

The Reminder

“Remind For Surely Reminding Benefits The Believers” (51:55)

NO SMOKING PLEASE!

In recent years we have seen smoking being banned in enclosed public places and the minimum age at which tobacco can be purchased has increased from 16 to 18. These measures are completely understandable as smoking remains the single biggest cause of ill health and early death in the UK. It is also estimated to cost the NHS £1.7 billion a year. Therefore, reducing smoking has become a priority for the government.

THE FACTS

Physical harm to oneself

- Smoking has killed about 100million people within the last century and continues to kill around five million adults a year globally.
- Smoking kills 1300 people a year in Glasgow, that is 25 people every week.
- Each cigarette contains 4000 chemicals; at least 60 of these are known to cause cancer.
- 70% of the tar in cigarettes is left in the lungs where it causes serious lung diseases.
- Smoking causes or worsens the following: Diabetes; hypertension; coronary heart disease and certain types of cancer. These are all common in the Asian community.
- Smokers generally look older than they actually are and their skin is dull and grey.
- Smokers are at a higher risk of developing certain types of blindness.
- Young female smokers risk a higher chance of infertility and men have higher rates of impotency.

Physical harm to others

- Passive smoking kills 1200 people a year in Scotland alone.
- Children who are regularly exposed to smoky environments are more likely to suffer from asthma, ear infections and chest infections.

Addictiveness

- 70% of people would like to stop smoking but only 2% are successful on their own due to the highly addictive nature of tobacco.

Financial harm

- A 20-a-day smoker paying £5 per packet of cigarettes will spend £1825 per year on this useless habit.
- Non-smokers are also penalised financially, as their taxes go towards the medical treatment of self-inflicted diseases caused by smoking.
- Money spent on the NHS for treating smokers could be better spent on health, education and charitable causes such as helping to eradicate poverty.

Early Islamic rulings on smoking

Smoking in the form that we know today was not a common practice at the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him). It came into appearance in the last two centuries. Due to the lack of a clear ruling in the texts scholars disagreed in regard to its ruling. Based on the information available to them at the time many scholars ruled that smoking was permissible as the adverse effects on health was not common knowledge then. With emerging evidence of the risks associated with smoking, many scholars changed the ruling to makrooh (disliked/detested).

THE CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC VERDICT ON SMOKING

There is a general Islamic principle that states that the harmful is considered unlawful (haram). Allah (the All-Mighty) says:

“He allows them as lawful what is good (and pure) and prohibits them from what is bad (and impure)” (7:157)

All scholars unanimously agree that whatever is proved to be harmful to the body and mind is prohibited (haram).

In recent times the majority of major scholars across the Islamic world have now revised the previous ruling on smoking (i.e. that it is makrooh – disliked). In light of modern medical research which has proven beyond doubt that smoking is harmful, scholars are now convinced that smoking is unlawful (haram). They have based this new ruling on the following facts:

1. The unlawfulness of harming oneself. The Quran states:

“and let not your own hands throw you into destruction” (2:195)

“Do not kill yourself, for surely God is ever Merciful towards you” (4:29).

2. The unlawfulness of harming others which is caused through passive smoking. This is supported by the hadith: “Harm should not be inflicted” (AL- MUSTADARAK)

3. The unlawfulness of wasting money. Allah (the All-Mighty) says:

“And eat and drink (freely), but do not waste: verily, He does not love the wasteful!” (7:31)

Regarding this last point it has been said “smoking is a kind of wastefulness, as there is no difference in the prohibition of wasting one’s money by throwing it into the sea, burning it, or doing any similar wasteful act.” Obviously, wasting money and harming oneself at the same time and others is even more unlawful.

These scholars state that the difference amongst the scholars over the prohibition or permissibility of smoking tobacco is relative to their knowledge of its harm. They state that in the case of smoking where its dangers have become so well known that it is now common knowledge, there remains no doubt that the correct Islamic ruling is that it is unlawful (haram).

Although some scholars have not moved from the previous position of it being makrooh (disliked), they are now increasingly becoming a minority due to the very strong arguments supporting the view of impermissibility. In addition, they also agree that smoking is unlawful where grave harm is feared in an individual's case.

ADVICE TO THE YOUTH

Many people take up smoking as teenagers thinking that it is a sign of adulthood or independence only to realise at an older age the damage it has caused them. Those young people who are under the false notion that smoking is only a concern in old age should pay heed to the following:

- A person who started smoking at the age of 15 is three-times more likely to die from its effects than someone taking up the habit in their 20s. This makes the decision to take up smoking as a teenager a major life-changing decision.
- People under 40 are five times more likely to have a heart attack if they smoke.
- There are more than 20 different ways that smoking can kill you even at a young age.

Young people should not be fooled by macho images of smoking in the media. The fact is that smoking is an addictive habit which destroys your health, the health of everyone around you (through passive smoking), wastes your money and everybody else's money too (due to the cost to the NHS).

Those young people who have already fallen prey to this life-threatening habit should try to give up as soon as possible before it is too late.

ADVICE TO SMOKERS

A 20-a-day smoker who started smoking at the age of 16 until the age of 56 will have spent £54,750 (based on £5 per packet). This amount can feed between 273,750 people to 383,250 according to the charity Islamic Relief as less than £1 can feed 5-7 people for a full day in Sudan, Chechnya and Bangladesh.

Muslims are aware that they have to account for all their actions in the Hereafter. Every smoker should ponder over how he will be able to justify this habit which harmed himself, those around him and wasted money in a time when people did not have enough to feed themselves. Rather if this money is spent in charity it will contribute to their balance of good deeds in the Hereafter.

Ramadan is a practical proof that strong will power can overcome the addiction of smoking. However, someone who is finding it difficult to give up should ask Allah (the All-Mighty) to help him/her in their noble intention. Help is also at hand in many forms. The following contacts can help smokers beat their habit:

- Asian Quitline—giving up smoking advice and support for South Asians, including material in other languages: www.asianquitline.org
- Go to your local pharmacy and join the “Starting Fresh Scheme today”
- Join the Smoking Cessation Service run by the NHS. For more information contact: 0141 201 9825 or www.smokingconcerns.com

GENERAL ADVICE

Family and friends should support smokers in their efforts to quit their habit. Many of us have friends and relatives who are smokers as statistics indicate that smoking is more prevalent amongst Pakistani and Bangladeshi men than the rest of the male population with more than half of Pakistani men smoking in Glasgow. Smoking is also increasing amongst Asian women. We must constantly encourage smokers to give up by reminding them of the damage it causes to themselves and others around them and the numerous benefits of not smoking. People should politely refuse smokers requests to smoke in their homes. Remember non-smokers are also at risk from passive smoking not to mention innocent children.

Anything useful I have written is by the grace of Allah (the All-Mighty) and all mistakes are my own and Allah (the All-Mighty) knows best.

For comments, feedback, suggestions on future community issues you would like dealt with, sponsoring future reminders, helping in distribution etc. please email: amer@shaykhamer.com

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