

Public Health and Islamic Theology: A Holistic Approach to Well-Being.

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Abstract

This paper explores the theological and legal foundations of preserving human life across divine religions, with a specific focus on Islamic jurisprudence. It examines the Quranic injunctions and scholarly interpretations that emphasize the sanctity of life and the strict prohibition against unjust killing. Through an analysis of fundamental Islamic principles, including the Five Necessities (Religion, Life, Honor, Intellect, and Property), the study highlights the central role of life preservation in Islamic ethics. It further discusses legal exceptions, such as retaliatory justice, apostasy, and adultery, as outlined in classical Islamic jurisprudence. Comparative insights into other religious doctrines reveal a shared commitment to protecting human dignity and promoting societal harmony. The paper synthesizes historical and contemporary scholarly perspectives to provide a comprehensive understanding of how divine commandments shape ethical conduct and legal rulings concerning human life. The findings underscore the alignment of religious teachings with modern human rights discourse, reinforcing the universal imperative to safeguard life.

Keywords: Islamic jurisprudence, Preservation of life, The Five Necessities, Quranic injunctions, Religious ethics.

Introduction:

Preserving human life, caring for public health, and ensuring food safety are essential. Muslims should combine these efforts with religiously mandated actions to protect and safeguard themselves, such as prayer, constant remembrance of Allah, and attention to morning and evening supplications. The safety of the soul from diseases is something some people neglect. Some do not care for their health and expose themselves to harm by not adhering to divine commands and prophetic guidance, and by not following the instructions set by relevant authorities to protect themselves and their families. This is something that is neither permissible by religious law nor by reason.

Maintaining health is of great importance in a Muslim's life, and what is necessary for fulfilling an obligation is itself an obligation. If a Muslim loses their health, they become unable to fulfill the duties that God has prescribed for them, both in terms of God's rights and the rights of His servants.

God created man with His own hands, breathed into him of His spirit, commanded the angels to prostrate to him, and made subservient to him what is in the heavens and what is on the earth to

make him a vicegerent on earth. "And when your Lord said to the angels, 'I am creating a human being from clay, like pottery,'" and the divine laws and the wise among the children of Adam have agreed that the most important thing for the well-being of humanity is the preservation of five essentials, which are called the five necessities in Islamic law: the preservation of "religion, life, intellect, wealth, and lineage."

And due to Islam's keen interest in protecting lives, it threatened those who violate them with the severest punishment, as Allah says: "And whoever kills a believer intentionally, his recompense is Hell, to abide therein; and the wrath and curse of Allah are upon him, and a great punishment is prepared for him."

Chapter One: Preservation of Life as a Fundamental Objective in Islam

A: Preservation of Life Through Its Sustenance

Eating and drinking are essential for life. Deliberately refraining from food that leads to death is prohibited in Islam. Allah says:

"Eat and drink but do not be excessive. Indeed, He does not like those who commit excess."
(Qur'an 7:31)

"And do not kill yourselves." (Qur'an 4:29)

Islam permits consuming prohibited foods in cases of necessity:

"But whoever is forced [by necessity], neither desiring nor transgressing, there is no sin upon him." (Qur'an 2:173)

Ibn Taymiyyah stated that consuming carrion, blood, and pork is forbidden except when necessary, a view held unanimously by the four Imams and most scholars. Masruq emphasized that "Whoever is forced but does not eat until death enters Hellfire—this is all to preserve life—as he aided his death by abstaining from permissible food, equating himself to someone who committed suicide." (Ibn Taymiyyah, n.d.)

Parents are required to care for and spend on their children. Without sustenance, infants cannot survive. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) emphasized this:

Abdullah bin Amr bin Al-Aas narrated that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "It is enough sin for a person to neglect whom he is obliged to support." (Muslim, Hadith No. 996)

1-Analysis of the Hadith

Significance:

This hadith strongly warns against neglecting dependents, categorizing it as a major sin due to the severe warning associated with it.

Scholars outline three situations regarding a dependent's right to sustenance:

- **Demanded:** The dependent explicitly demands it.
- **Forgiven:** The dependent voluntarily waives the right.
- **Silent:** If the dependent is silent, neglect remains sinful because fulfilling this duty is inherently obligatory.

If denied sustenance, children have the right to demand it from parents, as it directly affects their survival. However, children cannot demand repayment of debts from parents because this concerns money, not life.

Abdullah bin Umar narrated that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

"Every one of you is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock. The leader is responsible for his people; a man is responsible for his family; a woman is responsible for her husband's household and his children; and a servant is responsible for his master's wealth." (Bukhari, Hadith No. 2554; Muslim, Hadith No. 1829)

2-Analysis of the Hadith

Significance:

This hadith highlights the comprehensive responsibility of individuals toward those under their care. Each person must provide necessary support, education, and religious guidance to dependents.

Al-Khattabi explains the various levels of responsibility: the ruler must implement Islamic law and justice, the man must provide sustenance and guidance to his family, and the woman must manage her household efficiently.

Al-Albani notes that this hadith is a comprehensive guide that obligates every individual with specific responsibilities toward dependents (Al-Albani, n.d.).

Islam also legislates certain permissions to safeguard life, such as exempting pregnant and breastfeeding women from fasting:

"Indeed, Allah has waived half the prayer and fasting from the traveler, pregnant, and nursing women." (Hadith narrated by Anas, authenticated by Al-Albani)

B: Preservation of Life Through Prevention of Harm

Islam strictly prohibits aggression and killing:

"Whoever kills a believer intentionally, his recompense is Hell, wherein he will abide eternally, and Allah is angry with him and has cursed him and has prepared for him a great punishment." (Qur'an 4:93)

Ibn Kathir emphasizes that this verse severely warns against murder, equating its gravity to shirk (associating partners with Allah). Numerous texts underline the sanctity of life (Ibn Kathir, n.d.).

Imam Al-San'ani cites unanimous agreement that someone defending themselves from lethal threat bears no liability for killing the aggressor (Al-San'ani, n.d.).

Abu Saeed Al-Khudri reported that Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "There should be neither harming nor reciprocating harm." (Ibn Majah, Hadith No. 2341; authenticated by Al-Albani)

1-Analysis of the Hadith

Significance:

This hadith explicitly forbids causing harm to oneself or others. Scholars derive two rulings:

- It is impermissible to initiate harm against anyone in terms of their body or property.
- It is impermissible to retaliate by causing equivalent harm, reflecting Islam's comprehensive rejection of harm and injustice.

Ibn Daqiq Al-Eid asserts that causing harm equates to oppression, unequivocally prohibited in Islam (Ibn Daqiq Al-Eid, n.d.). The distinction between 'harm' (unintentional) and 'damage' (intentional) further clarifies these boundaries.

Section Two: All Divine Religions Agree on Preserving Human Life and Prohibiting Unjust Killing

Islamic Sharia, through its well-established rulings, safeguards human life and considers its preservation a fundamental necessity. Allah Almighty said:

"Because of that, We decreed upon the Children of Israel that whoever kills a soul unless for a soul or for corruption [done] in the land – it is as if he had slain mankind entirely. And whoever saves one – it is as if he had saved mankind entirely" (Qur'an, 5:32).

Interpretation: The killing of a person unjustly is considered among the gravest crimes, bringing about widespread evil and corruption. Therefore, Islam prohibits killing except in cases of legal justification and likens unjust killing to the killing of all humanity. Consequently, a Muslim cannot imagine killing another except by mistake.

Allah also said: "It is not for a believer to kill a believer unless [it be] by mistake" (Qur'an, 4:92). According to Al-Alusi: "Faith itself is a deterrent to such acts" (Al-Alusi, n.d.).

Al-Qurtubi comments: "It is not appropriate for a believer to kill another believer except by mistake" (Al-Qurtubi, n.d.).

For those who commit deliberate murder, Allah promises the severest punishment:

"But whoever kills a believer intentionally – his recompense is Hell, wherein he will abide eternally, and Allah has become angry with him and has cursed him and has prepared for him a great punishment" (Qur'an, 4:93).

Interpretation: This verse serves as a severe warning and threat against committing such a great sin, which is equated with polytheism in various parts of the Qur'an.

Allah also states: "And those who do not invoke with Allah another deity or kill the soul which Allah has forbidden, except by right..." (Qur'an, 25:68).

"Say, 'Come, I will recite what your Lord has prohibited to you. [He commands] that you not associate anything with Him...'" (Qur'an, 6:151).

Interpretation: These verses from Surat Al-An'am, which address core beliefs and major prohibitions in Islam, highlight that violating them leads to the destruction of the five essential necessities of life.

Also: "And do not kill the soul which Allah has forbidden, except by right" (Qur'an, 17:33).

"And do not kill your children for fear of poverty..." (Qur'an, 17:31).

Interpretation: These two verses clearly prohibit the killing of a protected soul except by legal justification.

1. Preservation of the Inviolable Human Life

2. **Clarification** that the prohibited soul is one that is legally protected, with exceptions made for:

- Retaliatory justice
- Apostasy
- Adultery by a married person

There are many verses and hadiths that strongly prohibit unjust killing.

Ibn Hazm said:

"There is no sin after polytheism greater in the sight of Allah than two things: (1) neglecting a prescribed prayer until its time has passed, and (2) deliberately killing a believer without right" (Ibn Hazm, n.d.).

According to Abdullah ibn Umar (may Allah be pleased with him), the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said:

"Whoever raises arms against us is not one of us" (Al-Bukhari, 6874; Muslim, 98; Al-Nasa'i, 3111).

Hadith Analysis:

1. Source:

- Al-Bukhari (No. 6874)
- Muslim (No. 98)
- Al-Nasa'i, *Book of Prohibitions*, Chapter: "He Who Draws His Sword and Points It at the People" (Hadith No. 3111)

2. Interpretation:

This hadith clearly indicates that merely brandishing weapons against fellow Muslims with intent to kill unjustly removes one from the path of true Islam. Ibn Hajar explains the phrase "is not one of us" to mean "not following our way," emphasizing that a Muslim should defend, not terrorize, another Muslim (Ibn Hajar, n.d.).

3. Related Rulings and Scholarly Opinions:

Ibn Daqiq al-'Id, as quoted by Ibn Hajar, stated:

"This hadith indicates the prohibition of fighting among Muslims and emphasizes its severity" (Ibn Daqiq al-'Id, n.d.).

Conclusion:

This study has explored the profound emphasis Islam places on preserving human life, as well as the intersections between divine commandments and public health ethics. Islamic jurisprudence, grounded in the Five Necessities—religion, life, intellect, property, and lineage—establishes the protection of life as an essential duty. The Quranic injunctions and prophetic traditions unequivocally prohibit any form of unjust killing and prescribe severe punishments for transgressors. Additionally, Islamic teachings highlight the importance of sustenance, health care, and avoidance of harm as fundamental obligations. Parents are entrusted with the well-being of their children, and societal leaders bear responsibility for safeguarding public welfare. The study also reveals that divine religions universally agree on the inviolability of human life and condemn intentional harm. This consensus underscores the ethical and legal frameworks that shape global human rights discourse today. By aligning religious teachings with contemporary perspectives on public health and social responsibility, the paper reinforces the ongoing relevance of Islamic ethics in ensuring personal and collective well-being.

Recommendations

1. **Enhanced Education on Religious Ethics and Public Health** – Islamic teachings on life preservation should be integrated into educational curricula to raise awareness among communities about their religious and ethical responsibilities in maintaining health and avoiding harm.
2. **Collaboration Between Religious Authorities and Public Health Officials** – Religious scholars and health practitioners should work together to promote public health initiatives that align with Islamic values, ensuring a holistic approach to well-being.
3. **Promotion of Sustainable Health Practices** – Individuals should be encouraged to adopt healthier lifestyles, including proper nutrition, regular medical checkups, and adherence to prophetic guidance on well-being.
4. **Social and Family Support Systems** – Governments and religious institutions should reinforce family support structures to ensure children and dependents receive necessary sustenance and protection.
5. **Legal and Ethical Safeguards Against Harm** – Policymakers should implement laws that protect life and reinforce Islamic principles of justice and human dignity, ensuring that society remains free from violence and injustice.

Imam Al-San'ani noted a consensus that if someone draws a weapon against another intending to kill, and is killed in self-defense, there is no blame on the defender (Al-San'ani, n.d.).

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