

Islamic Teachings and the Western Ways of Thinking about Illness and Treatment

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Unfortunately, there appears to be a lot of confusion in this regard among the Muslim health care practitioners. It seems that as educated as we are in the Western ways of thinking about 'Illness and Treatment', be they mental, emotional or physical, we show a great deal of ignorance when it comes to understanding the purpose, teachings and principles of our Faith.

We are smart enough to understand the differences between 'judicial system' and 'health systems'. How is it then that we don't understand the difference between the 'rules of shari'ah' and the 'treatment' of alcoholism?

The Islamic judicial system aims for prevention of crimes and unsavory behavior. The prescribed punishments are not meant to simply punish but to serve as a deterrent. Secondly, the 'prescribed' punishments cannot be changed based on 'our wisdom' as to what would work better. To do so would amount to accusing Allah of not knowing any better - Na'oozu Billah.

In our zeal to bring the teaching of Islam in every western field of study, we often end up doing injustice to Islam and its teachings as well as our Iman. While Islam, being a comprehensive faith and life-style, does give us guidance for all aspects of our life, it does not and was not meant to give us specific solutions, treatments, and theories about all the ills of life. (The reason I have underlined this last phrase is to prevent unnecessary arguments about some specific solutions it does provide through the teachings of the Prophet (peace be upon him).) Instead, it teaches us sound principles of how to live our lives and how to conduct ourselves so that we don't end up suffering from all the ills of this life in the first place. Ultimately, the goal of the teachings of Faith and its Shari'ah is to help us prepare for the life hereafter, so that we can successfully transition back to our original abode, where we came from.

Now, in light of the above, there is a prescribed punishment for Alcoholism which is meant to prevent and deter such bad habits. Then, there are treatment issues which will require us to take into consideration a whole bunch of other personal, family, social and community factors that may be contributing to the problem. Therefore, the treatment will have to be different to make it relevant and appropriate to the existing issues in each case. This does not mean that we ignore the teachings of Islam while we are counseling or treating clients, but that we should first understand these teachings, especially the teachings about Human Nature, and then use them appropriately in devising and implementing our treatment strategies.

If anyone is interested, look up the 26 weekly lessons on 'Human Nature' on my website:
www.shifa.ca