



Dr. Allan Handysides



Dr. Allan Handysides is currently director of health ministries for the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Prior to his present position he practiced the last twelve years as a physician in Toronto, Canada. He has also previously been a teaching fellow and staff member at the Hospital for Sick Children. Handysides served as medical director of Maluti Adventist hospital in Africa (1979) and medical director for the Trans-Africa division (1981). Dr. Handysides has two specialties: Obstetrics/Gynecology and Pediatrics. He was ordained as a minister in Africa (1983).

Born in WWII England, Handysides went to South Africa in 1954, where he attended Capetown University. Later he transferred to Edinburgh University (medical degree 1963). He did preregistration internships in London and in Edinburgh at the Royal Edinburgh Infirmary. Handysides began a residency in pediatrics at the Hospital for Sick Children (1964) and later a residency in Obstetrics and Gynecology (1975).

S*habbat Shalom: Do we have a Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) concept of health? If, yes, how would you define or describe it?*

Handysides: Yes, Seventh-day Adventists have a clear concept of health. We see it as a beautiful gift from God—of vibrant mental, physical, spiritual, and social wholeness. It is not some state of the absence of disease, but a positive condition of well-being. We recognize this is not of our own making, but God's creation. We see disease as a result of the brokenness of the human condition caused by the imperfections of our nature, that the separation from God has caused.

***Shabbat Shalom:* Why is health important for Seventh-day Adventist people?**

Handysides: Health is so important to us because we cherish a gift God has given us. Health enables us have clear and lucid minds that can appreciate God's love and will for us. Vigorous health enables us to be joyful and vivid witnesses to

truth, love, and compassion. Adventists believe we live in close proximity to the second return of Jesus and our emphasis on health is an attractive aspect of Christian living that may magnify the beauty of salvation to those who seek for results of Christian living in the present as well as the future.

***Shabbat Shalom:* Is SDA diet related to health or other considerations?**

Vigorous health enables us to be joyful and vivid witnesses to truth, love, and compassion.

Handysides: The SDA diet is actually not easy to define. The scriptural basis defines our church position. This is the avoidance of unclean foods, and the Old Testament injunction against certain meats, such as pork, scavenging and preying animals, are followed. We follow these instructions believing them to have basis in health, but also in faith—believing that God knows best even if we can-

not understand. There may well be further implications than purely health issues here, and the injunction not to eat the blood, for therein is the life, may have a spiritual protection against ideas that come from animism. The admonition to avoid the fat seems explicable on a health basis, but there may be a more profound reason.

Believing our body to be the temple of the Holy Spirit, we also strive for better health, and following the instruction given to our early church founders through Ellen White, many are lacto-ovo vegetarians. This diet has been shown to result in increased longevity. Total vegetarianism is promoted by our most zealous health promoters, but the basis for this is not as scientifically solid, nor as explicit in the writings of Ellen White, and can be an area of disagreement even between strong health proponents.

Shabbat Shalom: How is ethics related to health?

Handysides: Ethics are indeed complex and increasingly difficult to define in an age where genetic manipulation, gene therapy, stem-cell research, and genetic-disease patterns are increasingly understood. The pursuit of health is a laudable thing, yet the issues of human rights, and concepts of personhood, ensoulment, are indeed complex.

Health issues can confound the wisest of us, and prayer, meditation, and a willingness to be led by the Spirit are very much needed. Sometimes the cacophony of human opinion drowns out the still, small voice of God. Most issues of this complexity will need to be worked out in a close personal relation-

ship between the individual and one's Lord. So often our strident voices, empowered by proud

The pursuit of health is a laudable thing, yet the issues of human rights, and concepts of personhood, ensoulment, are indeed complex.

conviction, scarcely allow persons to think for themselves.

Shabbat Shalom: What are the various areas of SDA life that are concerned with health?

Handysides: SDA life involves our personal lifestyle, which reflects our relationship and communion with God, but Adventists believe strongly in a ministry of healing—a compas-



sionate outpouring of love in the healing touch of love to others. We believe all members are health ministers, be it in a gentle caress or the high-tech surgical or proton-powered therapies. Our members cover a variety of disciplines, but all are motivated by a desire to help others and alleviate suffering. We also are strong proponents of prevention, and health ministries encompass those areas, such as drug prevention, behavioral modification, etc., through establishing of wholesome, meaningful, loving relationships, especially with the youth.

Shabbat Shalom: Are

Seventh-day Adventists in general healthier than other people? If yes, how do you explain it?

Handysides: Seventh-day Adventists are generally healthier than others and live between seven and fourteen years longer than the average American (depending on the intensity with which they adhere to recommended health measures). Adventists do not smoke or drink when following the Adventist lifestyle. Those two measures prolong life. Then the Adventist health studies have clearly shown benefits of our sense of community and support in church life, and Vegetarianism, at least Lacto-ovo Vegetarianism, and even benefits from the reduced meat consumption and increased vegetable and fruit intake that many nonvegetarian Adventists follow.

Shabbat Shalom: What principles of health are promoted by Seventh-day Adventism?

Handysides: The guiding principles of health followed by Adventists can be summarized in temperance, which means, for Adventists, moderation in things good for one and abstinence from poisons. Tobacco, alcohol, and street drugs are poisons and we avoid them. Moderation in good things, even such as exercise, rest, and work, all play a role in making a well-rounded lifestyle. The emphasis on nature as God's creation makes us seek natural foods and solutions to everyday problems.

Shabbat Shalom: We have a very important tradition which emphasizes medical studies in the Adventist community and there are even three Adventist Medical Schools. How do you explain this?

Handysides: I would explain this as being an outgrowth of several factors. Our health emphasis, of course, is one important factor. The emphasis on service to others is another. We, as a church, have also seen health services as a ministry, so many who feel a call to ministry, but not in the pulpit, have felt the lure of health ministry. Then too, our emphasis on mission and medical mission is a major factor. Our first medical school was called a College of Medical Evangelists. The school in Argentina displays a strong emphasis on evangelism, even today. Then perhaps our Sabbath-keeping has played a role in that young people have sought self-regulating occupations to avoid Sabbath work, and even emergency medical work is seen as being like the lifting of the ox from the pit. After all, Jesus often healed on Sabbath.

Shabbat Shalom: Do we have an Adventist tradition of vegetarianism? How do you

account for this?

Handysides: The Adventist tradition of vegetarianism grew out of health concerns for a work force that was sickly, and inspired insights given to Ellen White on the superiority of vegetarianism. This was in an era of reform on health issues in many parts of the world, and indeed the moderate approach taken by Ellen White even in the face of

We believe all members are health ministers, be it in a gentle caress or the high-tech surgical or proton-powered therapies

what she called extremists has kept the church healthy and viable.

Vegetarianism carries with it dangers of New Age philosophy, which is really a resurgence of old age eastern mysticism and spiritism. Some church members, unwittingly swayed by ide-

ologies derived from these sources, seek to encourage many forms of food and dietary practices whose foundation is not healthful living but a New Age spirituality. Our tradition is based on vegetarianism—being healthy.

Shabbat Shalom: What is the message of health that Adventists have for the world?

Handysides: Our message for the world is that God loves us and cares for us. His wish is that we may prosper and be in health, even as our souls prosper. In fact, Adventists believe that the power of life given us by God, along with our physical body, is indeed the soul. This being the case, wholeness of life as lived in the fullness of a spiritual relationship with God and a social relationship with others is maximized by our good health.



*The door that is closed to a Mitzvah is open to the physician.
(Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah, 6, 1).*