

Cancer



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Cancer

Sh. Mansour Leghaei

“No Room For Sorrow”

Symposium on World Cancer Day

Islamic Contribution

Sunday 4 February 2001

Great Hall of Sydney University

In the Name of God; the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful

It is with great pleasure that I first and foremost express my gratitude to Prof. Alan Coates, Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Cancer Society for his sincere and endless work towards a cause much in need of the world's attention, and giving me the opportunity to participate.

I would like to call this gathering a ‘Spiritual Symposium’ with its ancient Greek meaning of ‘drinking party’ as I am going to share with you the taste of a Divine Wine which brings about an eternal intoxication and healing much stronger than any other worldly pain killer or intoxicant. And if in these few minutes given to me, I can just wet your appetite, then I believe I have offered my contribution.

This pure wine will hopefully open a new window of hope before sufferers, their family, friends and others who feel directly or indirectly affected.

Three Facts About Cancer

1) According to the Encyclopedia of Encarta “any of more than 100 diseases characterized by excessive, uncontrolled growth of abnormal cells, which invade and destroy other tissues, is named in medicine ‘Cancer’”.

2) The National Cancer Statistics Clearing House, within the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare,

reported a lifetime risk of one in three males and one in four females who were directly affected by cancer (AIHW 1999).

3) Scientists still don't completely understand the causes of cancer.

Cancer is a highly-charged word in our culture, because we link it so closely with death. The word strikes fear into our hearts and immediately turns life into turmoil.

Before pouring this Divine Wine, let me share with you the three main Islamic principles related to the topic.

The Main Islamic Principles

1) Monotheism

2) Meaningful Life

3) Conception of Death

1) Monotheistic conception means the realisation of the fact that the world is 'mono-axis' and 'mono-orbit'. This means that the world has come out of a wise will and that its system is founded on mercy and all that is good.

2) Meaningful Life aims at leading the existing things to a perfection befitting them. Nothing has been created in vain and without having any purpose. There is no chaos in cosmos. All the existing things of the world are harmonious and their evolution proceeds towards the same center. The fuel of this harmonious procedure is love, which is the direct fruit of Faith.

"He said to heaven and to earth; come both willingly or unwillingly, they both replied: We come in willing obedience." (41: 11)

3) Conception of Death: Many think that talking openly about death is a sign of giving up the desire to live. Nothing could be further from the truth. Thinking and speaking about death simply reckons with a real responsibility and it can very well coexist with a struggle for life.

We all find in ourselves a desire or wish to live forever. Hence, death (after tax in some cases!) is treated as a disastrous end. As such we tend to see it, if at all, in the distant future. From the Islamic point of view man is created for eternity in hereafter and death is not annihilation rather it is a bridge from here to a more advanced stage of life. The example of here and hereafter is similar to the world of a womb for a foetus and the outer world. This world and the hereafter are but two interconnected stages like those of sowing and harvest, for one reaps what one sows.

How a faithful Muslim would cope with Cancer?!

Based on the above principles, for the one who has faith in God, when his specialist informs him of being diagnosed with a serious illness such as cancer, instead of blaming God of being unfair to him, and questioning God as to why it has happened to him, why me?!, he realises that behind the dark shadow of any disaster, lies mercy and hence, optimistically considers the following inspirations:

1) Mindful to the Soul: Cancer or any other disease makes him more mindful and aware of himself. The power of youth, health and wealth, though temporary, usually misleads us to forget about ourselves and our souls. When a severe illness such as cancer strikes us, only then do we realise how weak and needy we are. Illness would bridge the gap between our world of every day selves and our world of souls and give more meaning and awareness to the recognition of the real self. By then an inner voice calls us to an Omnipotent Power who is the Source of all happiness and joy, which results in God consciousness and His presence.

As a result, at night, when the effects of chemotherapy keep him awake, he considers that seemingly painful call as a private invitation to a secret and sacred whispering with God far away from the eyes of strangers.

2) Launch of an Ascension: Believing in a meaningful life, for a faithful man a disease, any disease, is a wake-up call, the more severe it is the more effective the call would be. He knows that pain and disease can launch him on a journey that could change his entire life. Thus, getting better is not all that he is expecting out of being ill, or else he has missed a lot.

3) More grateful to the blessings of life. An Arabic expression says: “The blessing is known when it is taken away”. For a faithful man, cancer can enhance his appreciation of life. He realizes the fact that a call from one of his children, a hug from his wife, a thoughtful inquiry from a friend, and every leaf of a tree in his backyard and finally every moment of life that he has been receiving is a gift from the Merciful God and then he appreciates it more.

4) Death; a platform of eternity: Finally, if he finds that his cancer is fatal, he realizes the fact that firstly, cancer is only one out of more than a million ways of passing from this world to the next not the only one. And secondly, death is fearful if it means annihilation and total destruction. For a faithful man, death is but a platform to an eternal joy and happiness in Paradise and as such it does not strike him.

And to end my contribution in this Symposium I offer

Two Glasses: both to cure and to prevent Death!

All human's endeavor to fight for life, and intense growth of fear from death, is in its sense of annihilation. Here are two glasses of the Divine Wine for those who wish to be eternal. I will just describe

them to you, but should you take a sip, then I assure you that you would confidently leave endostatin and angiotatin to the mice! (if you are familiar with the drugs)

1) Name yourself 'Good' and act accordingly, then you'll be eternal. Instead of being depressed by cancer, which results in isolation and lack of motivation, make sure every day you produce good for others. Regardless of how you'll be treated, you produce a smile on other's faces, you'll be happy. Remember! We enjoy happiness, when we create joy and happiness for others. This is the law of cause and effect.

2) Love God, He makes you eternal. Love is the music of life. Lovers have no fear of death nor do they have any room for sorrow. As Emily Bronte expressed in her last poem lovers in God have no cowardly soul (No coward soul is mine.) When you love God, you love His creation and creatures, then He makes you be loved forever. Love is beyond the reach of death. As Hafez, an Iranian Mystical poet of the 14th century says:

*"Never dies he whose heart is living by love
Thus, our name is engraved eternally in the world."*

Shakespeare and Hafez never die. Emily Bronte, though she physically left this world soon, never dies. Moses, Jesus and Mohammad (peace be upon them all) none of the Prophets ever die. For they joined the eternal ocean of Divine Love. They were satisfied by the eternal water of life; LOVE.

Love is a dispensary of medicine both to cure and to prevent.
Join them and you'll enjoy their company forever.

And at last but not least, a priceless message from the Abrahamic faiths as quoted in the Holy Quran:

"And the same did Abraham enjoin on his sons and Jacob; O my sons! Surely God has chosen for you faith, therefore die not unless you Submit yourselves to God." (2: 132)

O Lord! Bestow your mercy and healing to all the patients of this world both physically and spiritually and in Thy presence, leave us with 'no room for sorrow'.

Amen.

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