

Spiritual Nutrition from the Islamic Point of View

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Abstract

Spirituality is one of the dimensions of health. Nutrition is one of the most important factors affecting the spiritual health. In this way many religions consider guidelines to get spirituality by nutrition. This paper discusses a concept analysis of spiritual nutrition in an (Shiet) Islamic context. To conduct the current study, the databases including Magiran, Hawzeh.net, Noormag, Jaame-al-Hadith, Jaame-O-ttafasir, Ahlebit library were utilized in the search for data. The results obtained showed that spiritual nutrition from the perspective of Islamic texts is a series of responsible activities that include, cognitions, behaviors and out comings components in relationship with food. It is deduced from the concept of spirituality in Islamic literature. Each component was found to be composed of several indicators. Awareness of the spiritual strategies in nutrition is effective in promotion of cultural competency for health professionals.

Keywords: Concept; Islamic teachings; Food; spiritual nutrition; spirituality

1. Introduction

Spirituality is one of the dimensions of health. It is connected to the aspect of humanity which refers to the method in which individuals pursue and express the meaning of life, and the way they experience their connectedness to the moment, self, others, nature, and to the significant or sacred (Puchalski, et al.,2009). Research has indicated that spirituality have a useful effect on physical health. Studies have shown a positive connection between spirituality and lower risks of cardiovascular diseases (Obisesan et al., 2006), cancers (Frank, & Carla ,2009).

It is very much required to keep the physical body healthy so that the soul and spirit may also remain healthy in order to serve both of our material and spiritual attainment. In this way in many religions there are specific forbiddances against irreverent behaviors which are not only damaging physically but also harmful to spiritual evolution. One of the spiritual expressions that is current in many religions is nutrition. For many religions believe that the food is —not just fuel and nutrients for growth and development but also pleasure, connection, and fulfillment as well(Jonathan et al.,2004), and so in final, we can obtain spirituality by food and diet (Earle,& Barron,1985). In this way the most religions have specific nutrition guidelines regarding what food to eat or avoid to get spirituality(Farouk, et al.,2015).

The two major sects within Islam are Sunni and Shia. More than two hundred million of the world's populations are Shia Muslims. Shia Muslims constitute 13 percent of the world's Muslim population, most of them living in Iran, India, Pakistan and Iraq, but other countries also have their own share of Shia population, for example, 10 percent of Muslims in North America are Shia Muslims (Miller, 2009).The Islamic values and beliefs are intricately linked to cultural norms, and this shapes the their' perception of health. In Islamic culture, health is defined as enjoying different forms of desirable physical, mental, social, and spiritual conditions (Shojaei, 2010).

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Islam considers the great value of excellence for Nutrition to get health (Marzband, & Afzali, 2014). So it is emphasized in self-care by reflecting on the food in Islamic teaching (Marzband, & Zakavi, 2017). As mentioned above the Spiritual health is one of health dimensions. Considering the Islamic Spirituality has a specific definition in Islamic culture, and emphasis of Islamic teaching in nutrition to get spiritual health, the identifying the spiritual nutrition standards based on Islamic teachings is necessary. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to answer the following question: what is the concept of spirituality in Islamic text? Does Islam deal with the use of nutrition in human life to get spirituality? If so, how? We discuss the Islamic point of view about spiritual nutrition based on the Quran, narrations (Shieh) and other related documents.

2. Methodology

The knowledge synthesis method by content analysis was selected for this study to summarise all of the printed studies on a specific question. This method was based on the usage of systematic review rules and attempted to draw valid and reliable concept from condensed text (Kastner et al., 2012). The literature search was not limited by start date, and it included recently published literature. Texts in English, Persian, and Arabic were sourced. Data collection was done by documentary search methods. We electronically searched the major websites of Islamic and Quran sciences in Iran, including Howzah.net, Nashriat.ir, Tebyan.net and Google Scholar Iranmedex SID, Magiran, Hawzeh.net, Noormag, Jaame-al-Hadith, Jaame-O-ttafasir, Ahlebit library. The combination of the two words, Islam and spirituality, Islam and nutrition, Tayyeb food and Quran, and Islamic traditions; was searched in both Persian and English papers to find relevant verses of Quran, Islamic narrations (Hadith) and reports, editorials and commentaries. Next, all contents of books and abstracts of the articles, titles, were reviewed by the lead author. In collaboration with the coauthor panel, selected studies were checked to verify those accepted into the study. In this way, those that did not involve relevant Hadith and verses or references to Islamic spiritual health and nutrition were excluded. In final, the total documents consisted of books (30) and journals (8) from Islamic literature for qualitative synthesis. The analysis generated the following issues: Definition of Spirituality in Islam, spiritual nutrition themes that Emerged from the Islamic text and definition of Spiritual Nutrition.

3. Spiritual health in Islam

In Islamic culture, health is defined as enjoying different forms of desirable physical, mental, social, and spiritual conditions, making it possible for a person to achieve a satisfying life (Shojaei, 2010). Spirituality for different people depending on their attitude towards world has various definitions (Martsolf, & Mickley, 1998).

In the humanistic approach, Spirituality is related to the aspect of humanity that refers to the manner in which individuals look for and express the meaning of life, and the way they experience their connectedness to the moment, self, others, nature, and to the significant or sacred (Puchalski, et al., 2009). It may include religion and other worldviews but encompasses far more general ways of expressing these experiences, including through the arts, relationships with nature and others (Bolton, 2006).

The word spirituality and its derivatives are not used in original Islamic sources (Qur'an and traditions), but its meaning can be inferred from Islamic texts. The concept of spirituality can be found in the Quran explicitly elucidated using terms such as pure and good life (Hayete-tayyebeh) and pure heart (Ghalbe-Salim) (Isfahani, 2011). Hayete-tayyebeh is defined as some form of human life that is not separated from the common life. It means that while pure life is life other than the worldly life, it is however associated with worldly life. Human beings enjoy the pure life; it is devoid of impurities (Tabatabaei, 1984).

According to Quranic creeds, a human being experiences a special life (Hayete-tayyebeh) according to faith to Allah. Allah is depicted as having key attributes of an attachment figure: namely, one who is close, responsive, and compassionate; and one who provides security and protection in times of danger [Ghobary Bonab, et al., 2015]. As God in Quran 8: 25 (translated by T. Saffarzade), states: "believers respond to Allah and the messenger when he calls you to that which revives you. Know that Allah is between the person and his heart and that to Him you shall all be gathered" (Quran 8:25). Although the first condition of realization of spirituality in the Holy Quran is faith in God, but it is not a sufficient condition. Nevertheless, human beings, in addition to faith in God, should do good deeds. Allah will surely bestow a pure and good life in this world only on believers who do good deeds. As God says in the Quran: "whoever leads a righteous life whether male or female, apart from the fact that he or she is a true believer, to them He will surely bestow a pure and good life in this world; and He will reward them incommensurate proportion of the best of their service" (Quran 16:97).

Ghalbe Salim (pure heart) in the Quran is another term that expresses Islamic spirituality. God said: "and most surely Ibrahim followed his way, (remember when) he came to his lord with a pure heart" (Quran37:83–84). In Quaranicreed, heart or (Ghalbe) is the source of moral virtues and moral vices. Pure heart is a kind of state of the soul in which we can find good characteristics such as, thinking, fear of the Lord, faith, virtue, trust, affection for others and peace (Mesbah,1999).

Some of modern Islamic intellectuals attempted to define spirituality based on Islamic tradition. Imam Khomeini, for example said: spirituality is a collection of attributes and deeds which creates logical, correct and strong appetite, emotion and allure in the human in order to advance him miraculously in the path toward the unique and beloved God...the dominant and basic aspect in the spirituality is attention toward God and acting for Him, it must be noticed both in intention and action that God is present and observes (Musawi al-Khomeini, 1999).

Martyr Motahari looks at spirituality as a kind of inborn feeling and tendency in human toward non material affairs such as knowledge, wisdom, moral righteousness, beauty and holiness and worship; he believes this is the distinctive between human and other creatures (Motahari,1993). In final, according to the Islamic thought, the spiritual excellence for human being is possible only by approaching God. Such spiritual excellence is through voluntary actions in the field of cognitions, behaviors in relation to oneself, God, others, as well as certain states and emotions(Marzband, & Zakavi, 2016).General indicatives of spiritual health include positive and negative feelings, worship, ethics, feeling of being supported by and connected to a divine power (Abbasi,et al.,2012).

4. Emerged Themes to spiritual nutrition

In our literature review, we retrieved and analysed relevant verses and traditions (Shia). The link between spiritual health and nutrition based on Islamic text was explained, and consequently, a few themes such as 'Monotheistic cognitions to food, Commitment to nutrition manners, Attention to pure food, and e.tc, were emerged. These are detailed in the following:

Monotheistic cognitions to food

Spiritual cognition to food is one of the components of the spirituality in nutrition. The believer should pay attention to the origin of the sustenance, namely God. In Qur'an God has pointed out the attitudinal difference between the unbelievers' nutrition and believers' one. In the case of the disbelievers in Chapter Mohammad, verse 12 He says: "As for the unbelievers, they take their fill of pleasure and eat as the cattle eat, but the Fire shall be their lodging!" From the perspective of the Quran the properties such as "eating too much" (Bahrani,1981). and seeing fullness as the aim of nutrition are among the nutritional similarities between unbelievers and quadrupeds (Al-Tabarasi, 2001). According to the Quranic teaching the animals eat grass without knowing from where it is, is it licit or illicit? Is it usurped or permitted? The unbelievers also eat food without paying attention to its abomination and being licit or illicit. Therefore, they have a similar end (Tabatabaei,1984). However, the believers pay attention to God's being dispenser and know the origin of their sustenance is God, as Ibrahim Khalilullah (PBUH) mentions to this: the same God who gives me food and waters generously (Qur'an 26:16). In addition, they know the natural gifts as the sign of God. As God in the Quran Chapter Nahl, verse 16regards having verse thinking in the face of nature as the signs of men of understanding: "And thereby He brings forth crops and olives, palms and vines, and all the fruits. Surely, in this there is a sign for a nation who think." Divine beneficences are the signs of God and like symbolic words they signify a meaning beyond those expressions. In fact, studying these beneficences, the nature finds the purposiveness, firmness, measurability and the absolute need to God.

Commitment to nutrition manners

Investigating Islamic texts indicates that one of the components of spirituality in nutrition is its functional constituents. The most important functional indicator of spiritual nutrition is to observe the moderation in nutrition. In Quran chapter A'raf, verse 31 God emphasizes on the observance of moderation in consumption: "Eat and drink, and do not waste. He does not love the wasteful." Surveying Islamic traditions shows that eating too much, fast swallowing of food, extravagance in eating one type of food, eating an illicit morsel, spoiling food and incomplete consumption of food etc. have been considered as some examples of wasting food Majlesi,1982).

One other nutrition manner is payment of financial rights of the poor. In Chapter Ana'm, verse 141 the God says: "When it bears fruit eat of it and pay what is due (the zakat) of it upon the harvest day. But do not be wasteful; He does not love the wasteful."

In order to accomplish this, in Islamic texts it has been emphasized on two methods of obligatory and approved prodigality. The Fifth and Zakat are among the obligatory prodigality and charity, as well as feeding the poor among the approved one in Islam (Sharifi, 2011). Investigating the Islamic traditions represents that having divine intention in food intake (Horre Ameli,1983). saying Bismillah (in the name of Allah) before meals and appreciation of God after food have been emphasized, too(Javadi Amoli, 2014).

The use of various foods and food various groups are some other basic ordainments in nutrition. The Quran proposes the principle of diversity in verses 61- Baghara, Abasa - 32-37 and Mo'menoun- 19-29. About 49 cases of plant origin food or sugar combination have been mentioned in the Qur'an and about 16 times the animal products have been named as the human used meat materials. There have been used 10 times the name of vegetarian quadruped whose meat has become licit, 2 times fish meat, 2 times the veal, one time the milk and one time the honey ((Abasnejad,2006).

Attention to pure food

Food purity is one of the other working procedures in spiritual nutrition. In the Quran chapter Baqarah, verse 168 and Maida, verse 4the God has emphasized on the food purity. The term tayyebat is derived from the word tuba which means good, tasty, sweet, pure, clean and not contaminated to abominable things (Ibn Manzur, 1999). The pure food is called the food that is desire with the healthy human nature. Its opposite is impure from which hates the human nature (Makarem Shirazi, 2000). Pure is meant being clean the goods from the unclean things (, Tabatabaei,1982). So the clean food isone that is conducted through the clean and uncontaminated materials, so that in addition to remove hunger secure the human health. In another definition: the pure food is one that is produced by the licit materials and is far from any pollution and is not the origin of disease for the consumer. In addition, it should have the invigorating elements and be useful for physical and spiritual health (al-Khatibal-Sharbini). Such a purpose is stressed in Islam with numerous guidelines such as washing hands before and after meals, washing fruits before eating (Mohammadi Reyshahri, 2006) and also avoidance of eating raw meat (Majlesi, 1995).

Commitment to allowed food (Halal)

In Qur'anic teachings the commitment to the licit food and staying away from illicit food is one of the working procedures of spirituality. Licit food is one whose consumption has been allowed and its use is not followed by punishment (Jaiyib, 1998).

The opposite of licit food is illicit one; this is one that has been prohibited and its consumer is sinful (Ibn Hazm,1983).So the consuming the illicit food causes to punish the consumer in the Last Day and sometimes in this world [Al-Zuhayli, 2007]. In chapter Nahl, verse 114 the God says: "Eat of the lawful and good things with which Allah has provided you". Also in the Quran (5: 96.), the meat of lamb, cow, camel and marine fishes (6:118) has been mentioned as examples of licit food. Other basic behavior in spiritual nutrition is avoiding the inviolable things. They are partly related to the type of food and beverage and partly about how to obtain and how to eat it. From the Quranic standpoint the illicit foods are of two species: a) what is essentially illicit like the wine in the verses 90 and 91 Maida, the meat of pork, blood and carrion (in verses 3-173 of Baqarah, verse 145 of Ana'mand 115 of Nahl) what is accidentally illicit, such as foods that are not based on the religious slaughter.

Fasting and Spirituality

One of the Islamic approaches in the nutrition spirituality is fasting. Fasting is a practice that for observing the God's command one avoids, from dawn prayer till the sunset prayer, from the things that render null the fast. One of the instances of abstinence is the abstinence of eating and drinking. Quran emphasizes on the relationship between fasting and spirituality: "Believers, fasting is decreed for you as it was decreed for those before you; perchance you will be cautious" (Quran, 2:183).

In the interpretation of this verse, one of the commentators of Quran says: If one wants spiritually to improve himself and connect to the world of purification and sublimity, the first thing to which he/she must commit is to prevent being unrestrained. He should not amuse himself with the physical pleasures and carnal desires; the human being is so great that the material life cannot be target for him.

The best, most effective, close stand public way to this (virtue) that can help individuals, is fasting; avoiding eating, drinking and sexual lust, the force of abstinence of sins will be strong in man, and he achieves gradually self-confidence and does not desist against any sin (Tabatabaei,1984).

Attention to food security

One of the characteristics of spiritual nutrition in Islam teaching is the attention to food security. It is defined when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (Food and Agriculture Organization 2013).

Islamic texts have emphasized food security with various guidelines to get spiritual nutrition. In one of the verses of the Quran on the fair distribution of food is emphasized. Allah says: "He brings forth gardens, trellised and untrellised, palm trees and crops, different to eat, and the olive and pomegranates alike and unlike. When it bears fruit eat of it and pay what is due (the zakat) of it upon the harvest day. But do not be wasteful; He does not love the wasteful". (141, Anam). In addition, in the other verse, Allah refers the Feeding the poor for giving spirituality: "O you who have believed, spend from that which We have provided for you before there comes a Day in which there is no exchange and no friendship and no intercession. And the disbelievers - they are the wrongdoers (Quran2:254).

Considering the Special outcomes

Another feature of spiritual nutrition is the attention to outcomes and its functions. A review of Islamic texts indicates that spiritual nutrition is characterized in some results. These are gaining distance of the disease, as Ali (PBUH) says: "decrease the food to prevent disease", (Amedi, 1987). In another tradition it has been cited that fasting (abstinence at eating and drinking) causes the physical health of human beings. As the Prophet says: "observe the fast to be healthy" (Noori, 1987).

It also provides for human being the nourishment to be considered as worship (Karim, 1991). The pure foods lead to gratitude to God, doing righteous deed, gaining distance from the Devil's orders (Quran 2:51), the forgiveness of sins, the increase of daily bread as well as granting prayer (Majlesi, 1982). The lack of commitment to the spiritual dimensions in nutrition causes the spiritual disease, as it has been quoted in a Hadith: the reason why the carrion is illicit, is that it makes ill-tempered, nervous, hard-hearted (Hoseini. & Hoseini, 2008). Furthermore, it paves the way to the eternal human affliction. As in Chapter NISA verse 10 God says: "Those who consume the wealth of orphans wrongfully, only consume fire in their bellies, and they shall roast in the Blaze".

5. Definition of Spiritual Nutrition

To provide knowledge and understanding of the conceptual elements of the spiritual nutrition in Islamic teachings, a qualitative analysis of the contents of the Islamic texts was conducted. According to Islamic text, spiritual nutrition is a series of responsible activities that include monotheistic cognitions to food, commitment to nutrition manners, attention to pure food, commitment to allowed food, fasting, attention to food security, considering the special outcomes. It is deduced from the concept of spirituality in Islamic literature. It means that the approaching God or spiritual excellence for human being is possible only through voluntary actions in the field of cognitions, behaviors in relation to oneself, God, others, as well as certain states and emotions.

6. Conclusion

Islam is one great religion whose teachings have impact on all aspects of human health, including the spiritual health. The present study shows that to get spirituality by food we need to have special cognitions, behaviors and certain states and emotions in relationship to it. The findings show that most important of cognitive, behavioral, and out comings components consist in: believing and regarding food as a sign of God, believing in God as Dispenser, having divine intentions in consumption, to pay the rights of the needy while consuming, fasting, using diverse foods, moderation in food intake, as well as gratitude to God, doing righteous deed, gaining distance from the Devil's orders. The spiritual nutrition is rooted in some other Islamic teachings. First the concept of health in Islamic teachings has the physical, mental, social and spiritual dimensions. In the realization of human health all these dimensions' act reciprocally. Although the pure scientific and experimental strategies are important in nutrition and in the realization of the health, but it is insufficient. The reason is that the pure material and experimental approach in nutrition overlooks the spiritual health of humans. The most important dimension of the health in Islamic teachings is the spiritual one; therefore, human being must consider the spiritual approaches to get spiritual health. Secondly, the spirituality in Islamic teachings consisted in: having special cognitions, behaviors in relation to oneself, God, others, as well as certain states and emotions.

It is followed by a merely religious approach, namely with faith in God and the righteous deed can lead to achieve the spiritual health or Quranic goodly life. Considering the spiritual dimensions in nutrition with Islamic attitude by policy makers and public health professionals can be effective in the realization of health in various physical, psychological, social and spiritual dimensions of Islamic society. Awareness of the spiritual strategies in nutrition is also efficient in promoting educational programs related to the professionals of health, especially in Islamic societies, because it makes to promote the cultural competences of health professionals and providers of spiritual care for the Muslim patients.

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