

Coronavirus: A punishment, Trail or Message from Allah? An overview of Islamic Teachings

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to find out Islamic teachings regarding the current pandemic of Covid-19 that whether it is punishment or trial or message from Allah? Starting with the description of corona virus as disease and its effects, the article gives a picture of Islamic teachings followed by findings and conclusion. It shows that regardless of the difficulties we are facing in Covid-19, Allah wants to draw His servants close to Him, and intends good for them. We must draw solace from the fact that Allah shows more mercy to His servants compared to a mother's mercy for her child. To deal with hardships and earn Allah's pleasure, we must regularly offer our gratitude towards Allah. This will also improve our health, both physically and mentally. Allah has promised the protection of His servants that ask for His mercy and forgiveness. Just like other calamities this pandemic can be face with piety, repentance, and patience. Along with faith in Allah, we should show clinical attitude in dealing with the pandemic, we should follow the guidelines of health experts, and take necessary measures along with rely upon Allah.

Keywords: Covid-19, punishment, trial, message, Islamic teachings



Introduction

Covid-19 is a major issue emerging as physical, financial and social disaster in the world today since February 2020. WHO named this new virus COVID-19 which is an epidemic that begun in the China's city Wuhan by the end of 2019, spreading throughout the world ever since.¹ The acronym COVID-19 represents the corona virus. The corona virus causes moderate to acute respiratory problems, and owes its transmission to exposure to infectious material, for example respiratory droplets. Symptoms mainly include fever, difficulty in breathing and cough, which may also lead to respiratory failure or pneumonia. One can be protected by taking self-safety measures of washing hands frequently, wearing face mask as well as keeping away from people that are affected. The spread of corona virus is linked to contact with a person who is infected especially through coughing and sneezing.

Effects of Covid-19

This miserable crisis of Covid-19 has intensively affected the whole health system along with the economic, social and political governance of the world since February 2020. This disease has been projected by WHO as highly infected and quickly spreader virus across the globe.² Socially and financially during last few months since April 2020 millions of people lost their jobs, more than half of the population precincts on the movement and restricted to their homes in the form of complete or partial lockdown. Many countries of the world have closed their borders completely or partially for international travel which has affected tourism and aviation industry of the whole world badly. Many airlines have grounded their aircrafts and layoff their employees. Only in china almost 48 cities were completely lock downed in February 2020. In March 1.4 billion people were lock downed by Indian government. Several other countries including, Italy, France, Pakistan, America etc. issued lock down policies to control the health issues in these countries. America

¹The World Health Organization. "World Health Organization facts." Accessed April 15,2020. <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/weekly-update-on-covid-19---15-april-2020>

² The World Health Organization. "World Health Organization facts." Accessed April 15,2020. <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/weekly-update-on-covid-19---15-april-2020>

has enforced lock down over 200 million people in North and Latin America in April 2020.³ Same policies have been imposed in African countries including, South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya in April 2020. All possible health safety measures were implemented around the globe to prevent transmission of this virus.⁴ Even though covid-19 was considered a health crisis at first, it quickly became an unanticipated social and economic crisis. Economists had never imagined that billions of people would have to be restricted to their homes. Thus, the repercussions will be far greater than those of the 2008 crises. The European democratic system will be put to a political test as a result of this crisis. A society's strengths and weaknesses are made evident through crises. To take necessary steps for future events, political narratives are being formulated.⁵

Does this Pandemic a Punishment or Trail for Humanity?

Now the point is if this disease is a punishment to all the bad peoples around the globe or it could be a test from Allah in order to realize the accountability of our practices to comeback to a straight path.⁶ Despite all social, financial, political challenges, some people are contending coronavirus can as "great equalizer".⁷ The world is pounding with great uncertainty, when worship

³Statista, "World Statista on Covid-19." Accessed April23,2020. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1104709/coronavirus-deaths-worldwide-per-million-inhabitants/>

⁴Pathfinders International. "Pathfinder's facts on How African countries are lifting lockdowns". Accessed May12, 2020. <https://www.pathfinder.org/>

⁵ British Broadcasting News. "BBC News on Covid update." Accessed May 24,2020. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/schedules/p01kv924/2020/05/12>

⁶ Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research U.S.A. "Mohammad Elshinawy, "The Infinitely Merciful and the Question of Hellfire," Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research." Accessed July10,2017 . <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/mohammad-elshinawy/the-infinitely-merciful-and-the-question-of-hellfire>

⁷ Worldometrs for COVID-19. "Coronavirus Pandemic Worldometer. "Accessed April 9,2020, https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019?adgroupsurvey={adgroupsurvey}&gclid=CjwKCAjwy42FBhB2EiwAJY0yQlcDRLbGBKTefyWs3UDkoXJdDC9dPYopUsUnNBkoTnTrgz_oGWXejBoCA-8QAvD_BwE

places are closed or limited for visitors with keeping away interaction with social distancing. A survey report finds out the public opinion about Covid-19 as trail, message, or torment of God. An American survey reports find out the facts about recent pandemic in religious life of Americans. Almost two third of American people religiously feel this pandemic as message from God to change. In the state of Pennsylvania, a new poll has found that people who are not affiliated with religion are taking this virus as message from God. Out of total population 52% said they believe in God but not follow religious practices. And 28% have the opinion that they believe in God more strongly after this pandemic as message for humanity to change. Religious groups like protestant and catholic are more likely to believe in God and taking this virus as strong message to change the behavior. Only 20% say they do not believe God as taking this pandemic as message.⁸

This pandemic of Covid-19 has excessively affected the minorities like blacks in America, Recent circumstances and societal inequality has exposed that minorities more vulnerable and amplifying concern of the minorities to be ignored by a push to reopen the US economy. The same poll found black Americans to be more religious and taking this virus as message to change humanity. Results found 27% said that, compared with 13% of Latinos and 11% of white Americans are more believe in God than before this pandemic.⁹

Concept of punishment and trail in Islam

Allah Almighty having all the right to punish and reward for bad actions and good actions respectively, being a supreme power. Receiving rewards because of good deeds is since Allah is graceful and benevolent, not due to natural result of those deeds. Similarly, punishment received due to bad actions is not the result of a person's deeds. Allah as a supreme power possesses complete control and can give a person punishment for the sin he committed or can pardon him.¹⁰ However Allah's grace and punishment is always based on His

⁸ Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research U.S.A. "Mohammad Elshinawy, "The Infinitely Merciful and the Question of Hellfire,"

⁹ Statista, "World Statista on Covid-19." Accessed April23,2020.

¹⁰ *Al-'Izz Ibn Abd al-Salām*, Trials and Tribulations (Birmingham: Dar al-Sunnah, 2004).16.

divine wisdom. Since Allah is wise, He uses his power fairly and rationally. Allah gives man his reward for noble deeds; it's entirely based on how pure the intention is in the desire to attain Allah's pleasure. Likewise, Allah gives punishment to man only for the sins he commits boldly and rebelliously. This punishment leads man to repentance. But at the same time Allah forgives sins for the person who genuinely repents after sinning and is ready to improve himself and give up sin. It does not matter how great a criminal or the crime is, if one realizes his mistake, seeks forgiveness for disobedience, and is willing to becoming obedient, Allah's mercy and grace can pardon that sin and crime.¹¹ In Islamic theology the term punishment denotes many forms of trial, reproach, admonishment, retribution, and punitive actions which may be given in the worldly life or the hereafter. In the hereafter, the most severe punishment will be the fire of hell. This is a type of punishment that is given after a person has been judged by Allah with His limitless mercy and justice on Judgment Day. Quran as revealed book of Allah divides them into two categories. The first one is punishment of a retributory nature that involves Allah's conclusive judgment, and the second one which involves no chance of deliverance.¹²

Concept of Punishment in Quran

Regarding punishment Quran has clearly described the narrations of the past nations who earned Allah's anger and punishment. It is clearly mentioned in the Quran that once their punishment was decided by Allah, they couldn't be able to repel. Allah says: "Nay, it (the Fire or the Day of Judgment) will come upon them suddenly and will baffle them, and they will not have any authority to prevent it, nor will they attain relief."¹³

Such kind of retributive punishment is aimed to destroy tyranny in order to support to prophet, to establish Allah's majesty, and lesson for people of later generations. But such kind of punishment did not occur before a number of

¹¹ Al-'Izza, Trials and Tribulations, 18.

¹² Yaqeen Institute, "The Infinitely Merciful and the Question of Hellfire." Accessed July 10, 2017 [https:// yaqeeninstitute. org/ mohammad-elshinawy/the-infinitely-merciful-and-the-question-of-hellfire/](https://yaqeeninstitute.org/mohammad-elshinawy/the-infinitely-merciful-and-the-question-of-hellfire/)

¹³ Al-Anbyā 21:40.

conditions by Allah which includes warning from prophet, rejection of people to the prophet's cause, tenacity in chaos and wrongdoing with shamelessness boldness and As Allah mentioned in the Quran once they denied and shamefully wronged against the instructions of Allah then they received different punishment in the form of storms, stones, blast, and swallowed by earth: "So every (nation) We sent punishment in the form of seizing air due to their sin; and some have received a storm of stones, and some were taken hold of by a blast, and some were swallowed by earth, and some were submerged in water. And Allah has not treated them unfairly, but it was they who were treating themselves unfairly"¹⁴

Sometimes Allah send some afflictions and difficulties to human beings so that they may turn to Allah. Objective of such kind of punishment is to bring betterment in humanity as Allah Almighty said in the Quran: "Corruption prevailed on the earth and sea by people, so Allah may make them experience the repercussions of their doings so they may come back."¹⁵

Concept of Punishment in *Ḥadīth*

Messenger of Allah said: "No disaster comes upon a Muslim, but that Allah atones for some of his sins as a result, even if it were only a prick he from a thorn that he receives."¹⁶

Ā'ishah: (the wife of the Prophet (SAW), I never saw Allah's Apostle laugh in a loud manner for me to be able to see his uvula, but he only smiled. There would be visible distress on his face when winds or clouds appeared. I said, "O Allah's Apostle! When clouds appear, people become joyful in the hope of rain, while I see that upon seeing clouds, signs of discomfort are visible on your face. 'He said, "O 'Aisha! How can I be assured they contain no punishment, as some people had been given punishment with a wind? Verily, some people experienced the punishment, but upon seeing the cloud) they said, 'This cloud shall bring rain.'¹⁷

¹⁴ Al-Ankabūt 29:40.

¹⁵ Al-Rūm 30:41.

¹⁶ Muhammad Bin 'Īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīh al-Bukhārī*, 5640, Book 75, Hadith 1.

¹⁷ al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīh al-Bukhārī*, Vol. 6, Ḥadīth, 4828, 4829.

Many times, Prophet Muhammad recommended the companions to give great importance to their lives compared to death in many of his ḥadīths, encouraging people to avoid going to places where there was an outbreak of epidemics. *Ā'ishah* said that she inquired from Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) about plague, and he replied, "Plague was a penalty that Allah would send on those He willed, but for believers, Allah turned it into a blessing. None (among the believers) observes patience in a land where there has been an outbreak of plague and believes that nothing will happen to him except that Allah has destined for him, except that Allah will give him a reward like that of a martyr."¹⁸ *Amr Ibn Sharīd* described quoting his father that there was a leper in the delegation of *Thaqīf*. Allah's Prophet (ﷺ) sent him a message saying: Your allegiance has been accepted, so you can go.¹⁹

The Prophet placed extreme importance on public health as well as his own health. While in Medina, when he was going to enter into agreement with a delegation, he did not shake hands with a person [from the delegation] as he had a contagious disease, and sent him back [to where he had come from],²⁰ In the mid-7th century, as a Muslim army reached a near in today's Syria (old Levant), the army became confused regarding what they must do, as the place was seized by plague. Caliph Umar persuaded the commander of the army to withdraw from the mission due to the plague.²¹ The Prophet of Allah (ﷺ) said: "Any cattle that suffers from an ailment, be they cows, sheep or camel, should not be kept with cattle that is free of disease (or said: "A patient should not be put with a healthy person). " (as safety measure)."²² However, the Prophet (ﷺ) also said: "Death due to abdominal disease for a Muslim is a death of martyrdom, and death of a Muslim from plague is also a death of martyrdom."²³ But there are certain exemptions of relief from the natural

¹⁸ Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, Book 42, Hadith 5079.

¹⁹ al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 5734, Vol. 7, Book 71.

²⁰ Muslim Ibn al-Hajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 2231, Book 26,36, Hadith 5541.

²¹ Ibn al-Athīr, *Usud al-ghābah fī ma'rifat al-ṣaḥābah* (Beirut: Dar Ibn Hazm, 2012).3:24

²² Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī* (Riyadh: Maktaba Al-Salafiyyah, 2008).1:86.

²³ al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 5771, Book of Medicine, Vol. 7: 71,(53),Hadith 665.

disaster and calamities in the form of torment of Allah. These exemptions include the following:

I. Piety

If a person attains piety, Allah solves his problems for him and bestows his blessings upon him. Quran says: “And for the ones who are afraid of Allah, He prepares for them a way out.”²⁴

Here it means whosoever fears Allah, He makes for him a way out of every difficulty. Those who fear Allah and abide by their commitment to Him, Allah provides for them the means to evade every difficulty. When they have completed their term, either keep them honorably, or separate from them honorably. And if people would have had belief and *Taqwā*, surely, Allah would have showered upon them blessings of the earth and heaven. As it is said in the Quran: “And if only the people of cities had belief and fear in Allah, we would have bestowed on them the blessings of heaven and earth; but they repudiated [the messengers], so We took hold of them for what they were earning.”²⁵

2. Repentance

Allah does not torment a person if they seek forgiveness. This Holy Quran emphasizes this fact as follows: “But Allah would not penalize them while you are amongst them. And Allah would not penalize them as long as they ask for pardon.”²⁶ Allah would not punish any nation or people while they seek Allah's Forgiveness. In the Holy Quran, Allah talks about the incident that took place in Prophet Yunus' tribe. They asked for Allah's forgiveness when they saw that Allah's punishment was approaching them, and hence Allah removed His torment. Quran speaks: “Was there any town (community) that believed (after seeing the penalty), and its belief (at that instant) rescued it (from the penalty)? (The answer is none,) aside from the people of Yunus (Jonah); when they accepted faith, We took away from

²⁴ al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 5733, Vol. 7: 71, Ḥadīth, 629.

²⁵ Al-‘Ar‘rāf 7:96.

²⁶ Al-‘Ar‘rāf 8:33.

them the torment of humiliation in the worldly life, and allowed them to enjoy for some time.”²⁷

3. Patience

Observing patience gives benefit to everyone who is put to a test by Almighty Allah. Upon observing patience when they encounter a natural disaster or calamity, they will be rewarded for it. The Holy Quran emphasizes this fact in these words: “And surely, We shall put you to test with something of fright, hunger, loss of wealth, lives and fruits, but give good news to those who are patient. Who, when faced with disaster, say: "Surely! We belong to Allah and surely, we shall return to Him." They are the ones on whom are blessings from their Lord, and (they are the ones who) achieve His Mercy, and they are the ones who are rightly guided.”²⁸

May Almighty Allah rescue us from calamities and His anger due to which he penalizes those who transgress, and may He allow us to have the vision to reform ourselves so that we can support those who are going through trials.

Findings

Keeping in view all the discussion about Pandemic of Covid-19 in the light of teachings of Islam, following are the findings of our research:

- Just like other natural disasters corona virus can be a punishment of Allah for those who have been corrupting the world with their tyrant policies and behavior against the innocent people and crossing the limits mentioned in Quran.
- This uncontrollable disease can be a warning for the sinners to be conscious of their behavior and the death to come.
- Just like other trail it may be a test for humanity especially for believers to increase their faith in Allah and His decree.
- Quran and Sunnah as primary guides should be enough to judge our trails and punishment in order to provide guidance on how natural calamities and disasters can be tackled.

²⁷ Yunus 10:98.

²⁸ Al-Baqarah 2:155-157.

- Just like other calamities this Pandemic can be face with piety, repentance and patience.
- Muslim should not be negligent and show clinical attitude in dealing with the pandemic. Along with faith in Allah we should adopt precautionary measures, follow the guidelines of health experts, and take necessary measures along with rely upon Allah.
- Charity is an evidence of faith. During these financially tough times caused by the corona virus, giving charity to those in need will be of immense help.

Conclusion

COVID-19 is a hard test, or a benevolent admonishment that Allah has given to humankind. It could also be both. Regardless of the difficulties we face, Allah wants to draw His servants close to Him, and intends good for them. We must draw solace from the fact that Allah shows more mercy to His servants compared to a mother's mercy for her child. To deal with hardships and earn Allah's pleasure, we must regularly offer our gratitude towards Allah. This will also improve our health, both physically and mentally. Allah has promised the protection of His servants that ask for His mercy and forgiveness, as Allah can forgive all sins, whether they are major or minor. During such times, the believers must introspect and analyze their own situations. What determines whether this epidemic is a blessing or a punishment for us is how we choose to react? We do not possess full authority over the effects of the epidemic, but we can control how we choose to react to the situation. The question is whether we are seeking nearness to Allah and becoming successful in our test? We may be tested mentally, financially, or physically. By hoping for a reward from Allah, observing patience and being content with Allah's decree, one must feel comforted with the knowledge that Allah may allow us to become martyrs.