

Dear all

In order to gain community cooperation, it is essential that the community's awareness be raised. Once awareness has been raised, the community should be given assistance in identifying ways to solve the problem and developing plans and strategies. Without awareness of the problem, or the motivation to solve it, the community will not respond and the problem will never be solved or controlled. The indigenous response based on the intrinsic values help the communities in dealing with the issues more effectively. Today we are sharing an article which shows how Buddhist communities have used their intrinsic values to deal with the issue and have made it easier for Buddhist community to identify the issue and deal with it. Can we not do some thing similar in Pakistan, which can make it easier for our people to deal with it?

The Four Noble Truths of AIDS

The Buddha taught about suffering. He taught the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering and the path leading to the cessation of suffering. AIDS is suffering. And just as there is a cause for suffering, there is also a cause for AIDS. The cessation of AIDS also exists and there is a path leading to the cessation of AIDS.

The Buddha defined suffering as birth, old age, sickness and death. Getting what one wants is suffering, he said. And being separated from the things one loves is also suffering.

To define AIDS in terms of suffering we can say that being infected with HIV is suffering. Being ostracized and discriminated against is suffering. Loss of income through lack of employment is suffering. Seeing schools close their doors to innocent children is suffering. Falling ill and dying of AIDS is suffering. The suffering of AIDS does not stop with the individual, however, but also extends into the family and the community. Parents and children of people with AIDS also suffer.

A family suffers when its main breadwinner becomes infected with HIV and can no longer work to earn the money required to purchase daily needs. Parents suffer as they struggle to find the money needed to pay for their children's treatment. They suffer as they watch their children grow weak, fall ill and eventually die from AIDS. Children suffer when they are teased and taunted by others because their parents have HIV/AIDS. They suffer when they find that schools and communities will not accept them. Children suffer when they see their parents, once a strong and healthy support, fade into thin, emaciated figures. They suffer when they see the ones they love die, leaving them orphaned, alone and insecure.

The community suffers through the loss of its workforce to HIV/AIDS. It suffers when it becomes divided and when income once generated by strong, healthy people is no longer available to finance community development. It suffers as it watches its younger generation grow up alone, insecure and uneducated. The nation also suffers through the loss of its workforce. It suffers through loss of productivity, resulting in loss of income or a deficit in the national budget. It suffers as it spends vast amounts of money it cannot afford to finance treatment for people who cannot be cured. The nation suffers as it watches its defenses and security weakened through the loss of its once healthy, young men and women.

Even religion suffers. Monks suffer as fewer and fewer people provide less and less food on morning alms round. They suffer when there is no one to contribute to the construction or maintenance of temples. They suffer when they see that there are no longer any young men to be ordained as monks, or young boys to be ordained as novices, leaving temples to become deserted and the religion to die. Yes, AIDS is suffering.

But, if we look at the teachings of the Buddha, we will see that there is a cause for suffering. As the Buddha has taught, ignorance is the cause of suffering. What causes the suffering of AIDS?

It is also ignorance. Ignorance is the root cause for the suffering of AIDS.

Ignorance has caused more suffering and done more damage than the virus itself. Through ignorance, millions of people have been infected with HIV. Ignorance on how to live with HIV has resulted in the rapid and often unnecessary deterioration in health for many. Ignorance on the condition has led to discrimination and stigmatization, has divided communities and workplaces, closed classroom doors to innocent children and caused people to elect to die of their own hand rather than die of AIDS.

The Buddha taught that every condition has an opposite condition. Where there is sadness there is happiness, where there is ignorance there is knowledge, where there is suffering there is non-suffering.

The suffering of AIDS also has an opposite and that is the non-suffering of AIDS.

He also taught the way to end suffering by eliminating it at the cause - ignorance. Where there is knowledge, there is no ignorance and consequently no suffering.

The teachings of the Buddha can also be applied to HIV/AIDS. If we overcome the ignorance that surrounds AIDS and gives birth to all the suffering of AIDS, we can achieve the state where there is no suffering from AIDS.

The Noble Eight-Fold Path and AIDS

The Buddhist way to overcome suffering is by following the Noble Eight-fold Path. Many in the past have traveled this path successfully and it can be followed in the present.

The first step on the Noble Eight-fold Path is

Right Understanding (*Sammaditthi*). With right understanding about HIV and AIDS, people will not get infected, fall ill and die. Right understanding can also prevent the prejudiced attitudes and discriminatory behaviour that have a devastating impact on the person with HIV, the family and the community.

Right Thought (*Sammāsankappa*) is the second step on the Noble Eight-Fold Path. Right thought about HIV/AIDS helps to prevent risk behavior. It also helps to overcome prejudice and discrimination in the community. With right thought people with HIV/AIDS will be able to live happier and healthier lives and the community will remain united and prosper

Right Speech (*Sammavaca*), the third step on the Noble Eight-Fold Path, is necessary to correct any misconceptions, superstitions and false-beliefs about HIV/AIDS. With right speech, there will be no malicious gossip or harmful talk about people with HIV/AIDS. Children will not be teased and taunted and the community will live in harmony. People who practice right speech will not lie or speak falsely about their behaviour or their condition.

Right Action (*Sammakammanta*) means performing wholesome acts that will not lead to risk behaviour and abstaining from behaviour that will put one at risk of being infected with HIV. It also means supportive behaviour such as showing compassion (Metta) and loving-kindness (Karuna) to people with HIV/AIDS and their families. This is the fourth step on the Noble Eight-Fold Path.

Right Livelihood (*Samma-ajiva*) is the fifth step on the Noble Eight-Fold Path. There are certain professions that put one at greater risk of contracting HIV than other professions. They include working in the entertainment industry such as in pubs and bars, working in the commercial sex industry, dealing in alcohol and narcotics. By avoiding these professions one is practicing right livelihood and is at less risk of contracting AIDS.

Right Effort (*Sammavayama*) means applying effort in controlling personal behavior, saying no and not giving into peer pressure to engage in risk behavior. It also means applying effort in developing understanding and compassion, and in overcoming prejudiced attitudes. With right effort, a person with HIV/AIDS will be able to learn more about the condition, take care of personal health and live a longer, happier and more peaceful life. By applying right effort, one is treading the 6th step on the Noble Eight-Fold Path.

Right Mindfulness (*Sammasati*). This is the 7th step on the Noble Eight-Fold Path. The Buddha has taught that mindfulness should be practiced at all times. Without mindfulness in body, speech and mind, a person is more likely to do, say and think wrong things. A person who is not mindful can easily be led into performing unwholesome acts that could result in infection with HIV. When there is no mindfulness, a person could say things which are incorrect, harmful and damaging, not only to himself but also to others. Wrong mindfulness can also cause unwholesome thoughts to arise that could lead to risk or damaging behavior.

Right Concentration (*Sammasamadhi*) Without concentration, the last step on the Noble Eight-Fold Path, a person becomes easily distracted, forgets what is wholesome and what is unwholesome, and is prone to perform acts that could lead to infection with HIV. Lack of concentration can also result in doing and saying things that are harmful to one and others. Concentration is also excellent for maintaining equanimity and calm which is very conducive to good health. A person with HIV who is able to maintain concentration will be able to enjoy long and peaceful life.

Thus, when looked from at from a Buddhist perspective, AIDS can be prevented all the damaging impacts can be prevented.

PNAC Resource Centre

Noman Farooq

Senior program Associate

PAKISTAN NATIONAL AIDS CONSORTIUM

House No 441, Street 57, Sector I 8/3 Islamabad

Email: noman@pnac.net.pk

www.pnac.net.pk

www.aidspnac.org