

ISLAMIC TRADITION ON THE END OF LIFE DECISIONS

THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN
RELIGION AND CULTURE

UNIVERSAL IDIOM IN THE MATTER OF DEATH

- The beginning and end of life are conterminous in providing the universal experience of being a human.
- Life as a preparation stage for death and the Hereafter.
- Funeral rituals in all cultures reveal the universal dimensions of human longing to remain connected with the loved ones and cared for in the moments of pain and separation.
- Life-cycle unveils moments of self-realization in the life-long journey towards the discovery of one's origin – “To God we belong, to God we shall return” (The Qur'an 2:156)

RUMI ON ONE'S INMOST LONGINGS

- “Listen to the reed, how it tells a story, complaining of separations – saying, ‘Ever since I was parted from the reed-bed, my lament has caused men and women to moan. I want a bosom torn by severance, that I may unfold [to such] the pain of love-desire: everyone who is left far from her source wishes back the time when she was united with it.’ ”
- All who hear the mournful tones of the reed flute respond because they know the same sorrow of separation from their divine source and their longing to return to that source.
- Life then is a the story of “separation” from and “union” with one’s source.

REMAINING CONNECTED

- Human relationships are at the heart of religious life in different cultures.
- Moments of affliction through illness demand intense demonstration of connectedness.
- Pain attains meaning at the time when one receives human tireless attention and care.
- Modern life style is open to criticism where human relationships become diluted because of the demands made by the artificial pace of “busy” life.
- Religious faith begins to alleviate relational indifference at the time of pain and suffering.

DEATH WITHOUT ILLNESS

- The ideal is set by the Prophet: “How fortunate you are that you died while you were not afflicted with illness.”
- Value attached to a healthy life in Muslim culture.
- Illness regarded as an affliction that needs to be cured by every possible legitimate means: “God has not created a disease without creating its cure.”
- The goal of medicine: To search for cure and provide necessary care to those afflicted with disease.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF ETHICS IN ISLAM

- Correlation between Reason and Revelation in terms of ethical guidance
- The dichotomy between religious and secular non-existent in Islam
- Professional ethics geared towards protecting individual's well-being within the familial and communal context

HUMAN BODY AND SUFFERING

- Human being has stewardship not the ownership of her body.
- Merely caretaker, the real owner being God.
- Suffering is a form of a test and trial to confirm a believer's spiritual station: "Surely God will try you with something of fear and hunger..." (Qur'an 2:153ff.)
- Suffering purposeful, not EVIL, functions as God's purpose for humanity.

HUMAN DECISION TO END SUFFERING

- God's immutable decree is revealed in law, where not only the right to die is not recognized; the right to be assisted in dying, whether through 'passive' or 'active' means is also ruled out.
- Collective decision by healthcare providers, including attending physician and family, based on the principle of "No harm" makes it possible to withdraw life-sustaining treatments.