



Religion is a strong modifier of social behavior in many cultures. Patients who otherwise resist behavioural change will happily alter their lifestyle, diet or exercise habits if given religious or moral or 'supernatural' sanction.

Preachers, priests, 'sadhus' and 'imams' thus have a major effect on the health care-related behaviour of the community. A simple pro-health message inserted at the end of a sermon, e.g. get your kidneys checked, or do not watch TV more than 30 minutes a day, helps promote good lifestyle practices.

Even more efficient as a behaviour modification technique is practical demonstration by religious leaders of exercise or nutrition-related interventions. Beginning and ending a lecture with simple isokinetic or isotonic upper limb exercises, and distributing low-calorie fruits as 'communion' or 'prasad' instead of high-calorie foods, are methods of conveying these habits to the public.

### **Learning from the scriptures:**

It is often said that Indians are fatalists who leave everything to fate or to God. The excuse patients usually quote is: "Our religion tells us that bodily sufferings are a result of sins incurred in our past life". This excuse is used to avoid taking medicines or insulin, and to explain inertia on part of the patient. "My sugar levels are always 400: they will never come down."

What do our scriptures actually teach us? Lord Krishna exhorted Arjuna to fight the Mahabharata, not to bow before his enemies. Lord Ram and Hanumanji fought Ravana and his army of demons. Hindu scriptures talk of Gods fighting 'asuras' whenever they are attacked. Sikh and Islamic tradition boast of fighting against injustice (and winning). Christianity speaks of Lord Jesus healing the sick, thus giving divine approval to our fight against illness.

What, then, do we learn from the scriptures? We learn to fight disease, to fight diabetes, to fight its complications. We learn not to admit defeat, but to persevere. Because if we persevere, victory will be ours.

We try to achieve primary prevention (prevention of diabetes) in our community. If we do not succeed, we should not lose heart. We should aim for secondary (prevention of complications) or tertiary prevention (minimization of disability). In simple terms, try to prevent diabetes. If that is not possible, try to prevent nephropathy. If even that is not possible, try to prevent chronic renal failure, and end-state renal disease. If even that is not possible, offer dialysis or renal transplant so that the patient's quality of life improves.

This, in a nutshell, is what our scriptures teach us. Keep on fighting until you succeed. Keep on trying to control diabetes until you succeed. Not taking care of your health is an insult to God.

Srimad Bhagwad Gita: Chapter 2

37 O Son of Kunta, either you will be killed on the battlefield and attain the heavenly planets, or you will conquer and enjoy the earthly kingdom. Therefore, get up and fight with determination.

38 Do thou fight for the sake of fighting, without considering happiness or distress, loss or gain, victory or defeat - and, by so doing, you will never incur sin.

### **INTERPRETATION**

You must fight diabetes with determination. Fight for the sake of fighting. God has given you your body as 'Prasad'. It is your moral duty to take care of it.



Srimad Bhagwad Gita: Chapter 3

4. Not by merely abstaining from work can one achieve freedom from reaction, nor by renunciation alone can one attain perfection.

8. Perform your prescribed duty, which is better than not working. A man cannot even maintain his physical body without work.

21. Whatever action a great man performs, common men follow. And whatever standards he sets by exemplary acts, all the world pursues.

22. O Son of Prtha, no work is prescribed for Me within all the three planetary systems. Nor am I in want of anything, nor have I the need to obtain anything - and yet I am engaged in work.

**INTERPRETATION**

One must work or exercise to maintain his body and control diabetes. Lord Krishna works in spite of the fact that he does not need to do anything. We must follow his example.

Srimad Bhagwad Gita: Chapter-9

26. If one offers Me with love and devotion a leaf, a flower, fruit or water, I will accept it.

**INTERPRETATION**

The Lord accepts leaves (vegetables) and fruits happily. The same foods are good for health. Diabetics should take foods from 'anaj mandi', 'sabzi mandi' and 'fruit mandi', while avoiding processed or refined foods.

Srimad Bhagwad Gita: Chapter 11

34 The Blessed Lord said: Simply fight, and you will vanquish your enemies.

**INTERPRETATION**

Lord Krishna teaches us to fight diabetes and tells us that we will win. Just as we have faith in Him, we should have faith in his weapons (drugs, diet, exercise and education). These weapons will help us win the battle against diabetes.

Srimad Bhagwad Gita: Chapter-14

17 From the mode of goodness real knowledge develops; from the mode of passion, greed develops, and from the mode of ignorance, foolishness, madness and illusion develop.

18. Those situated in the mode of goodness gradually go upward to the higher planets, those in the mode of passion live on the earthly planets; and those in ignorance go down to the hellish worlds.

**INTERPRETATION**

One should seek knowledge and achieve good control of diabetes. One should avoid passionate behaviour like binge-eating or stopping medicines. Ignorance about diabetes is a sin: ask your counsellor about your disease.

Srimad Bhagwad Gita: Chapter 16

23. One who acts whimsically, not caring for the regulations of the scriptures, can never attain perfection, nor happiness, nor the supreme destination.



#### INTERPRETATION

One should seek medical aid and take drugs/ diet prescription in a regular manner. This will help you attain perfect blood glucose.

#### Srimad Bhagwad Gita: Chapter 17

9 Food that is too bitter, too sour, too salty, to pungent, too dry or too hot causes distress, misery and disease. Such food is very dear to those in the mode of passion.

10 Foods prepared more than three hours before being eaten, which are tasteless, juiceless and decomposed, which have a bad smell, and which consists of remnants and untouchable things are very dear to those in the mode of darkness.

#### INTERPRETATION

Avoid extremes of diet. Follow the diet prescribed to you so that you can achieve good control. Do not go on starvation diets. Do not eat left overs or small pieces of sweets, thinking that you are saving money by consuming them.

#### Srimad Bhagwad Gita: Chapter 18

7. Prescribed duties should never be renounced. If, by illusion, one gives up his prescribed duties, such renunciation is said to be in the mode of ignorance.

8. Anyone who gives up prescribed duties as troublesome, or out of fear, is said to be in the mode of passion. Such action never leads to the elevation of renunciation.

9. O Arjuna, if one does everything as a matter of duty and gives up attachment to the result of his work, his renunciation is said to be in the mode of goodness.

#### INTERPRETATION

Keep on trying to manage diabetes. Do not remain in the illusion that 'sugar' has not bad effects or does not harm you. Do not avoid fighting diabetes just because it is difficult or you are afraid of getting injections. Such action will never lead to good health or goodness.

#### Srimad Bhagwad Gita: Chapter 18

48 Every endeavor is covered with some sort of fault, just as fire is covered by smoke. Therefore, one should not give up the work which is born of his nature. O Son of Kunti, even if such work is full of fault.

#### INTERPRETATION

It is certainly difficult to control diabetes, and there may be shortcomings, either on part of the patient or the physician. This does not mean that one should not try. In fact, one should try harder.

These simple, but eternal, respect messages can be used to spread diabetes awareness amongst individuals and communities. There is a need to include verses from scriptures of other religions to make diabetes awareness a truly global movement.

Sanjay Kalra.  
Bharti Kalra.