

Spiritual Fitness

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The faith of Islam strongly promotes a "healthy lifestyle"; however, it does not make a "healthy body" the ultimate goal in life. In the 80th chapter of the Qur'an, Surah Abasa, Allah says: ***"So then let the person look towards his food..."(80:24)*** One of the meanings of this short, yet profound verse is that do we consider WHAT we eat and WHERE it comes from (how it is grown, under what conditions, etc...)?

The society of today seems to be infatuated with "healthy eating" and "healthy living" – these being two of the key buzzwords used in marketing and advertising. Consumers spend billions of dollars a year on fad diets – most of which do not even produce results!

Statistics show that in 2005 in the USA alone, over 51 billion dollars was spent on organic food! In addition, billions of dollars were spent on organic soap, shampoo, perfume, and cosmetics. The tip of the iceberg is, however, that in 2005, over 25 million dollars was spent on organic pet food! The amount spent on memberships at fitness clubs, spas, exercise equipment, and the like is just as staggering as the numbers quoted above!

With such an emphasis on being fit, looking good, and being healthy, with almost no talk about spiritual well-being, consider the following words of guidance from Imam Hasan al-Mujtaba (peace be upon him): "I am surprised at the person who thinks about what he eats (he makes sure that whatever goes into his stomach is wholesome and healthy), how does such a person not think about what goes into his head (the knowledge which he takes in)! He ensures that no harmful foods enter his stomach; however, his chest (mind) becomes the rendezvous point of deviated, base teachings!"

The faith of Islam strongly promotes a "healthy lifestyle"; however, it does not make a "healthy body" the ultimate goal in life. In the 80th chapter of the Qur'an, Surah Abasa, Allah says: ***"So then let the person look towards his food..."(80:24)*** One of the meanings of this short, yet profound verse is that do we consider WHAT we eat and WHERE it comes from (how it is grown, under what conditions, etc...)?

In addition, in the 2nd chapter of the Qur'an, Surah Al-Baqarah, we are told: ***"O you who have true faith! Eat from the Earth, that which is permissible (Halal) and pure (Tayyib)..."(2: 168)*** Here, two conditions are given for what we put into our stomach: it should be permissible – according to Islamic law – and pure.

Islam also actively promotes physical fitness, and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his

family) advised his followers to engage in four specific forms of physical activity (although we are not limited to only these): horse-back riding, archery, swimming, and wrestling.

However the food we eat and the physical fitness we engage in is not to be considered as the end, but rather a means to something much greater.

In reality, Islam is all about a healthy balance between "body" and "soul" – as they complement one another. Islam is a holistic faith – not sacrificing the body for the soul or vice versa. However, our body will not last for more than 100 years – who lives longer than this? Not many people... But the soul is eternal – either to live in perpetual bliss in Paradise, or to be forever tormented in Hell.

Since this is the case, why do we not put a greater emphasis on the life, health, vitality and strength of the soul?

We pay our personal trainer at the gym hundreds of dollars a year to help us lose weight and stay in shape, but how much are we ready to pay for spiritual guidance and instruction? How much do we spend on inviting scholars and speakers to our Islamic centers – paying their travel expenses and granting them a generous "gift" for taking the time to impart knowledge to us and helping our soul stay in shape?

When we get sick and need a doctor, we ensure we go to one who has the credentials and license to practice. But when it comes to Islamic teachings, ANYONE can come to the center and be given the opportunity to speak and "guide" the masses! The person may have never studied Islam in the traditional centers of knowledge; their only contact with Islamic teachings may be through reading a few books or Googling information on the Net, yet we feel that they are worthy of guiding an entire community!

This is not to say that "self-taught" speakers should not teach the community, but such "self-taught" people who are able to impart the true teachings and address contemporary issues are few and far between. In reality, many "self-taught" Muslim speakers SHOULD NOT be addressing the masses – just as some "officially-taught" Muslim "scholars" should also NOT be addressing the masses.

How much do we contribute on a monthly or yearly basis towards the publication and dissemination of Islamic literature to benefit us and others around us? If only 300 believers were to give a yearly donation of \$100.00 each, they could fund the publishing of at least six books dealing with Islam to be distributed throughout the community and the general population! Has Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (peace be upon him) not said: *"May the mercy of Allah be upon those who keep our tradition alive. If people knew the beauty of our teachings, they would have no choice but to follow us."*

Are we ready to implement this challenge in our lives? The prime question we need to ask ourselves is: How much do I spend on spiritual fitness?

As we progress towards the advent of the Awaited Savior, Imam al-Mahdi (may Allah hasten his

reappearance), let us begin by putting in place, in addition to our physical activity, a strict spiritual regiment so that when the Imam does call us, we are physically AND spiritually ready to answer his call.

In a society where people spend billions of dollars on healthy bodies, how much are we Muslims ready to spend on healthy souls?

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