132519 - Facts about schizophrenia; is the sufferer still accountable?

the question

Are those who suffer from mental disorders such as schizophrenia no longer accountable for prayer and other obligatory duties?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

The accountable person is one who is fit to be addressed by the commands and prohibitions, so that he will be punished if he goes against that. Hence the scholars defined the accountable person as someone who is qualified to comply with religious instructions. One of the most important characteristics that make him qualified for that is soundness of mind; therefore one who is insane is not accountable. That is indicated by the words of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him): “The Pen has been lifted from three: from the sleeper until he awakens, from the child until he reaches puberty and from the insane person until he comes to his senses.” Narrated by at-Tirmidhi (1423); classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh at-Tirmidhi.

It says in al-Mawsoo‘ah al-Fiqhiyyah (13/249):

Being qualified to comply with religious instruction means being fit to be subject to the rights and duties prescribed in Islamic teaching, so that some rights will be proven for him and some duties and commitments will be obligatory for him…. Thus it is known that being qualified is the criterion for accountability. End quote.

Secondly:

Schizophrenia is a mental disorder, which is sometimes mistakenly called “split personality”.

Dr. Yaasir Bakkaar said:

There is no basis for what some people say about the schizophrenic patient having two personalities in one body. This is something that was invented by the writers of movie scripts. In reality, the patient is suffering from a mental disorder that causes a disconnect between reason, emotions and behaviour.

He also said:

Schizophrenia is a chronic mental disorder that affects several brain functions, such as cognition, understanding, emotions and behaviour. End quote.

Dr. Husayn ‘Abd al-Qaadir – a mental health consultant – said:

Psychological studies confirm that schizophrenia is a condition that affects 1% of people; the affected person is described as having a mental disorder. Schizophrenia is a chronic illness that the patient will suffer from for the rest of his life. End quote.

As for the symptoms of this disease, it affects a person’s cognition, ability to feel emotion, and understanding; it causes loss of willpower and of control over behaviour.

With regard to willpower, the schizophrenic patient loses a great deal of willpower and is unable to take any decision; it has a negative impact on his behaviour, then he loses self-awareness.

In terms of behaviour, the schizophrenic patient loses interest in himself, his personal hygiene and his health in general. He pays no attention to what happens around him on a daily basis, and he may exhibit strange patterns of behaviour, such as repeated movements; or phases of agitation, mania or aggression; or he may withdraw from people and stop going to the mosque or to see his friends; or he may lose interest in his surroundings and keep away from people. He also neglects his studies and his work completely, to the extent that he is dismissed, and he sits cocooned in his imaginary world.

End quote from a description given by some specialists.

By reflecting upon the reality of this mental illness and its symptoms, it becomes clear that the schizophrenic patient may suffer from it most of the time or all of the time, which makes him live in another world. At these times, he is not accountable until this phase passes.

This is what a specialist has to say about this matter:

Dr. Sayyid al-Barjeesi said – explaining what the schizophrenic patient suffers from in terms of symptoms:

Delusions: this refers to false beliefs that are deeply rooted in his mind and it is very difficult to convince him on the basis of logic that these ideas are not true. The presence of delusions does not indicate that his intelligence is deteriorating, because they have nothing to do with intelligence. The most significant delusions in schizophrenia are:

1. Paranoia, where the patient believes that people are after him, or that the security forces are tracking his every move, or that some people hate him and want to get rid of him, either by putting poison in his food or by some other means.
2. Megalomania, where the patient believes that he is the smartest and strongest of all people, or that he is a messenger sent to guide people, or that he is a great scholar, or that he is an inventor, or that he has been given supernatural powers, or that he has knowledge of the unseen.
3. Misinterpretation of things, where he thinks that what people say hints at him or refers to him, and believes that every move on the part of people around him is referring to or hinting at his behaviour. This causes him to either be in a state of continual contact with society, or to withdraw from people.
4. Delusions of being subject to influences, where the patient thinks that he is under the influence of either internal or external forces, and he becomes a prisoner to these thoughts, which may involve imaginary laser beams, audible vibrations or wireless vibrations and the like.

End quote.

Conclusion:

Based on the above discussion on the definition of accountability from an Islamic point of view, what makes a person qualified to be accountable, and what is expected of him, and based on what we have discussed about the nature of this illness and its symptoms and impact, we think that the person who is affected by it does not meet the conditions of accountability, especially in the chronic, later stages of the illness. However, when he is in a phase in which he has self-awareness and is able to control his actions and his thinking, he is accountable and must comply with the commands and prohibitions of Allah.

What we have said above has to do with duties towards Allah, may He be exalted, such as prayer, fasting and Hajj. However, with regard to duties towards other people, he is liable for any damage he may cause to their property, and he is required to give zakaah on his wealth, because these are obligatory duties for which it is not stipulated that one should be accountable for them to be obligatory.

And Allah knows best.