

**ORIGINAL RESEARCH****The mutual relationship between euthanasia and preservation of life from the Islamic jurisprudence perspective**

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**Abstract**

**Introduction:** All divine religions have paid a special attention to the preservation of life. In a similar vein, the last monotheistic religion, Islam, has emphasized the need to respect this right and the need to preserve human life. Some solutions have always been proposed on the need to respect and exercise this right. All divine religions are against euthanasia and the views of its opponents and euthanasia has been interdicted in many verses in the Quran. The current study was an attempt to demonstrate the importance of preservation of life from the perspective of Islam and to examine this issue from a religious point of view and the emphasis on the need to preserve human life

**Materials and Methods:** The study adopted a descriptive-analytical design. In line with this design, various books on Islamic sciences, interpretation, narrations, and jurisprudence were consulted. Furthermore, using the databases, related papers were also consulted.

**Results:** According to Islam, God is the genuine owner of human bodies and lives. Humans cannot jeopardize their lives and perform euthanasia without a legitimate reason based on jurisprudence or wisdom but should use their life in line with the goal of creation, i.e., to serve God. The importance of preservation of life is primarily recognized by wisdom<sup>1</sup>. The Holy Quran and Islamic narrations have also recognized the need to preserve human life. Islamic scientists (clergymen) have also emphasized its obligation.

**Conclusion:** Human beings are obliged to avert dangers and do their best to preserve their lives. Every action, which may lead to euthanasia, is against wisdom Islamic jurisprudence.

**Keywords:** Euthanasia, Islamic jurisprudence, Obligation, Preservation of life

## Introduction

Euthanasia is an important, nozohur and controversial phenomenon in medicine. It concerns patients with hard-to-treat diseases and those who do not enjoy living and those with a low quality of life.

In some cases, the person is quite willing to end his/her life with the help of another person or the medical team while the medical team is committed to help the patient to survive (1).

Euthanasia has a Greek etymology and is derived from EU meaning good and palatable and THANASIA meaning death; the word thanasia is derived from Khanates (the goddess of death in ancient Greece). In Persian, euthanasia has been referred to as sweet death, mercy killing, good death and also fast and easy death (2).

In the Dictionary of Oxford' euthanasia has been defined as painless killing of a patient who suffers from an untreatable and painful disease (3). It was first used in English in 1646 to mean easy and comfortable<sup>7</sup> death (4).

Ralph Burgen's definition might be a more inclusive one; in his book "Ethics of Dying Patients"<sup>(2)</sup>(, he defines euthanasia as putting an intentional end to the life of a patient with an untreatable disease, who is suffering, tired and disappointed of improvement, etc., which is done with the purpose of helping his/her to get rid of this problem

The movements that emphasize identity, individuality and control over one's body and the right to die According to some authors, this discussion became more considerable when self-autonomy held more attraction than justice (5).

Social movement is derived from a turbulent situation, the product of the motivation for power and the result of wishes and hope for designing a new plan for life. In the "Requested Death" movement or the movement of "The Right to Die"<sup>(6)</sup>, the issue of a new plan for dying has been raised, a plan that allows the patient particularly to end his/her life. The ultimate purpose of this movement was legalization of "death requested by the patient." Although different schools have had concerns about preserving and promoting human dignity and each school has put forward a structure and system for this purpose, the Islamic jurisprudence has taken a transcendental approach in this regard and its solutions are unique. The dignity of human

life, properties and reputation is among the transcendental rules of Islam, which brings human dignity in its best possible form<sup>(7)</sup>. Accordingly, preserving 'self' is considered as one of the essential components of the Islamic jurisprudence and Islamic scientists believe in the obligatory nature of preserving life or self from being wasted in different discussions and have argued for it drawing on different reasons based on wisdom and narrations. They consider leaving or abandoning one's life as taboo (8).

About the dying person, it has been mentioned that if there is a hope of returning to life for him/her, s/he should be revived and no negligence is accepted in this regard (9).

The "right to live" as one of the fundamental human rights has been always the focus of different religious and thinking schools particularly the monotheistic religions (10). Whenever violating a taboo or a religious obligation is in conflict with human life, committing a taboo or violation of an obligation are allowed to preserve human life, as in the following cases:

- 1) 1) Quitting hajj in fear of one's or another respectable person's life (11)
- 2) When someone is in a situation in which s/he has to eat dead animals' meat, blood or pig meat, and then they will be halal for him/her (11)
- 3) When someone has a little water that, if s/he uses for performing ablutions, s/he and his/her companions will be thirsty (and without water), then s/he should perform his/her ablution with earth or sand (tayammum) instead of with water (12)
- 4) If keeping a fetus (whose soul has not been insufflated) causes a risk to the mother's life, she can abort her pregnancy according to the conditions specified in the Islamic jurisprudence (13).

### Quran and the essentiality of preserving life

In verse 32 of chapter Ma'idah, the Quran says, "Because of that, we decreed upon the Children of Israel that whoever kills a soul unless for a soul or for corruption [done] in the land - it is as if he had slain mankind entirely. And whoever saves one - it is as if he had saved mankind entirely. And our messengers had certainly come to them with clear proofs. Then indeed many of them, [even] after that, throughout the land, were transgressors." In this verse, the Quran has obviously denounced

killing of any human being, unauthorized by the Creator, and has emphasized the reviving and even preserving the life of human beings (14,15).

2) There are some verses in the Quran that are known as 'emergency verses (16-19).

For example, in the verse "He has only forbidden to you dead animals, blood, the flesh of swine, and that which has been dedicated to other than Allah. But whoever is forced [by necessity], neither desiring [it] nor transgressing [its limit], there is no sin upon him. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful"(20) and the previously mentioned verses, the basic principle is 'emergency' or 'compulsion'. According to these verses, whatever is taboo for human such as the dead animals meat, blood and pig meat become halal under specific (emergency) conditions (11). In this verse, under critical conditions, God has announced as halal what He has considered as taboo under normal conditions so that human life is preserved and the person can continue his/her life (21).

#### **Euthanasia and self-murder**

Euthanasia is one of the controversial issues in medicine. Those in favor of its legalization are mainly physicians. Divine religions particularly Islam are bitter opponents of euthanasia and denounce any attempt to help a patient to commit suicide or accelerate his/her death. They believe that life and death are concerned with God and no one has been allowed to commit suicide or end someone's life out of mercy to relieve them from pain and suffering caused by an untreatable illness as this is a kind of murder. Therefore, interfering in God's affairs is an inexcusable crime that is accompanied by the fire of hell (the taboo of suicide in the Quran and the Sunnah (tradition) and the Quran solutions for preventing it)(22).

Researchers acknowledge that there are some verses in the Holy Quran that mention committing suicide directly or indirectly. Among these verses (23) is "And spend in the way of Allah and do not throw [yourselves] with your [own] hands into destruction. And do good; indeed, Allah loves the doers of good." They argue that God has banned exposing oneself to destruction (death) and this exposure to destruction is the same as suicide and has been prohibited in Islam (the

illegality of suicide in the Quran and tradition and Quranic solutions for preventing it) (22).

From the perspective of Islam, God is the actual owner of human body and life and human being cannot put his/her life in danger and practice euthanasia without a particular reason justifiable by wisdom or sharia. From this perspective, human body and life are in trust for human beings and they should be careful to preserve and use them in line with the goal of their creation, i.e., serving God.

On this basis, quitting preservation of life provides the ground for putting oneself to death (15).

Accordingly, from a religious perspective, as human is not the actual owner of his/her body and soul and the strict illegality of suicide and murder whether in religion and narrations or based on wisdom and ethics, and as deciding on life and death of human is uniquely exclusive to God and the inability to tolerate pain and suffering is not the license for death and getting out of the natural direction of death and considering the corruption and abuses caused by euthanasia, this practice is haram (illegal) and is considered as murder (Euthanasia or mercy killing from a religious perspective) (24).

Euthanasia can be practiced in two ways:

In one case, the patient or one of his/her relatives stops treatment process so that the disease progresses to the point of death (non-active euthanasia). Islamic scientists point out that because preserving the life of a Muslim (as long as it is possible) is obligatory, stopping the treatment process is not acceptable and medical and revival measures are even necessary.

In the second case, the drug is injected to the patient so accelerate his/her death (active euthanasia). In this case also, Islamic scientists have considered this action as unauthorized (25) and even as murder. According to them, this is not only highly illegal but is also liable to prosecution.

#### **Divine blessing and illegality of suicide**

According to the Holy Quran, divine laws whether in terms of the obligations or the prohibitions are based on God's mercy and kindness and they are for the good and interest of human beings both at the individual and social level (26). As an example(27), illegality of murder is based on God's mercy and

kindness; according to the Quran, “O you who have believed, do not consume one another's wealth unjustly but only [in lawful] business by mutual consent. And do not kill yourselves [or one another]. Indeed, Allah is to you ever Merciful.”

Based on this verse, “And do not kill yourself” refers to any kind of suicidal action or killing others and the Holy Quran considers this as a blessing and mercy from God to His servants: “Indeed, Allah is to you ever Merciful” (26).

It should be noted that although human beings have been given the will to get involved with their properties within the limits specified by wisdom and jurisprudence, they have not been given the right to interfere in their life and end it because experts believe that, as required by the jurisprudence principle derived from the verse “people have dominance over their properties,” humans can have control over their properties not their life (28). Even in the case of properties, interference has to be within the limits specified by wisdom and jurisprudence (9)

#### **The obligation of preserving life based on the narrations (from the Prophet and Imams)**

As mentioned in the section related to the verses from the Quran, there are some verses that authorize some prohibitions under critical conditions. Although these verses concern the edibles, Islamic scientists do not confine emergency conditions to the edibles and believe they can be applied to other cases as well (through induction)(29,30) .

There are numerous narrations from Imams (peace be upon them) related to the critical conditions in the narrations books including *Vasa'el ash-Shia*. Here we are going to mention some (31).

1) There are nothing prohibited by Allah unless He considered it as halal (legal) for someone who is under critical conditions(32).

2) Imam Sadeq (peace be upon him) said “Anyone who has to eat dead animals meat, blood and pig meat under critical conditions and does not eat them until s/he dies, s/he has practiced atheism (33). It seems like that Imam Sadeq has considered the need to resolve emergency conditions as a religious obligation and has taken refusal to arrange for them as atheism and opposition to the Islamic scientists (31).

3) Experts believe that the most important reason about critical conditions has been mentioned in a narration known as the ‘narration of resolution’, which says “رُفِعَ عَنْ أُمَّتِي تِسْعَةٌ: الْخَطَأُ، وَالنَّسْيَانُ، وَمَا أُكْرِهُوا عَلَيْهِ، وَمَا لَا يَعْلَمُونَ، وَمَا لَا يَطِيقُونَ، وَمَا اضْطُرُّوا إِلَيْهِ، وَالْحَسَدُ، وَالطَّيْرَةَ، وَالتَّفَكُّرَ فِي الْوَسْوَاسَةِ فِي الْخَلْقِ مَا لَمْ يَنْطِقْ بِشَفَةِ (In nine cases, my nation has been relieved of responsibility: in error, forgetting, what they are forced to do, what they do not know, what is beyond their ability, compulsion, jealousy, jinx, and tempting thinking about the creation as long as it is not verbalized.” This statement has been cited from the prophet and the content of the statement is that God has removed nine things from the Islamic Umma out of mercy, one of which is related to doing something in an emergency (11,31).

#### **Dissimulation (Taghiah) and the obligation of preserving life**

Islamic teachings are based on wisdom and consistent with human fitrat (nature) and include all dimensions of life. Sometimes, in human life, due to the existence of different beliefs and tastes, human beings have to do something against their will to preserve their life or other interests. By observing particular principles and conditions, Islam has recommended this to its followers in its teachings (34). Accordingly, some experts have mentioned preservation of life as the main reason for dissimulation (35) (Taghiah) in a way that you can even practice dissimulation in religious principles to save your life (36). Therefore, the Quran (37) holds that those who are made by polytheists to deny their belief in God and to (apparently) disbelieve in God but their heart is full of belief (in God) are distant from God's wrath and anger (26). For this reason, according to the narrations, “Someone who does not practice dissimulation (Taghiah) is not a believer.”(38) As Imam Bagher says, “dissimulation is my and my forefathers’ belief.”(39) However, it should be noted that some of the narrations related to dissimulation concern any emergency one may face. For example, Imam Bagher (pbuh) said “Dissimulation concerns any emergency the son of Adam (human being) finds him/herself in; God authorized it for him/her.” (40)

In addition to the narrations, experts have argued for dissimulation (Taghiah) based on logical reasons. According to them, whenever

human life is at risk or faced with an oppression and dissimulation can be practiced to avoid the risk, human wisdom prefers dissimulation (40). Therefore, the necessity to preserve life is a kind of dissimulation.

#### **The obligation of preserving life from the perspective of Islamic scientists**

Based on the Quran, narrations and wisdom, Islamic scientists hold that preservation of life is an obligation. By examining their views, it can be found that they have raised the issue of preserving life when talking about eating dead animals meat and other prohibitions in emergencies believing that for preserving human life and survival purposes, it is necessary to eat as much taboo food as to save one's life(41-43). However, the obligation of preserving life is not confined to eating dead animals meat or eating other foods considered as taboo but can apply to the obligation of preserving one's or others' life, as in the following cases: If one has to borrow money to save one's life, it is an obligation for the person to do that (44).

If someone is drowning and saving his/her life requires informing others (to come and save

him/her), informing the people becomes an obligation(45).

If saving someone's life requires postponing one's prayers, postponing the prayers is an obligation (46).

#### **Limitations of the study and suggestions for further research**

One of the limitations of the study was the lack of statistical analysis and experimental investigation in the area of euthanasia and the few studies conducted on this topic are mainly based on jurisprudence and legal. Therefore, it is suggested that experts in the country investigate this issue based on experimental evidence.

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#### **Conflict of interest**

Authors declare no conflict of interest.

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