

PRECEPTS OF COMMUNITY HEALTH AND HYGIENE FROM THE HOLY BIBLE

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ABSTRACT

Every Society, in its unending process of evolution, devises its own methods of survival in ethical, medical and emotional aspects. The urge for good and healthy living, the desire for longevity of life are not only inherent but also largely evident in all the societies right from the time of its primitivity. Jews are a wonder community. Though negligible in numbers, they managed to win 17.5% of noble prizes announced so far. Besides, almost all the major inventions in the world are by Jews. This despite the years of persecution and trials the community was subjected to in the history. The pages of the human history are smeared with the blood patches of the Jews in the hands of oppressors for several centuries. Apart from the fact that theirs is the community chosen specially by God, the intellectual prowess and tenacity of the Jewish community basically stems from the discipline and dietary code they received from their leader Moses in wilderness. Jewish nation was conceived in the vision of their patriarch Abraham but in fact, born on the night they left as slaves from Egypt for good under the dynamic leadership of Moses. Mosaic code for all aspects of life has made Jews or Israelites what they are today. A modest effort is being made in this article to trace their community's health and hygiene social behavioral precepts as given by Moses.

Key words: Holy Bible, Community Health, Hygiene, Mosaic Code.

Every Society, in its unending process of evolution, devises its own methods of survival in ethical, medical and emotional aspects. The urge for good and healthy living, the desire for longevity of life is not only inherent but is evident in all the societies right from the time of its primitivity. Men always wanted look stronger and women had insatiable desire to look younger and beautiful. The undercurrents of competition in contemporary societies always resulted in each society coming out with the natively devised methods and modes of healthy living in personal, family and community sectors.

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The case of 'Hebrews' the present day Jewish Community as was called four thousand years ago, is also no exception to this. Jewish Community is the most persecuted Community, which had to undergo unspeakable torture in the hands of oppressors belonging to various nations at different times, learnt to survive in a very hard way.

Finding its beginnings in the seed of Abraham the patriarch, the Jewish Community suffered and tolerated the oppressive and offence annihilative persecution from the rival societies. The Assyrian, Babylonian, Egyptian and Roman oppression just to name a few, have lasted for centuries and this made deep impact on the Psyche and lifestyle of the Jews. Though it is not possible to trace all the footprints of the Jewish society in the sand of history in its evolutionary path of survival and victorious life style, a modest effort is being made in this article to bring to light some of the aspects of their principles of hygiene, health and community living.

The four hundred and thirty years of living in captivity and slavery in Egypt had its own impact on the life style of Jews. Egyptians considered themselves a superior race and as such they did not even eat along with the Jews (Gen. 43;32). In these circumstances the Jews had to live in ghettos and in very unhygienic surroundings during their slavery in Egypt. For about four hundred and thirty years, the Jews as slaves had very pathetic and health and hygiene wise very low level of life in Egypt.

Therefore when Jews were being led out of slavery in Egypt, the primary concern of their God Jehovah was not only revive in them the spirit of self respect but also to restore the sense of health and hygiene. As their journey from Egyptian slavery to freedom filled life in the promise land of Canaan is going to take about 43 years in the wilderness of Sinai and Moab, the concern of Jehovah was to give them a set of principles in connection with their health and hygiene.

The basic principle the Jews had to follow was not to mix the dairy products and meat products while cooking and also eating (Ex. 23:19). This later fully developed and adopted and now practiced as 'Kosher' (dietary code) all over the world as Jewish code of eating and it has gone a long way in restoring their health. The dairy products like curd, cheese, butter milk etc., are never served on the dinner table when the meat is being served. There had to be a gap of minimum four hours between the consumption

of these two food items. It was believed during those days, as it is believed in some of the oriental societies even today, that there could be negative impact on the human digestive system if these two items are consumed together and it could result in some serious illness in the long run. It is also practiced in the Jewish Society that when the meat of the animals is consumed, the animal whether a calf or a sheep must not be more than one year old (Num. 28:9). This was to encourage people to eat tender meat so that there could not be any digestion related ailments and it was also strictly forbidden to eat the meat of the dead animals. God was so concerned that Jehovah promised them longevity of life and healthy living where there is no sickness if people follow the principles. He gave them the principles through their leader Moses (Ex. 23:25).

The Jewish people in their journey towards Canaan the promised land had to come to a place called 'Marah' where the waters of the well were very bitter and inconsumable. Then God ordered Moses to fetch a shrub and mix it with the water so that the water could become fit for consumption. Moses does as he was commanded and the water becomes sweet and consumable (Ex. 15:25). Though, the name of the Shrub is not mentioned in the Bible, the nomadic tribes of the East Asian deserts did have the knowledge of some herbs and shrubs which had the power to purify the water to make it fit for the consumption. The biblical archaeologists are now conducting research in that respect too.

Moses also gives them a long list of animals and creatures to be eaten and also to be strictly avoided (Lev. 11th Chapter). This is in view of the people's health and sickness.

It was not only water purification that God of Jews was concerned about. He always gave them a formula for preparing a mix, which will not only work to spread to fragrance but also come in handy as air purifier. As they are dwelling in the wilderness, God asks them to prepare a place of worship for Him and people to come and pray for him. He calls them into the tent for meeting but the entrance of the tent of meeting, God asks them to make an incense mix of gum resin, onycha, galbamus and pure frankincense in equal proportions. Moses commands them to prepare the mix in a holy manner and the incense is to be kept at the temple all the time burning so that people residing around the tent will have the benefit of the air being purified. It is interesting to mention here again that incense made of sandalwood and Frankincense always had

been a favourite one among the nomadic tribes of the East Asian deserts. The incense had not only the fragrant aspect but also therapeutic potential when inhaled. God's concern appears to be to make Jewish people have this therapeutic benefit.

The Jewish people were also warned of not indulging in excessive drinking in the Community. It has been a standard instruction to them that they should not indulge in excessive consumption of the liquor and for the priests, drinking is totally prohibited (Lev. 10:8, 9). This was intended not only to streamline their community behavior but also to protect them from being victimized by the ill effects of the liquor consumption.

Moses instructs his people that they should burn out all the fat of the animals slaughtered both for the offering and also consumption purpose. While it will be too assumptive to attribute reasons for this instruction, it is not out of place to think that the reason probably was not to encourage people to consume eatables that are known to be full of cholesterol and other related things (Lev. 4:26, 4:31,4:35).

The personal health and hygiene as a basis for the community health and hygiene is emphasized by Moses. People in the wilderness were instructed to have personal hygiene in their bodies, houses and streets. Their clothes too were ordered to be clean. Jewish community for several centuries has the reputation of being a healthy and hygienic one and the basis for this comes from Mosaic code. Principles of cleanliness or hygienic in surroundings are strictly codified and enforced not only at the tabernacle i.e., the temple vicinity but also in the camp sites in the wilderness.

The principles of health and hygiene were so effectively enforced by Moses that even though more than six million people were living at one place during their stopovers in the wilderness, the breaking out of contagious diseases in the epidemic properties was just unheard off. Few instances of mass deaths like that of 'Korah' and his followers were the result of God's wrath rather than the poor hygiene.

Sewage was totally unknown concept to Moses and his people of Israel and it is also humanly an impossible task to create a system of sewage for more than six lakh people in the wilderness as they are on constantly move from one place to another. Therefore Moses devised a system through which the waste materials of the animal sacrifices and of human excreta and carcasses of the dead are disposed off.

In order to prevent unsanitary soiling of the ground, at the altar of burnt offerings some pots to take away ashes and shovels and basins were to be kept (Ex.27:3). Cleanliness at the place of the altar in the temple was seen as the central point of hygiene for the whole community. A special priest was assigned with the job of carrying out the waste materials from the altar and even this job was to be done with great care as per the code given by Moses. For the collections of the material the priest has to wear tight fitting clothes as specified by Moses and for carrying them too he has to wear some other clothes. Then for conducting rituals at the temple he has to wear other type of clothes. All this is to prevent him from getting himself contaminated to then passing on the contamination to the others. Official removal of the waste materials from the altar even devised and strictly enforced keeping in view the possible contamination to the whole community. Not only the work of burnt offerings and several other offerings but also the removal of the burnt, half burnt animal bodies was assigned to the priests to ensure health and hygiene to the community. All these waste materials were to be carried to a place of disposal well outside the camp site (Lev. 4:12). All these principles of hygiene were enforced with the strict warning that the Lord, your God, walks in the midst of your camp, therefore shall it be immaculate. (Deut. 23:15). The removal and destruction by fire of debris was sanitary procedure aimed at preventing the offensive sights, of disease – breeding material, bad odours. Disposal of human excreta for the people of more than six hundred thousand people was also a challenging one. Unless an effective way was devised and strictly enforced, the hole camp site and the community would have become the most unclean area. Therefore, there should be a separate place designated for the people to come and relieve themselves. While going to relieve themselves they were instructed to carry a paddle in order to dig a small hole and when relieved themselves, to cover the hole with the sand (Deut. 23:13, 14).

The Egyptian practice of embalming and mummification was never encouraged by Moses in the wilderness. Instead the practice of burying the dead at the place of cemetery earmarked well outside the campsite was introduced. The funeral also has to take place before 24 hours of death to prevent widespread 'uncleanliness' (Num. 11:31). The dead bodies in hot climate can quickly decompose and become offensive to the whole community as a source of disease therefore all the dead including those who are punished with death sentence must be buried on the same day. (Deut. 21:23)

Not only human beings and animals but also houses, garments, utensils and other articles that become sources of contamination were to be isolated, washed, sterilized or destroyed if necessary. Vessels too are to be kept tightly sealed to prevent contamination of the surroundings (Num. 19:15). Hence the vessels must have attached cover and to be kept covered when not in use so that air cannot gain entrance.

The food must be very clean as it can be both the source of health and also disease. Not only eating but also offering unclean food to a neighbour was forbidden. Moses gives a long list of eatable and forbidden animals which later on as explained in the previous section, form a part of 'Kosher' (dietary code), among the Jews. (Lev 11:43). If the sacrificed animal meat is boiled in an earthly vessel the vessel has to be destroyed because the vessel because of its pores and earthly make absorbs into itself the minute particles of the food cooked and no amount of washing would rid itself of it. Where as if the boiling takes place in a copper vessel the same can be kept undestroyed as it can not absorb the boiled material (Lev. 6:21).

At the time of religious ritual men and women must strictly clean themselves and clean their clothes. Three days before the ritual the men must also abstain themselves from intercourse and all sorts of contacts with female. This is because semen emitted by the men is believed to be a source of contamination after a certain period. (Ex. 19:15)

The emphasis on personal and communal cleanliness was so much that Moses devotes some entire chapters in Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy to cleanliness. So much that even public spitting by the people was forbidden. Violation of any of these cleanliness laws always necessitated the act of disinfection (Purification) and the disinfection or purifying solutions was 'water' or 'fresh water'. (Lev. 15:9). The person who spits must wash his clothes and bathe his body in water (Lev. 15:8). It was customary in those days for the host to offer water to the guests to clean the feet and sandals (Gen. 24:32, Gen. 43:24)

Every law and precept concerning the cleanliness, diseases, health and religious rituals was widely publicised and notified by Moses through a set of Tribal elders and temple priests. Wherever and whenever necessary, sign posts too were erected (Gen. 38:14).

When people are living in community and the numbers are as huge as millions, a very special care had to be taken about the cleanliness of the surroundings and naturally cleanliness being the most potent of all factors in sanitation it thus became the keynote of Mosaic principles. The communal sanitation procedure was based upon supplying pure and adequate water, preservation of food items from contamination by dirt, flies decaying matters etc, personal cleanliness, advice of suitable dietary, prompt disposal of litter and decomposed material, effective management of communicable and contagious diseases.

When a soldier returns from battle field it was mandatory to keep him and his exploits in isolation for some days as he might be carrying with him, the elements of contamination (Num. 31:19-23).

The deep desire of Israelites had always been to have a long life like their patriarchal fathers Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and others. The leader of Israelites in the wilderness Moses himself lived for 120 years with all of faculties retaining their power until his death. The Bible says he climbed the mount Nebo on his final day and his eye did not lose its sparkle, nor his faculties leave him (Deut. 34:7). Longevity of life is one of the blessings God promised to Israelites. The reward for observing all the laws given by God through Moses was health and long life on this planet.

Sabbath

The conservation and proper channelization of human strength and health was given greater importance in the Jewish society. Israelites were to observe weakly Sabbath strictly all through their life as per the fourth commandment. The fact that it finds a place in the Ten Commandments given by God through Moses explain the importance attached to the public life of health in the wilderness. The people were to work hard for six days and then take complete rest on the seventh day (Gen. 20:9). Their children, servants, slaves, the cattle the aliens everyone had to observe this Mosaic law called Sabbath. Anyone who is found violating this law will be subjected to death by stoning. The American researchers attributed the excellent health condition of the Jews to this law. The seventh day rest has become a source of conserving their energy and it went

a long way in improving their health condition. They were also to observe every seventh year as a Jubilee year during which time they were not to till the land and sow the seeds. It is a rest year even for the soil. This was aimed at recharging the soil which was bound to give double the crop on the following year of the jubilee year. It is now scientifically agreed that the periodical rest both to the human beings and also to the soil will result in renewed vigor and increased productivity.

Leprosy

Though several diseases were effectively dealt with in the biblical times a special mention must be made about leprosy. When Miriam, sister of Moses was affected with leprosy, it was such a terrible sight to the entire community that everyone prayed God that they must be spared from being affected by leprosy. Leviticus 13th Chapter and several other chapters deal extensively with leprosy. The high priest and the priest were to diagnose leprosy when the symptoms appear on the skin of the people in the form of boils and white patches. There is a definite procedure to be followed by the priests in determining whether the person brought before them is affected by leprosy. When diagnosed that the person is affected by leprosy he or she is to be isolated from the camp site and the person has to be sent to an isolated place situated at a far away place. This was in view of the opinion that the disease was contagious. If the person happens to be cured of leprosy he or she will again be examined by the temple priests and after following a lengthy process involving several rituals and then he or she will be allowed into the camp on being diagnosed of cured from leprosy.

Thus the Jewish society in the wilderness was a well equipped, regulated, educated and wisely administered one under the leadership of their leader Moses. The foundation for the longevity of life and unending energy even at the ripe age which are the hallmarks of Jewish people was laid in the Mosaic laws and the strict adherence of Jewish people to many of those laws even to this day.

Abbreviations

- Gen. : Genesis
- Ex. : Exodus
- Lev. : Leviticus
- Num. : Numbers
- Deut. : Deuteronomy

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सारांश

पवित्र बाइबल में सामाजिक स्वास्थ्य के नियम एवं स्वस्थवृत्त

पी.के. जे. पी. सुभक्ता, पी.वी.वी. प्रसाद एवं अला नारायण

प्रत्येक समाज विकास की अनन्त प्रक्रिया में जीवित रहने के लिए स्वयं के तरीकों द्वारा नैतिक, चिकित्सिकीय और भावात्मक पक्ष से उपाय करता है। सभी समाजों में आदिकाल से ही अच्छे और स्वस्थ जीवन के लिए प्रेरणा और दीर्घायु की कामना अन्तर्निहित ही नहीं है अपितु सुस्पष्ट भी है। यहूदी एक असाधारण समाज है। यद्यपि यहूदियों की संख्या अत्यल्प है तथापि अब तक घोषित नोबल पुरस्कारों में से १७.५% पुरस्कार इसी सम्प्रदाय ने प्राप्त किये हैं तथा संसार के महान् आविष्कार भी इसी समाज के लोगों ने किये हैं। शताब्दियों से मानव इतिहास सताने वालों के द्वारा इस समाज के रक्त से रंगा हुआ है। यहूदी समाज ने मरुभूमि में आवास की अवधि में अपनी बुद्धिमानी, वीरता और दृढ़ता से अपने धार्मिक नेता मूसा द्वारा प्राप्त किये गए आहार नियमों एवं उपदेशों का अनुपालन किया। वास्तव में यहूदी समाज का सूत्रधार उनके पूर्वज इब्राहीम के समय में ही हो गया था परन्तु उनका जन्म उस समय हुआ जब वह अपने धार्मिक नेता मूसा की अगुवाई में दास के रूप में मिस्र से अपनी भलाई के लिए निकले। आज यहूदी समाज जो भी है वह जीवन के सभी क्षेत्रों में मूसा द्वारा दिये गए उपदेशों के कारण ही है। इस लेख में मौजैक कोड (मूसा द्वारा दिये गए सामाजिक स्वास्थ्य, सफाई और सामाजिक एवं व्यावहारिक उपदेशों) को संक्षिप्त रूप में वर्णित किया गया है।