to the Book of Allahﷻ. For the method of implementing those orders, we refer to the teachings of Rasoolullahﷺ, the Sunnah. These together comprise the entire Deen of Islam. The Word and its meaning, explanation and demonstration. The one who separates one from the other is ignorant and incapable of following Islam. Allahﷻ sent the Messengerﷺ and reiterated his critical importance in completing the Deen. He called him the one who completes the Deen as it is through his guidance (which is Wahi Ghayr Matloo – Revelation that is not recited) that we are able to put the orders of Allahﷻ into practice.

Allahﷻ said about our conduct in this life:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ وَإِيتَاءِ ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَيَنْهَىٰ عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ
وَالْبَغْيِ يَعِظُكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ

Nahl 16: 90. Verily, Allah enjoins Al-Adl (justice) and Al-Ihsaan [excellence, compassion], and giving (help) to kith and kin (relatives): and forbids Al-Fahsha' (all shameless and evil deeds), and Al-Munkar (all sins of every kind), and Al-Baghy (oppression), He admonishes you, that you may take heed.

Islam is established on two principles: justice and compassion. Justice relates to our relationship with Allahﷻ as well as with His creatures, human and otherwise. Compassion relates to our relationship with the creatures. Justice is to give each one what is his due. To give to Allahﷻ what is His due (worship), to ourselves, what is our due (taking care of yourself) and to the people, what is their due (rights of people – Huqooq ul Ibaad).

Compassion is a step ahead. That is why the Qur'an uses the word Al-Ihsaan. Al-Ihsaan is to give more than what is due. To give what is due and then to give more. To give more than due only to please Allahﷻ. Al-Ihsan is the sign of those who love Allahﷻ and seek His pleasure in everything they do. Rasoolullahﷺ

described Al-Ihsaan in terms of worship when he said, 'To worship Allah ﷻ as if you can see Him. And though you can't see Him to know that He is seeing you.' Al-Ihsaan is to have such a keen awareness of the presence of Allah ﷻ in our lives that we do every action as if we can see Allah ﷻ. And we do it knowing that Allah ﷻ is seeing us. Al-Ihsaan is a state in which the person is completely protected from sin. Where he can't possibly commit a sin. It is a state where the person is in a state of total confidence in the protection of Allah ﷻ and knows that when his Rabb is with him, he is free from all fears. Al-Ihsaan is a state of complete surrender to the Will of Allah ﷻ with great enthusiasm and submission. It is a state where the only concern of the slave is to please Allah ﷻ and so he is pleased with whatever his Rabb decrees for him. This leads to a state of total contentment and happiness with his situation in life, no matter what that situation may be. This is how Rasoolullah ﷺ and the Sahaba were always in a state of Shukr (thankfulness) even when they were in conditions of deprivation and need. I ask Allah ﷻ for this for us all.

About His purpose for sending us into the world, Allah ﷻ said:

كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ

A'al Imraan 3: 110. You [Muslims] are the best of people ever raised up for (the benefit of) mankind; you enjoin Al-Ma'ruf (all good) and forbid Al-Munkar (all evil), and you believe in Allah.

Allah ﷻ sent us to benefit people. He didn't send us to do good for ourselves no matter what the costs to others may be. He sent us to go good to everyone, even at our cost. Allah ﷻ told us, Muslims, that our purpose is to encourage all good things that benefit people and society and prevent all those which harm them. This refers to everything beneficial (not only religious issues) and everything harmful. Islam allows and promotes all goodness and prohibits all evil. That has been stated as the very purpose of our creation. To this end we must apply ourselves.

In this process Allahﷻ ordered us to help one another in everything good and stop one another from everything evil. There is no excuse in keeping silent or cooperating with anyone engaged in any illegal, immoral, antisocial or harmful action. Those who keep silent in the face of all sorts of social evils and succumb to social pressure must take heed because on the Day of Judgment they will have no excuse. Allahﷻ said:

وَتَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الْبِرِّ وَالتَّقْوَىٰ وَلَا تَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الْإِثْمِ وَالْعُدْوَانِ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ

Ma'aida 5: 2 Help you one another in Al-Birr and At-Taqwa (virtue, righteousness and piety); but do not help one another in sin and transgression. And fear Allah. Verily, Allah is Severe in punishment.

In the beautiful bayan of the Qur'an, Allahﷻ has addressed all of mankind and Muslims in particular and after reminding them of their responsibility to worship none other than their Creator and Sustainer; listed all things that have to do with the rights of people; especially the weak, poor and oppressed. Please note that there is no differentiation between Muslim and non-Muslim. Islam's justice is for all. Not only for Muslims. This is what won the hearts of people and they came to Islam. Islam spread by the winning of hearts, not the winning of arguments.

There are many other places in the Qur'an where Allahﷻ mentioned the rights of people; in Surahs Luqman, Isra, Baqara, Nisa, Ma'aida, Mu'minon and elsewhere; and emphasized the importance of good actions. Rasoolullahﷺ emphasized the rights of people with such emphasis that one can say that Islam was as much a social reform movement as it was a religion. Da'awa of Islam is not an exercise to gain supporters in order to gain political power. It is a sincere effort to cure the ills of society so that people can taste and feel the goodness of Allahﷻ's law. That these people may enter Islam is a consequence. There are

innumerable Ahadith which emphasize the importance of being good to others for the pleasure of Allah ﷻ. Irrespective of whether those others are Muslim or not. How much more important to be good to your own family and to your Muslim brothers and sisters, though they may follow a Madhab (Maslak) different from your own? Let us reflect on how far away we are from the standard that Rasoolullah ﷺ set for us that will be the basis on which we will be judged.

On the authority of Abu Hurairah ؓ who narrated that Rasoolullah ﷺ said: "He will not enter Jannah whose neighbor is not secure from his evil." [Muslim, Book of Faith 1:74]

Abdullah ibn Amr ؓ slaughtered a sheep and said: Have you presented a gift from it to my neighbor, the Jew, for I heard Rasoolullah ﷺ say: Jibreel ؑ kept on commending the neighbor to me so that I thought he would make him an heir? [Sunan Abu Dawood, 2446] (i.e. Allah ﷻ would make the neighbor and heir in property)

Rasoolullah ﷺ said, "Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should speak good or be silent. Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should be generous to his neighbor. Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, should be generous to his guest. His welcome is for a day and a night, and his hospitality is for three days. Whatever is more than that is Sadaqa. It is not halal for a guest to stay with a man until he becomes a burden." [Malik Al-Muwatta, Volume 49, Number 22]

Rasoolullah ﷺ said, 'O trusting women! Let none of you despise giving to her neighbor even if it is only a roasted sheep's trotter.' [Malik Al-Muwatta, Volume 58, Number 4]

Narrated Abdullah ibn Umar ؓ that Rasoolullah ﷺ said, "The best friend in the sight of Allah is he who is the well-wisher of his companions, and the best neighbor is one who behaves best towards his neighbors. [Tirmidhi, Number 120]

Narrated Abdur Rahman ibn Abu Qurad, "Rasoolullah ﷺ performed Wudhu one day and his companion began to wipe themselves with the water he had used. Rasoolullah ﷺ asked them what induced them to do that, and when they replied that it was love for

Allah and His Messenger ﷺ he said, "If anyone is pleased to love Allah and His Messenger ﷺ or rather to have Allah and His Messenger ﷺ love him, he should speak the truth when he tells anything, fulfil his trust when he is put in a position of trust, and be a good neighbor." [Bayhaqi transmitted it in Shu'ab al-Iman & Tirmidhi, Number 1289]

Narrated Abdullah ibn Mas'ud ؓ that Rasoolullah ﷺ said, "Allah Most High has allotted you your characters just as He has allotted you your provisions. Allah Most High gives worldly things to those whom He loves and those whom He does not love, but He gives religion only to those whom He loves, so he who is given religion by Allah has been loved by Him. By Him in Whose hand my soul is, a man is not a Muslim till his heart and tongue are submissive, and he is not a believer till his neighbor is safe from injurious behavior on his part." [Musnad Ahmad and Bayhaqi, in Shu'ab al-Iman & Al-Tirmidhi, Number 1292]

In all of the above and many more such Ahadith, what always strikes me is the fact that Rasoolullah ﷺ didn't distinguish between the Muslim neighbor and a non-Muslim. That is the justice of Islam.

Both in Makkah and Madina the society was pluralistic, multi-religious and multi-cultural. Yet Islam's definition of justice and the rights of people are the same. There is no distinction between Muslim and non-Muslim when it comes to treatment of people and helping others in times of need. It is a reality of this life that the world loves those who are beneficial and who give and hates those who are harmful and take. We were sent to give, not to take. We were sent to show the way, not to imitate. We were sent to lead, not to follow the lead of others. We were sent to guide, not to be guided by others. We were sent to be responsible for others, not to give up our freedom to their fickle desires.

It is for us to decide where we fit in. And for us to change that situation. It is for us to remember that people listen with their eyes and so they don't care what we say until they see what we do. We need to change our image not by some fancy PR exercise but by reflecting on how we have become used to living our lives and to make some fundamental changes, going forward.

For this the best guidance is the Kalaam of Allah ﷻ (Qur'an) and the Sunnah of His Messenger ﷺ, both of which are clear and will be a witness in our favor or against us, as we decide.

I would like to end with the quote of Sayyida Ayesha Siddiqa (RA) who is reported to have said, 'Every person is an author. On the Day of Judgement, he will be given the book he wrote.' We are all authors, so let us make sure that on the day our books are published, they will do us honor. Today we have the opportunity to erase whatever we have written and to rewrite it in a way that will protect us from embarrassment and worse, when we receive our books. I ask Allah ﷻ to grant that you are given your books in your right hands and to cover your faults and forgive your sins and to grant you the company of Rasoolullah ﷺ wal Anbiya was-Siddiqeen, wa-Shuhada was-Saliheen. Wa hasuna ulaaika rafeeqa.