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AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE ON EPIDEMICS, PANDEMICS AND CONTAGIOUS DISEASES AND PREVENTIVE MEASURES PRESCRIBED BY ISLAM



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INTRODUCTION

How does Islam explain the occurrence of certain contagious diseases such as plague epidemics or the coronavirus pandemic?

Seydatuna Aysha (RA) writes that he asked the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) to explain the meaning of an epidemic. He replied, “It is a torment that Allah sends on whom HE wills and a Mercy for believers. If it occurs within a country, whoever remains and is patient, believing that whatever shall befall him is God’s will, will be rewarded as a martyr.”

عَنْ عَائِشَةَ أَنَّهَا سَأَلَتْ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ عَنِ
الطَّاعُونَ فَأَخْبَرَنِي أَنَّهُ عَذَابٌ يَبْعَثُهُ اللَّهُ عَلَى مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ
جَعَلَهُ رَحْمَةً لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ فَلَيْسَ مِنْ أَحَدٍ يَقَعُ الطَّاعُونَ فَيَمُوتُ فِي
بَلَدِهِ صَابِرًا مُحْتَسِبًا يَعْلَمُ أَنَّهُ لَا يُصِيبُهُ إِلَّا مَا كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَهُ إِلَّا كَانَ
لَهُ مِثْلُ أَجْرِ شَهِيدٍ

Contextualization (MC Diop):

According to the Hadith of Seydatuna Aysha (RA), no one can accuse any individual or any specific community of being the cause of an epidemic since no one can say with certainty the precise evil which has given rise to a divine action such as this.

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Some have said that an epidemic will not affect believers or a country where there are Saints. Is this true?

Our Mother, Umu Salamata (RA) asked the Prophet (PBUH): “Will Allah (SWT) put us through such trials as mass deaths when there are Saints among us?” He replied: **“Yes, even when there are Saints, HE will put one through such trials when there is excessive evil.”**

قالت أم سلمة: يا رسول الله أنهلك وفينا الصالحون؟ فقال رسول الله (ص): نعم إذا
كثر الخبث

History informs us that in the year 75 AH (AD 639), during the Khilafa of Seyduna Oumar (RA), more than 1,000 Muslims lost their lives in the plague of Emmaus in Syria. Among the victims of the plague were Companions of saintly spiritual holiness: Mu'âz Ibn Jabal, Abou 'Ubayda Ibnul Jarrâh, Churahbîl Ibn Hassanata, Al Fadl Ibn 'Abas, Yazîd Ibn Abi Soufyan, Suhayl Ibn 'Amr, Abou Jandal Ibn Suhayl Ibn 'Amr and other Noble Companions.

ومات في طاعون عمواس من المسلمين بضع وعشرين ألفا منهم أبو عبيدة بن الجراح ومعاذ بن جبل والفضل بن عباس وشرحبيل بن حسنة وسهيل بن عمر ويزيد بن أبي سفيان وأبو جندل بن سهيل بن عمر

Contextualization (MC Diop):

The death of Companions of the Prophet (PBUH), and not just any Companions, during an epidemic demonstrates that there is no Islamic foundation for asserting that certain people will be spared during an epidemic, including believers or a country where there are Saints. No one is protected from the epidemic except those whom Allah (SWT) has decided to spare.

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GENERAL RELIGIOUS RECOMMENDATIONS

What should be people's attitude when faced with a pandemic like the COVID-19?

The general Islamic rule during insecure times such as a pandemic is to protect oneself, as stated in the Qu'ran :

“Believers, take precautions.”

(النساء) خذوا حذرکم V 71 S La Femme

According to the Hadith of Abdourahmane Ibn 'Awf, the Prophet (PBUH) said: **“When an epidemic breaks out in the land where you are, do not leave and flee from it. When you hear of an epidemic outbreak in another land, do not go there.”**

عن عبد الرحمن بن عوف أن النبي (ص) قال: "فإذا وقع بأرض أنتم فيها فلا تخرجوا منها فرارا منه وإذا سمعتم به بأرض فلا تدخلوا عليه

The Qur'an refers us to specialists: **“Ask scholars and specialists if you do not know.”** (S The Bee, V 43 and S The Prophets V 7).

فاسألوا أهل الذكر إن كنتم لا تعلمون (النحل آية 43 والأنبياء آية 7)

Contextualization (MC Diop):

The aforementioned
verse compels
us to follow the
recommendations of
health specialists during
this period of coronavirus
pandemic. The measures
that doctors worldwide
recommend today are in
alignment with directions
provided in the
Qur'an and Sunnah.

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SPECIFIC RELIGIOUS RECOMMENDATIONS

What does Islam specifically recommend for preventing a disease such as the COVID-19 pandemic from spreading throughout a community?

The Prophet (PBUH) said: **“Avoid contact between people who are contaminated and those who are not contaminated.”** يورِدُن

لَا يُرِدَنَّ مُمَرِّضٌ عَلَى مُصِحِّح

Contextualization (MC Diop):

This verse of the Prophet (PBUH) indicates we should follow the recommendations of health specialists during epidemics such as the coronavirus pandemic in order to avoid the spread of infectious disease. When there is a high risk of contagion within a population, strict measures need to be taken to ensure individuals who are infected do not contaminate those who are not infected.

This may eventually lead to an order for confinement.

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What other preventive measures does Islam specifically recommend?

✦ Prohibit travel

The Prophet (PBUH) said: **“When there is an outbreak of an epidemic in another land, do not go there! If there is an epidemic in your land, do not leave.”**

إذا سمعتم بالطاعون بأرض فلا تدخلوها وإذا وقع بأرض وأنتم بها فلا تخرجوا منها

✦ Ensure personal and public cleanliness and hygiene

The Prophet (PBUH) said: **“When you do your ablutions, clean your nostrils with water and when you use the latrine, clean yourself with water...and when you wake up, wash your hands before putting them anywhere, because you don’t know where your hand has spent the night.”**

قال النبي (ص): إذا توضأ أحدكم فليجعل في أنفه ثم لينثر ومن استجمر فليوتر وإذا استيقظ أحدكم من نومه فليغسل يده قبل أن يدخلها في وضوئه فإن أحدكم لا يدري أين باتت يده

Verses 43 S The Woman and 6 S The Table of the Qu’ran recommend using water in the toilet whenever possible.

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According to Seydatuna Aycha, the Prophet (PBUH) said:

- ▶ **“Be clean, Islam is clean.”**

عن عائشة قالت: قال رسول الله (ص): تنظفوا فإن الإسلام نظيف

- ▶ **“Cleanliness is half of Faith,”** said the Prophet (PBUH).

الطهور شطر الإيمان

- ▶ The Prophet (PBUH) said: **“Allah (SWT) is Clean and loves those who are clean... is Generous and loves those who are generous. Always keep your courtyards and public places clean.”**

إن الله طيب يحب الطيب نظيف يحب النظافة كريم يحب الكرم جواد يحب الجود
فنظفوا أنفسكم وساحاتكم

- ▶ The Qu’ran says: **“Allah (SWT) loves those who purify themselves.”** (S Repentance, V 108)

والله يحب المطهرين (التوبة 108)

Contextualization (MC DIOP):

Medical experts emphasize the critical importance of regularly washing the hands with soap for at least 20 seconds. This will kill the coronavirus. They have also shown that the coronavirus is found in feces. Thus, it is extremely important to wash hands with soap for at least 20 seconds after going to the toilet.

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✦ **Cover your mouth when coughing or yawning**

The Prophet (PBUH) said: “ **When you cough or yawn, place your hand in front of your face (mouth) and lower your head. ”**

إذا عطس أحدكم فليضع كفيه على وجهه وليخفض صوته

His followers reported that: “ **When the Prophet (PBUH) coughed, he put his hand or his handkerchief over his mouth to reduce the impact.”**

كان النبي (ص) إذا عطس وضع يده أو ثوبه على فيه وغض بها صوته

Contextualization (MC DIOP):

In the current context of coronavirus, these guidelines are recommended by doctors who consider them as ways to avoid spreading saliva, considered to be the main vector for contaminating others with the coronavirus. This is why they recommend coughing or sneezing into the crook of the elbow or into a tissue to be thrown into a waste basket immediately after use.

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- ✦ **Avoid shaking hands when greeting someone during the pandemic.**

Allah (STW) says in V 54 S The Livestock: **“When those who believe in Our teachings come to you, tell them: Peace be with you!”**

54 وإذا جاءك الذين يؤمنون بآياتنا فقل: سلام عليكم" (الأنعام

Contextualization (MC DIOP):

The only obligation in greeting in Islam is to say
"Peace be with you." السلام عليكم.
So when health experts judge that hugging or shaking hands can contaminate others, Muslims should refrain from doing so.

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- ✦ **Be careful in the way that you gather at mealtime and adapt to the coronavirus situation by eating separately.**

V 61 S The Light states: **“There is no harm in eating either together or eating separately.”**

ليس عليكم جناح أن تاكلوا جميعا أو أشتاتا: 61 سورة النور

- ✦ **Avoid gathering together for prayer according to the situation**

Health experts recommend avoiding gatherings in places of worship during the pandemic. This recommendation corresponds to the Prophet’s advice (PBUH).

- **Islam allows you to pray at home when the weather is bad:**

Imam Ibn Hajar (RA) says in Fathul Bâry Commentary on Bukhari: Bukhari (RA) reports that Abdallah Ibn Harith said: **“Abdallah Ibn Abas exhorted us one day of great rain and when the muezzin arrived at the phrase, *Come to prayer*, he ordered him to say: *Pray in your homes*. Everyone looked at each other in amazement. He said to them: *Do you disagree with me? Yet someone better than me (the Prophet) did it.*”**

عن عبد الله بن الحارث قال: خطبنا ابن عباس في يوم رزغ فلما بلغ المؤذن "حي على الصلاة" فأمره أن ينادي "الصلاة في الرحال" فنظر القوم بعضهم إلى بعض فقال: كأنكم أنكرتم هذا؟ إن هذا فعله من هو خير مني يعني النبي

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- **Islam allows you to pray at home in times of insecurity.**

Scholars say that in order to avoid Pharaoh's oppression of the Jews, Allah (SWT) advised the Jews to pray in their homes instead of the synagogue. V 87 S Jonah : says: **"We said to Moses and his brother: Make your home a place of worship and be diligent in prayer. Announce the good news to believers."**

وأوحينا إلى موسى وأخيه أن تبوءا لقومكما بمصر بيوتا واجعلوا بيوتكم قبلة وأقيموا الصلاة وبشر المؤمنين (يونس آية 87) ١

- **In situations where the right to health or life is threatened, Islam grants numerous exemptions related to worship.**
For example, you are allowed to do the following:

- suspend prayers in times of insecurity or when traveling
- temporarily suspend fasting during times of illness
- permanently end fasting for people with chronic illness
- not perform the pilgrimage in times of illness or insecurity
- shorten prayers and the number of Rakas when ill or in times of insecurity.

All of these exemptions are granted in accordance with the following Qu'ranic principle: **"Allah (SWT) does not want to cause you problems. On the contrary, HE wants to purify you and fill you with Favors so that you will be grateful."** (V 6 S La Table)

ما يريد الله ليجعل عليكم من حرج ولكن يريد ليطهركم وليتم نعمته عليكم لعلكم
تشكرون (المائدة 6)

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“Allah (SWT) wants to facilitate and not create difficulties.”
(V 185 S The Cow)

يريد الله بكم اليسر ولا يريد بكم العسر (البقرة)

Religious experts have interpreted these verses in through following Islamic Principles:

Principle 1: “Under certain circumstances, normal obligations need not be followed.”

قائدة: "الضرورة تبيح المحظورات"

Principle 2: “Avoiding something bad is more important that doing something good.”

وقائدة: "درء المفاسد أولى من جلب المصالح"

✦ **Protect yourself from getting sick and take care of yourself if you fall ill**

The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said: **“Allah (SWT) brings sickness, but provides cures and there is a remedy for every sickness. Therefore, heal yourselves! But not with things that are forbidden.”**

إن الله أنزل الداء والدواء وجعل لكل داء دواء فتداووا ولا تداووا بحرام

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✦ Place your trust in Allah (SWT)

Some people have said: **“We don’t need to follow the recommendations of health specialists; we just need to place our trust in Allah (SWT) to protect us from the COVID-19.”** However, Islam recommends something else.

Abderrahmane Ibn Abi Layla (RA) relates that a man asked the Prophet (PBUH): **“Do I place my trust in Allah (SWT) and leave my camel outside without attaching him or do I attach my camel outside and place my trust in Allah (SWT)?”** The Prophet (PBUH) told him: **“Attach it outside and place your trust in Allah (SWT).”**

عن عبد الرحمن بن أبي ليلى قال: قال رجل لرسول الله (ص): "أترك ناقتي أو بعيري وأتوكل أو أعقله وأتوكل؟ قال: بل أعقله وتوكل

✦ Ask for forgiveness and pray to Allah (SWT)

“God, protect me from skin disease, from leprosy, from mental illness and the consequences of other illnesses.”

اللهم إني أعوذ بك من البرص والجذام والجنون وسوء الأسقام

Contextualisation (MC Diop):

Attaching your camel in the current context means that we must take every precaution to avoid contracting the COVID-19 disease. In this way, we truly place our trust in Allah (STW).

It is only when we have taken all precautions, following the general and specific recommendations cited above, that our prayers have the most chance of being favorably accepted by Allah (SWT).