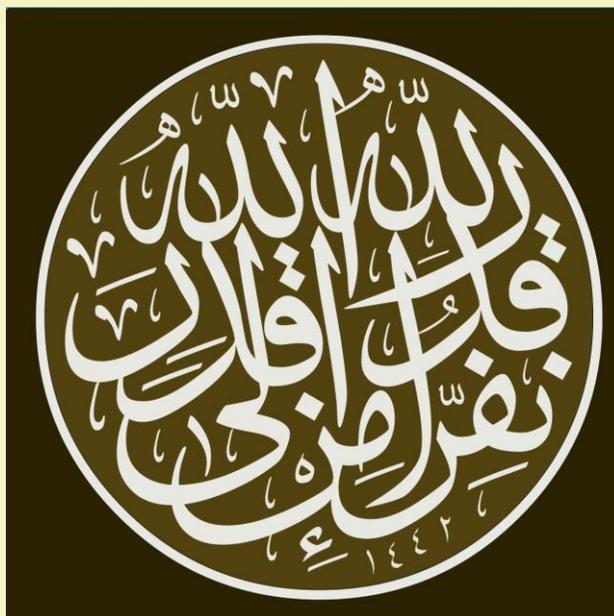


Fleeing from Fate to Fate

40 AHĀDĪTH ON CONTAGION AND PANDEMICS



MT Karaan

The artwork on the cover represents
the golden words of Amīr al-Mu'minīn
Sayyidunā 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ

نَفَرُ مِنْ قَدَرِ اللَّهِ إِلَى قَدَرِ اللَّهِ

“We flee from Allah’s Qadar, to Allah’s Qadar”

in stylised Thuluth Jali format

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الحمد لله، وصلى الله وبارك وسلم على سيدنا محمد، وعلى آله وصحبه، وبعد:

The idea of collecting a number of aḥādīth on contagion, pandemics and related matters was born just as the second wave of Covid-19 infections was beginning to rise in South Africa. A medical professional requested texts from the seminal sources of Islam that would counter a narrative in which religion was being pitted as inexorably anti-science.

What began as a handful of ḥadīth texts grew into a collection of 10 aḥādīth on adopting preventative measures during pandemics. But the sudden exponential rise of the second wave brought home the realisation that the Sunnah does in fact address a number of other aspects to pandemics as well—aspects from which the public would indeed have great benefit. In response, this collection developed into the time-honoured *arbaʿīn* format of the Muḥaddithīn.

In the course of compilation the need for a commentary became apparent. Much of the furore around Covid-19 was being fuelled by either ignorance of what the Sunnah teaches in this regard, or misunderstandings about how the ʿUlamā resolved the apparent conflict of texts, or an unfortunate reluctance to acknowledge the existence of a very orthodox traditional discourse on contagion and pandemics at variance with what was purported with vehemence to be the only legitimate position.

Much as the vehemence of the present discourse is regretted, its causes are also understood. This is not the first time in history that the impact of concepts such as contagion and pandemics upon the most sensitive areas of our faith—*tawḥīd*, *yaqīn*, *tawakkul* and *qadar*—becomes palpable. It was but yesterday that Sayyidunā Abū ʿUbaydah رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ asked Amīr al-Muʿminīn Sayyidunā ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ if he was fleeing from *qadar*. This collection takes its title from the profundity of Sayyidunā ʿUmar’s reply: “Indeed, we flee from Allah’s *qadar* to Allah’s *qadar*!”

Situations such as the one we find ourselves in leave no time for settling personal scores or responding to taunts and accusations. What is needed is for sense and sanity to prevail, and without guidance from the Sunnah of Rasūlullāh ﷺ there can be no sanity. Of detractors we have had no dearth, but we have for them the same answer as Sayyiduna ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ gave to those who denounced him as more deluded than a donkey for his scheme of dispersing the population into the countryside to counter the spread of the plague. “By Allah, I will not respond to you,”¹ he replied, knowing that what the moment required was not controversy, but positive action. As the record shows, he was correct on both counts.

Much of this book was written while I was on a journey, without any books at my disposal, and with my phone being the only available writing instrument. But as awkward as the modality of writing was, the flow of inspiration was as overwhelming as it was humbling. To the dear friends and pupils who assisted from a distance I offer my sincere gratitude.

The forty aḥādīth in this collection have been arranged into seven chapters:

- Chapter 1 addresses the idea of **contagion conceptually**, and contains 5 aḥādīth.
- Chapter 2 presents the **preventative measures** prescribed by in the Sunnah, in 9 aḥādīth.
- Chapter 3 discusses the impact of a pandemic upon **masājīd**, in 7 aḥādīth.
- Chapter 4 offers 4 aḥādīth on how to deal with **dispensations** in the Sharī‘ah.
- Chapter 5 presents 4 aḥādīth on the subject of using **medication**.

¹ An attempt at denying the authenticity of this incident forces the unorthodox step of a footnote to a foreword. The crux of this attempt is that it seeks to isolate Ṭabarī’s *Tārīkh* as the only source of the incident, and thereafter proceeds to present its author, Muḥammad ibn Jarīr ibn Yazīd al-Ṭabarī, as an unreliable Shī‘ī.

The identification of Ibn Jarīr as a Shī‘ī, and thereafter to conflate him with his namesake and contemporary, the Ithnā‘asharī Shī‘ī Muḥammad ibn Jarīr ibn Rustam al-Ṭabarī, flies in the face of centuries of expert scholarship, of the likes of Dhahabī, Subkī and Ibn Ḥajar.

Had the critic focused on the *isnad* with which Ṭabarī records the incident, he might have found himself on somewhat firmer scholarly grounds—but even here, his attempt would have been abortive. The slight defect in Ṭabarī’s *isnad*, which also appears in Imām Aḥmad’s *Musnad*, is more than sufficiently fortified by not one, but several strands of narration spread over a selection of works of ḥadīth and history.

- Chapter 6 speaks of **safety from illness**, in light of 5 aḥādīth.
- Chapter 7 offers, in 6 aḥādīth, advice and encouragement from the Sunnah on **patience when afflicted**.

As I write the number of infections continues to climb in our country and elsewhere. Along with it the fatality curve maintains its ominous ascent. However, the sense of despair that threatens to overwhelm is kept at bay by the never-diminishing hope that truth and sanity *will* prevail, accompanied by the optimism that the Ummah of Muḥammad ﷺ *will* survive this pandemic as it did others, and live on to fulfil its destiny. This time, hopefully, having imbibed its painful and costly lessons.

If this book happens in any way to contribute to that outcome, I shall be more than amply rewarded and satisfied.

MT Karaan

Strand, Cape Town

South Africa

7 Jumādā I 1442

22 December 2020

Chapter One

CONTAGION

HADĪTH NO 1

“There is no contagion...”

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: «لَا عَدْوَى، وَلَا طِيْرَةٌ، وَلَا هَامَةٌ، وَلَا صَفْرَةٌ. وَفِرَّ مِنَ الْمَجْدُومِ كَمَا تَفِرُّ مِنَ الْأَسَدِ.» (رواه البخاري ٥٧٠٧)

Abū Hurayrah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ narrates that the Messenger of Allah صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ said: “There is neither contagion, nor bad omens, nor ‘omens associated with an’ owl, nor ‘omens associated with’ Şafar. ‘But’ flee from a leper as you would flee from a lion.” [BUKHĀRĪ 5707]

Superstitions of Jāhiliyyah

The society in which Islam appeared was one in which superstition and myth had come to supplant faith and fact. Crucial decisions were made with the help of a range of methods of augury, such as the direction in which startled birds flew off, and the random pattern in which arrows were cast. Omens were taken from the hooting of an owl, or from the month of Şafar itself.² And the spread of disease came to be associated with all but personified causes unseen.

Absent amidst all of this was recognition of Allah as the Prime Cause of all things. The rectification of this situation came in the form of aḥādīth such as the one above,

² There is another meaning of *şafar* in this context which is preferred by a number of scholars. Taking it to denote the second month of the Hijrī calendar is informed by the fact that in our contemporary society superstitions pertaining to this month persist.

in which superstition is, as a rule, summarily and conclusively negated.

Four things stand negated in the ḥadīth: [1] contagion, [2] bad omens, [3] owl-related omens, and [4] the month of Ṣafar. A question arises here: are all of them negated in the same absolute manner, and at the same all-encompassing level?

Differentiation

There is a very subtle but noticeable difference between the way that contagion is approached, both in this very ḥadīth and elsewhere, and the way in which the remaining superstitions are treated.

With those superstitions the negation is absolute to the point where no concessions are made whatsoever. We do not find, for example, any word of caution to rather abstain from something in the month of Ṣafar, to desist from travelling when the bird of augury flies off to the left, or to take care when the owl hoots. But contagion is almost invariably accompanied with either a specific exhortation in the same text to adopt precaution (“Flee from the leper as you would flee from a lion”), or by parallel instructions in other aḥādīth.³

How is this apparent contradiction to be resolved? One view holds that the negation is as absolute for contagion as it is for the other superstitions: disease cannot transfer from one carrier to the next person, and what appears to be contagious transfer is nothing but pure coincidence. As for the accompanying exhortations, they are understood, in this view, to be precautionary in the following sense: Should a person happen to contract a disease after contact with a carrier, he might be induced thereby to ascribe it not to Allah, but to contagion. As such, no chance should be left for him to ever fall prey to this mistake. Of course, this line of reasoning leaves unanswered the question as to why it is only ever for contagion, and never for any of the other superstitions, that such exhortations are mentioned.

A more balanced and correct appreciation of the aḥādīth leads to another line of resolving the issue. This is expressed by Imām Bayhaqī, in the following manner:

³ Some of these follow in Chapter Two.

The negation of contagion as stated in this ḥadīth, pertains to the sense in which it was believed during Jāhiliyyah to exist, which involves the ascription of causality to things other than Allah. However, it is not inconceivable that Allah could, by His Will, make a healthy person's contact with a person afflicted with any of these diseases the ostensible cause for contracting the disease. It is for this reason that Rasūlullāh ﷺ said, "Flee from the leper as you would from a lion," and "Do not bring diseased camels into contact with healthy ones." He also said, "When you hear of plague in a land, do not go there." All of that happens by virtue of the fact that it was predestined by Allah.⁴

A similar line of reasoning is followed by Mawlānā Rashīd Aḥmad Gangōhī in lecture notes on *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī*, where he states:

What appears from a survey of the ahādīth that have come down on issues such as this is that the Arabs believed contagion to possess an autonomous causal effect independent of any other causative factor. As such, the Prophet ﷺ negated all types of effect. If things of this nature do happen to have some causative role within their respective effects, it is by the permission of Allah that it is so. Their claim that Allah placed effect in the stars to the extent that He Himself no longer has power to bring into existence or terminate existence is *kufr* and *shirk*, as is the view that they innately possess effect without Allah having placed it in them. The same goes for the view that after Allah placed effect in them, He no longer brings about effects, and it is they, rather, who produce effects. — In this view, as opposed to the first, Allah retains the option to effect. — The same applies to the position that effect comes from Allah, but it is impossible for the effect to not come about as normally expected.

On the hand, there is the view that they have no effect whatsoever, neither because they are causes nor because they are correlative indicators. This view has been espoused by none except a small group of Zāhirī literalists. What must be believed at heart is that it is Allah who is the Real Cause who does as He wishes, when He wishes. These 'ostensible physical causes' are only correlative indicators in the wake of whose appearance Allah, in His divine course of action, causes effects to come about. If He wills it He could cause the

⁴ Cited in Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, vol. 6 p. 592

effects not to come into existence, notwithstanding the presence of ostensible cause. This is similar to how He placed a certain ‘level of’ effect in medicine without such medicine having any intrinsic effect on letting the results emerge. They are therefore no different from rain: when a cloud forms it appears that there will be rain; notwithstanding that, our certainty is not connected to the rain, except if so wished by Allah, Lord of the Worlds.⁵

Summing up this explanation, Muftī Taqī ‘Uthmānī writes in the commentary of *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*:

The gist is that if it is medically proven that germs of some diseases transfer from one body to another, this does not contradict the negation of contagion in the ḥadīth. What is negated is an autonomous and independent causal effect that comes about without Allah creating it, which is without a doubt *shirk* and *kufr*. As for the belief that that the transfer of germs could sometimes cause illness, as do other harmful things, and that all of this is suspended on the will of Allah and predestination by Him, to the point where germs will not transfer if Allah does not will it, or they may transfer without causing any illness—such a belief is correct. It is in no way opposed by the Shari‘ah, and is no way in conflict with the ḥadīth in this chapter. Since there is a normative convention in some diseases like leprosy and the plague to transfer from one body to the other, the Prophet ﷺ commanded precaution to be adopted against it at the level of opting for preventative causes. Adopting such causes is not opposed to trust in Allah and belief in Predestination, as long as a person believes the effect of those causes to be not innate, but contingent on the Will of Allah, saying, “I trust in Allah, and on Him do I rely,” thereby indicating that although these diseases transfer as a matter of convention, their transfer is contingent upon what Allah predestined, and not by their own innate effect.⁶

The very same approach was taken throughout the centuries by numerous great imāms such as Ibn al-Ṣalāh, Nawawī, ‘Irāqī, and Qaṣṭallānī. The latter ascribes it to the majority of Shāfi‘īs,⁷ while Imam Nawawī states it to be the position of the vast

⁵ *al-Kawkab al-Durrī*, vol. 2 p. 177

⁶ *Takmilat Fath al-Mulhim* vol. 4 p. 325

⁷ *Irshād al-Sārī* vol. 12 p. 504

majority of the ‘Ulamā.⁸

What emerges from this discussion is that causation operates at two levels:

- *Real causation*, which belongs exclusively to Allah, and in which no act of causation ever fails to produce its effect.
- *Apparent or normative⁹ causation*, which exists in apparent physical causes. At this level, the apparent cause may well fail to produce the effect.

What the hadith negates is the equation of apparent causes with Allah as the Real Cause, or the supplanting of the latter with the former. With Islam emerging in a pagan Jāhili society, this was exactly the approach needed to wean people from the depths of fetish and superstition. At the same time the existence of apparent causality was duly acknowledged, both in the same negating text, and in other texts of equal authority.

Causality, and specifically, the manner in which apparent causality in nature relates to divine causality, was an issue to which much attention was given in Islam’s tradition of *‘ilm al-kalām*, or scholastic theology. Here, Ash‘arī theologians such as Imām Ghazālī held the standard of divine causality proudly aloft. Ghazālī insists that the apparent correlation between an ostensible cause and its supposed effect does not represent a necessary relationship. In *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah* (Incoherence of the Philosophers), his celebrated refutation of philosophy, he writes:

There is no necessary relationship in the correlation between what is normally believed to be a cause, and normally believed to be an effect. Rather, whenever we have two things where neither of the two is the other, nor does proving or disproving the one entail the proving or disproving of the other, then the existence of the one does not of necessity mean the existence of the other, and the nonexistence of the one does not of necessity imply the nonexistence of the other. For example, quenching thirst and drinking, satiation and eating, burning and contact with fire, light and sunrise, death and decapitation, cure and taking medicine, bowel action and taking a

⁸ *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* vol. 14 p. 214

⁹ With “normative” here meaning, *conforming* to a norm, and not *determining* the norm.

laxative, and so forth, on to all other observed correlations in the fields of medicine, astronomy, industries and crafts. That they align in correlation is only because Allah preordained them to be created in tandem, and not because they are necessarily and inextricably interrelated, for it is well within the ambit of Divine Ability to create satiation without eating, death without decapitation, life continuing beyond decapitation, etc.¹⁰

The theological position expressed by Imām Ghazālī here is called Occasionalism. It centres on the idea that created things cannot be the efficient causes of effects, and that it is Allah who in fact creates every effect. It is of particular interest to note that this doctrine, as advanced by Ghazālī and the Ash‘arī theologians, has in recent years found support from a surprising angle: quantum mechanics. Beyond turning Newton’s notion of a mechanical universe on its head, advances in this area of physics have provided to an increasingly nihilistic world reason to pause and reconsider the supposedly scientific foundations of its atheism.

On the area in which quantum mechanics connects to Occasionalism, Karen Harding¹¹ writes in the conclusion to her article *Causality Then and Now*:

Both al Ghazali in the eleventh century and quantum theory in the twentieth century imply that the world is very different from what common sense would lead one to believe. The appearance of objects is deceiving. Objects do not have an independent existence, as one has come to expect. Objects are created each moment, either by God or by an act of observation. Furthermore, it is not possible, even in principle, to predict the exact behaviour of objects, but only the probability of occurrences. Such a view of the physical world is, then, both old and new.¹²

¹⁰ *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah*, p. 239

¹¹ She is described at the time the article was published (1993) as chair of the Department of Chemistry, Pierce College, Tacoma, Washington.

¹² Harding, Karen, “Causality Then and Now: Al Ghazālī and Quantum Theory”, *The American Journal of Islamic Social Science*, 10:2, p. 176. Accessed at <http://www.ghazali.org/articles/harding-V10N2-Summer-93.pdf> on 23/12/2020.

HADĪTH NO 2

“Who caused mange in the first camel?”

عَنْ ابْنِ مَسْعُودٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ: قَامَ فِينَا رَسُولُ
اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فَقَالَ: «لَا يُعَدِي شَيْءٌ
شَيْئًا.» فَقَالَ أَعْرَابِيٌّ: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ، الْبَعِيرُ أَجْرَبُ
الْحَشْفَةِ نَدِينَهُ، فَتَجْرَبُ الْإِبِلُ كُلُّهَا. فَقَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ
صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: «فَنَنْ أَجْرَبَ الْبَعِيرِ الْأَوَّلَ؟ لَا
عَدْوَى، وَلَا صَفْرَ. خَلَقَ اللَّهُ كُلَّ نَفْسٍ، وَكَتَبَ
حَيَاتَهَا وَرِزْقَهَا وَمَصَائِبَهَا.» (رواه الترمذي ٢٢٩٣)

Ibn Mas‘ūd رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ narrates: The Messenger of Allah صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ stood among us and said: “Nothing transfers illness to something else.”

A Bedouin said: “O Messenger of Allah, we put a camel with mange on its genitals in the same enclosure ‘with healthy camels’, with the result that all the camels become diseased with mange.”

Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ said: “So who caused mange in the first camel? There is neither contagion, nor ‘bad omen associated with’ Šafar. Allah created every soul and wrote its life, sustenance and afflictions.” [TIRMIDHĪ 2293]

The problem of Jāhili society

Let us begin once again from the Jāhili society into which Islam emerged. The extent to which this society was steeped in superstition required an emphasis, at the outset, on *tawhīd* that would allow it to take root firmly with all excrescences of *shirk* decisively severed from it.

There are in society, however, two classes of things. The first is the type of thing in which created entities have no share whatsoever. In the other type there is a convergence of two sides: an apparent physical side, and a side of unseen truth and reality. Matters of divinity and worship, for example, belong to the first type, while in things such as assistance and sustenance there is an apparent physical side wherein created entities play an ostensible role, and another side pertaining to unseen truth and reality in terms of which even these mundane aspects of life revert to Allah alone as their Prime and Real Cause.

Rectification in stages

The manner in which erroneous perceptions are rectified differs between these two types. No created being can ever be admitted to have any sort of share in matters of divinity and worship. With the second type, however, a more gradual approach is taken. Visiting graves, for example, was peremptorily banned in early Islam due to the need to completely wean society from anything that might undermine *tawhīd*. Once this objective was successfully achieved, permission to visit graves was reinstated, since now they would serve their proper purpose of reminding about death, away from the slightest shade of *shirk*.

The manner in which Rasūlullāh ﷺ draws the attention of the Bedouin away from apparently observed effects, and towards Allah as the Original Cause represents precisely this initial emphasis on *tawhīd*. The context is one of *tawhīd*, and any pronouncements made in this context will reference only such aspects of *tawhīd* that will remove the veils of apparent causes. It is in this same vein that the ḥadīth therefore goes on to speak of how Allah created not just every soul, but also foreordained its life, its sustenance, and the afflictions which will befall it. For such are the things discussed in the context of *tawhīd*.

Did a stage eventually come when the initial unrelenting emphasis on *tawḥīd* and the unseen aspect of causality could be tempered to a certain degree? It most certainly did, as the aḥādīth in Chapter Two will demonstrate. But more interesting in this regard is Ḥadīth no. 28 in which we will find Bedouins whose *tawḥīd* eventually reached a level prompting them to ask whether they could actually stop using medicines against illness.

HADĪTH NO 3

Of diseased camels and healthy camels

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: «لَا يوردُ مُمْرَضٌ عَلَى مُصِحٍّ.»

(رواه مسلم ٩٢٦٣)

Abū Hurayrah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ narrates that the Messenger of Allah صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ said: “Do not bring diseased camels into contact with healthy camels.” [BUKHĀRĪ 9263]

Affirming apparent causality

This ḥadīth is one of several which provides foundation for the partial and secondary affirmation of physical causes. As stated, this affirmation acknowledges the phenomenon of effects resulting from causes, but adds two important dimensions:

- The causal relationship is not one of necessity, where every physical cause *must* produce its effects with clockwork regularity and permanence.
- Behind and above the level of physical causation lies true causation, which is causation by Allah.

As long as the first consideration does not smother out the second, there is no harm in affirming physical causation. This is what the ḥadīth does: Do not mix sick and healthy camels, for in the ordinary and mundane physical course of affairs on which the world operates, this might well lead to illness in the healthy camels as well. But do not for a moment believe that this apparent physical cause is the ultimate cause of disease. The creator of disease at all levels is none other than Allah.

The duty to restore balance

This is the fine balance which Rasūlullāh ﷺ established between the physical world of cause and effect, and the truth of unseen dimensions. Once established, however, this balance will not forever remain undisturbed. When it does get upset the duty of restoring it devolves upon the ‘Ulamā of the Ummah. In the case of this specific ḥadīth, the balance was restored by Sayyidunā Abū Hurayrah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ.

It is recorded in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* that Abū Hurayrah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ would always transmit this ḥadīth together with the ḥadīth that negates contagion. However, a time came when he absolutely refused to transmit that ḥadīth, restricting himself only to this ḥadīth of the camels. When reminded of it by some of his closest pupils he actually grew angry and pointedly refused, leaving them draw the erroneous conclusion that he had either forgotten the ḥadīth negating contagion, or that it had become abrogated.

May Allah’s mercy be upon Sayyidunā Abū Hurayrah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ and his pupils! He had neither forgotten nor was there any abrogation. If anything, Abū Hurayrah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ had become aware of an imbalance that overemphasised divine causation at the expense of created causation, and this refusal to transmit the one ḥadīth was his attempt at restoring the balance established by Rasūlullāh ﷺ.

The obligation of restoring balance whenever it is lost or upset continues to rest upon the shoulders of the ‘Ulamā of the Ummah.

HADĪTH NO 4

“When a fly falls into your utensil...”

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ: «إِذَا وَقَعَ الذُّبَابُ فِي إِنَاءٍ أَحَدِكُمْ فَلْيَغْمِسْهُ كُلَّهُ، ثُمَّ لِيَطْرَحْهُ، فَإِنَّ فِي أَحَدِ جَنَاحَيْهِ شِفَاءً، وَفِي الْآخَرِ دَاءٌ.» (رواه البخاري ٥٧٢٨)

Abū Hurayrah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ narrates that the Messenger of Allah صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ said: “When a fly falls into your utensil, dip it completely in, and then get rid of it; for in its one wing is cure, and in the other is disease.” [BUKHĀRĪ 5728]

Recapturing the gist

What was established up to this point may be summed up in the following points:

- At the level of *tawhīd* there is a complete negation of causation by anyone other than Allah.
- Normative causation is acknowledged in a manner that does not clash with divine causation.
- Normative causes play a mediating role in bringing forth effects created and predestined by Allah.

- Their mediation is not a matter of ineluctable necessity; when Allah wills that they should not produce effects they don't, and when He wills, He brings about effects without any mediating physical causes.

External corroboration

We may now ask: Is there in the Shari‘ah any external corroboration for the understanding outlined here? Put differently: does the Shari‘ah offer reason to believe that illness may travel from one created being to another through the agency of created entities too minute to be seen by the naked eye but which are acknowledged as having a certain effect in causing disease?

There was a time when the ḥadīth of the fly achieved fame (or notoriety) on account of efforts by detractors of the Sunnah to undermine the entire Sunnah by presenting this ḥadīth as “unscientific”. Eventually science went on to discover the truth of which Rasūlullāh ﷺ spoke,¹³ and microbiologists are now beginning to harvest antibodies from flies.

Today this wonderful ḥadīth offers us yet another glimmer of guidance. It tells us that there are microbial entities existing in one body that may, on account of physical contact, be transferred to another body, in which it may then go on to cause disease. And then it goes on to tell us which specific preventative measure to adopt to ward off that possible effect.

This is exactly what contagion is: one body carrying unseen physical entities which it may transfer to another upon contact, with the possibility that the second body could now become infected with the same disease. And against all of this Rasūlullāh ﷺ prescribes for us the preventative measures in Chapter Two.

¹³ See in this regard the book *al-Iṣābah fī Ṣiḥḥat Ḥadīth al-Dhubābah* by Dr Khalīl Ibrāhīm Mullā Khāṭir.

HADĪTH NO 5

The night of epidemics

عَنْ جَابِرِ بْنِ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا قَالَ: سَمِعْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يَقُولُ: «غُطُّوا الْإِنَاءَ وَأَوْكُوا السِّقَاءَ، فَإِنَّ فِي السَّنَةِ لَيْلَةً يَنْزِلُ فِيهَا وَبَاءٌ لَا يُمْرُ بِإِنَاءٍ لَيْسَ عَلَيْهِ غِطَاءٌ، أَوْ سِقَاءٍ لَيْسَ عَلَيْهِ وَكَاءٌ، إِلَّا نَزَلَ فِيهِ مِنْ ذَلِكَ الْوَبَاءِ.» (رواه مسلم ٢٠٢٤)

Jābir ibn ‘Abdillāh رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا says: I heard the Messenger of Allah صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ say: “Cover ‘your’ utensils and tie the ‘mouths of your’ waterskins; for there is a night in the year when epidemics descend, with some of it settling into any uncovered utensil or untied waterskin.” [MUSLIM 2024]

Divine systems

For all his arrogance, man understands only a tiny fraction of the systems set in place by Allah for this world to operate. Disease, pestilence and epidemics form part of these divine systems, and the “logistics” according to which they function lie beyond the reach of human interrogation.

We are informed of them by Allah’s Messenger صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ of whom Allah says:

﴿عَالِمِ الْغَيْبِ فَلَا يُظْهِرُ عَلَى غَيْبِهِ أَحَدًا، إِلَّا مَنِ ارْتَضَى مِنْ رَسُولٍ﴾ [الجن ٢٦ - ٢٧]

He, †Allah is the† Knower of the Unseen disclosing none of it to anyone. Except messengers of His choice. [72:26-27]

Physical causation of disease

At the level of the Unseen this ḥadīth informs us that epidemics descend on an unspecified night of the year. Beyond the Unseen, however, we learn from it that what descends on that night might actually affect us in a very physical manner. Of the nature of what descends on that night we know virtually nothing.

But the ḥadīth leaves no ambiguity about the fact that it can harm us in a physical manner. It is precisely on account of this potential harm that we are instructed to adopt the very physical preventative measures of covering utensils and tying the mouths of waterskins.

Chapter Two

**PREVENTATIVE
MEASURES**

HADĪTH NO 6

“Harm neither yourself nor another.”

عَنْ عُبَادَةَ بْنِ الصَّامِتِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ: «لَا ضَرَرَ وَلَا ضِرَارَ.»

(رواه ابن ماجه ٢٣٤٠)

‘Ubādah ibn Ṣāmit رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ narrates that the Messenger of Allah صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ said: “Harm neither yourself nor the next person.” [IBN MĀJAH 5707]

Purpose of law

The purpose of the Shari‘ah is to regulate human life in all of its dimensions. It covers both faith and practice, and in terms of practice it extends to areas or worship, social life, commerce, health and medicine, leisure and much more. In a nutshell, it is a legal system that embraces all aspects of life.

From a legal vantage point, human life is a set of competing rights and duties which at times coexist harmoniously, but often clash between themselves. It is when they happen to clash that harm comes to fall upon some individuals. Any legal system that has the regulation of human life as its purpose must contain within itself mechanisms for the removal of harm in a manner that ensures that rights are restored, obligations are performed, victims receive support, and aggressors are held in check. The removal of harm is in fact a major feature of our Shari‘ah, represented in one of its five universal rules which states: *Harm shall be removed.*

This rule, which is one of the five rules upon the foundation of which the entire edifice of our legal philosophy rests, finds its origin in the ḥadīth which states, *Harm neither yourself nor another*.

Pandemics and harm

One of the most obvious features of a pandemic is that the behaviour which people choose for themselves have an effect on harm either to themselves, or to others around them. Accordingly, the question may be asked as to what specific guidance the Shari‘ah offers to regulate human conduct during pandemics.

As the aḥādīth in this chapter will demonstrate, our Nabī ﷺ did not leave us rudderless during such episodes. They will prove that the adoption of preventative physical measures has a solid foundation in the Sunnah, and is in no way foreign to Islam, or the product of a perceived clash between Shari‘ah and secular law.

Therefore, the Muslim who—

- believes in the position of the majority of the ‘Ulamā that viruses do play a role in spreading disease;
- and that physical proximity and contact are the factors set in place by Allah as the normative and conventional causes of contagious spread;
- and that preventative measures are enjoined by the Shari‘ah prior to any law, and are prescribed by Rasūlullāh ﷺ before any government official;

he is the kind of person who is willing to sacrifice some of his freedom and temporarily give up some of his normal activities, not out of a lack of faith and irreligiousness, but due to his conviction that the need for measures such as these arises out of the Shari‘ah prior to secular law having anything to say about it, and that it is religion that prescribes them before state.

He knows fully well that indifference in behaviour is likely to cause harm to himself or those around him, and he knows that our Nabī ﷺ prohibited the infliction of such harm.

***Maqāṣid* of the Shari‘ah**

The process of distilling overarching universal principles from the Shari‘ah took two distinct pathways. On the one hand there was the extraction and formulation of the legal maxims known as *qawā‘id fiqhīyah*, while on the other hand the *maqāṣid* or higher purposes of the Shari‘ah came to be formulated.

There are few concepts in the Shari‘ah that have been as misunderstood and abused as the *maqāṣid*. Where one extreme end of the spectrum seeks to raise the concept of *maqāṣid* to the level of cancelling the writ of Qur’ān and Sunnah, the other extreme edge insists that it should be completely rejected and disregarded.

Each individual point of law in the Shari‘ah seeks to achieve a certain outcome. The overarching outcomes which the Shari‘ah strives to realise have been tabulated as five: the preservation of life, religion, property, intellect and progeny. When distilled out of their natural habitat—which lies within the body of law that is the Shari‘ah—clashes between these objectives are quite easy to imagine. The death penalty, for example sets aside the preservation of the individual’s life for a higher purpose, while the obligation of *zakāh* represents an encroachment of sorts on the purpose of preserving property. Very clearly, the formulation of law must involve a certain ordering of values. The central question would therefore appear to be: by what yardstick does such ordering occur?

As important as that question might be in issues that lie beyond the immediate ambit of the texts of the Qur’ān and Sunnah, it happens to have very little bearing on the matter of pandemics and adopting preventative measures during them. This is because, like so many other laws in Islam, the process of ordering *maqāṣid* values is here already enshrined in the texts themselves, leaving no need for any jurist to attempt an ordering of his own.

A few textual examples might help to convey a better understanding of how *maqāṣid* work in a situation where the ordering of values has been taken care of in the texts.

- One of the problems that the early Muslims faced in Makkah was that of being forced to recant their faith by speaking words of *kufr*. The coercion

caused life to be pitted against faith. The question of how to order the one against the other was answered in the revelation of the 106th verse of Sūrah al-Nahl:

﴿مَنْ كَفَرَ بِاللَّهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ إِيمَانِهِ إِلَّا مَنْ أُكْرِهَ وَقَلْبُهُ مُطْمَئِنٌّ بِالْإِيمَانِ وَلَكِنْ مَنْ شَرَحَ بِالْكُفْرِ صَدْرًا فَعَلَيْهِمْ عَذَابٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ﴾

Whoever disbelieves in Allah after believing—not those who are forced while their hearts are firm in faith, but those who embrace disbelief wholeheartedly—upon them will be Allah’s anger.

Here the preservation of life received preference over the preservation of faith, even if only for that moment of coercion. The one who assigned that preference was Allah Himself, and not a human jurist.

- At one stage during the Battle of the Trench the sustained threat from outside caused ‘Aṣr to have to be delayed till after sunset. The defence of Madīnah, together with the holistic preservation of religion and life that it entailed, was given preference over the preservation of one important but atomistic aspect of religion, as undesirable as it was. The ordering of the *maqāṣid* in this case was again not the discretionary of a fallible jurist.
- The Battle of Badr took place in Ramaḍān. On this occasion Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ instructed the Ṣahābah رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُمْ not to fast. In this case the ordering of *maqāṣid* values happened in favour of the preservation of religion holistically, as opposed to maintaining the atomistic obligation of fasting.

Examples of this nature can be listed to no end. The entire Sharī‘ah is replete with examples of Allah or Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ setting the law through ordering the *maqāṣid* values themselves.

This is exactly how *maqāṣid* work in the case of preventative measures against a pandemic: the ordering of one *maqāṣid*-based consideration against another is not the mere discretion of a jurist or scholar. As the aḥādīth in this chapter and the one

following it will demonstrate, it is to Allah and His Rasūl صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ that the process of assigning precedence to one value over the other reverts.

There may indeed be instances which do not fall within the ambit of any particular or general text. Such instances, too, abound in the Shari‘ah and have specific rules and procedures for dealing with them. In the context of pandemics and preventative measures against harm, however, we have no need to dwell at length on those procedures, if for no other reason, then for the simple fact that the *maqāṣid*-based values that pertain to this context have already been adequately ordered in the Sunnah of Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ.

HADĪTH NO 7

“Tie your camel.”

عَنْ أَنَسٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ: قَالَ رَجُلٌ: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ، أَعْقِلْهَا وَاتَوَكَّلْ، أَوْ أَطْلِقْهَا وَاتَوَكَّلْ؟ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: «إِعْقِلْهَا وَتَوَكَّلْ.» (رواه الترمذي ٢٥١٧)

Anas رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ narrates that a man asked: “O Messenger of Allah, shall I tie ‘my camel’ and rely ‘upon Allah’, or leave it untied and rely ‘upon Allah’?”

The Messenger of Allah صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ replied: “Tie ‘your camel’ and rely ‘upon Allah’.”
[TIRMIDHĪ 2517]

The *tawakkul-asbāb* paradox

At the core of the Bedouin’s question lies the essence of what Islam teaches about relying upon the Creator whilst at the very same time availing oneself of created means. In Islam, *tawakkul* never meant the abandonment of *asbāb*, or apparent means.

This universe was created by Allah to operate according to systems; systems in which cause-and-effect is a key factor. Despite the existence of those systems, Allah remains in full and uncompromised control of all of it. In Allah’s divine convention, the apparent link between cause and effect is readily overridden, especially for a greater and more momentous purpose, giving us the anomalies of nature known as miracles. However, in the ordinary course of affairs, that relationship between

cause and effect must be maintained, though never allowed to replace the core belief in Allah as Prime Cause. That what Islam teaches. As the poet says:

توكل على الرحمن في كل حاجة ولا تُؤثرَنَّ العجز يوماً على الطلب
ألم تر أن الله قال لمريم هُزِّيْ إِلَيْكَ النخْلَ تَسَاقَطِ الرطبُ
ولو شاء أحنى النخل من غير هزّها إليها ولكن كل شيء له سبب

For every need rely upon Allah

Let failure never supersede effort

See you not that Allah said to Maryam

Shake the tree and the dates will descend

Had He wished He'd incline it towards her

With no shaking—but all things have a cause.

It is of interest to note here that the command to Sayyidah Maryam عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ to avail herself of ordinary means for her sustenance came within the very context of one of history's greatest suspensions of the cause-and-effect convention, which was the miraculous birth of Sayyiduna 'Īsā عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ.

The unambiguous message of this ḥadīth is that true reliance upon Allah requires that one continues to avail yourself of the means which Allah created for the fulfilment of needs, while never losing sight in your heart and mind that, the curtain of apparent means notwithstanding, it is from Allah that the fulfilment of needs truly comes.

The rule of believing in Allah as the True Cause while making use of apparent means governs all aspects of life, from the management of a Bedouin's camel, to the earning a livelihood, procreation, protecting home and hearth, and dealing with disease and pandemics. In this last context it would be denied only by those who take the view that viruses and disease have no effect whatsoever.

Although this must be acknowledged to be the view of some scholars, there are a few important considerations that must be emphasised here:

- **Firstly**, as we learn from Imām Nawawī, this is not the position of the majority of the ‘Ulamā.
- **Secondly**, even according to this view, the Sunnah still requires preventative measures to be adopted, albeit for a different purpose.
- **Thirdly**, adopting this view in no way warrants that adherents of the majority position be criticised or slandered.

Levels of harm

Let us go back to the question as to whether the adoption of ordinary means to prevent harm in any way contradicts *tawakkul* upon Allah. This question has already been answered in the negative. What needs to be said at this juncture is that harm, according to what Imām Ghazālī states in his *Ihyā’*, may be classified into three levels.

- **Level One:** harm whose occurrence is a matter of certainty.
- **Level Two:** harm whose occurrence is a preponderant possibility.
- **Level Three:** harm that is purely imaginary.

Harm against which we are obliged to adopt preventative measures is that which belongs to Levels One and Two. Adoption measures against imaginary harm is not prescribed by the Sharī‘ah.

This, of course, leads to the question whether the harm of Covid-19 is real or imaginary. Whether the virus itself is natural or man-made is of no consequence in this respect. While a house is burning, any preoccupation with who set it alight is callous, dangerous and foolish. It is a time for lives to be saved.

The only thing comparable to how the virus itself thrives and spreads at times like this is the manner in which conspiracy theorism flourishes. But even the giving of credence to such theories does not obviate the need to prevent the harm being

caused. People are dying. If this could in any way be called into question at the beginning of this crisis, that time has long gone. Today we are in the throes of a second wave that has already surpassed the ferocity of the first. There can be no question: the harm of Covid-19 is very, very real. If not at the level of certainty for the hitherto uninfected, then at the very least at the level of preponderance.

Statistics

Do the measures prescribed by medical experts actually work? Let us consider two examples, one from either edge of the spectrum:

- **New Zealand:** At the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis New Zealand imposed a strict and wisely implemented lockdown. At the time of writing these words, New Zealand has had a grand total of 2128 infections, of which 2054 have recovered and 25 died, leaving only 49 active (and managed) cases.
- **Sweden:** The relaxed approach adopted in Sweden (probably in expectation of herd immunity) was eventually formally acknowledged by its government to have failed. With a population double that of New Zealand's, Sweden has had to date 367,120 cases of infection with 7993 deaths. That amounts to an infection rate 178 times that of New Zealand, and a death rate in excess of 300 times New Zealand's.

A fortunate man, says our Nabī ﷺ, is he who takes heed from the experiences of another.

HADĪTH NO 8

Travelling during a pandemic

عَنْ أُسَامَةَ بْنِ زَيْدٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ: «إِذَا سَمِعْتُمْ بِالطَّاعُونَ بِأَرْضٍ فَلَا تَدْخُلُوهَا. وَإِذَا وَقَعَ بِأَرْضٍ وَأَنْتُمْ بِهَا فَلَا تَخْرُجُوا مِنْهَا.» (رواه البخاري ٥٧٢٨ ومسلم (٢٢١٨)

Usāmah ibn Zayd رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا narrates that the Messenger of Allah صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ said: “If you hear about the plague in a land, then do not enter it. And if it appears in a land where you are, then do not leave it.” [BUKHĀRĪ 5728, MUSLIM 2218]

Background

There is a story to the first emergence of this ḥadīth among the Ṣaḥābah. It goes as follows:

In the 17th year after the Hijrah, Amīr al-Mu'minīn Sayyidunā 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ set out with a large group from Madīnah Munawwarah to visit the armies in the Levant (the lands that are today Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria). At a place called Sargh¹⁴ he was met by the commanders of the armies. It was also here that news came to them that the plague had broken out.

¹⁴ Today there stands at the location of this place the Jordanian village of al-Mudawwarah, 15km from the Saudi-Jordanian border.

Sayyiduna ‘Umar رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ consulted the Ṣaḥābah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ. Opinions differed. Some advised that he continue his journey deeper into the land where the plague was, while others advised that he return to Madīnah. ‘Umar رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ decided on the latter course.

What was the motivation of those of the Ṣaḥābah who advised that he continue his journey? It was their conviction that only such calamities could ever befall us as Allah ordained. From their vantage point, taking the road back to Madīnah had every appearance of fleeing from Qadar. And this was exactly the sentiment which their spokesman Sayyiduna Abū ‘Ubaydah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ expressed: “Amīr al-Mu’minīn, are you fleeing from Qadar?” To which Sayyiduna ‘Umar رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ replied, “How I wish, Abū ‘Ubaydah, that the one who asked that question was someone other than you. Yes, we are fleeing from Allah’s Qadar, to Allah’s Qadar!”

Up to this point the ḥadīth had not yet surfaced. The Ṣaḥābī who had heard these words from Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ was Sayyidunā ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Awf رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ. He had come with the delegation from Madīnah, but he was not present at the consultation. When he arrived afterwards, he narrated to them what he heard Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ say: “If you hear about the plague in a land, then do not enter it. And if it appears in a land while you are there, then do not leave it.”

Sayyidunā ‘Umar رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ stood vindicated—but why not? During the lifetime of Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ there had been several occasions in which his discretion was revealed to be in full harmony with subsequent revelation. Among all the Ṣaḥābah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ he was the one who Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ identified as the epitome of the *muḥaddath*, an especially inspired person.¹⁵ It was about him that Sayyidunā ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib publicly declared upon the pulpit of Kūfah, “The best men in this Ummah after its prophet is Abū Bakr, and then ‘Umar. To us it was not farfetched to think that the *Sakīnah* spoke on the tongue of ‘Umar.”¹⁶

Against this backdrop of history, let us now go on to tabulate the lessons offered by the ḥadīth.

¹⁵ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* no 3469

¹⁶ *Musnad Aḥmad* no 834. *Sakīnah* here refers to a special group of Angels.

Lessons

1. The plague, or by extension, any contagious disease, is intrinsically connected to belief in Qadar, or predestination. On account of this connection it is quite natural for differences of opinion to arise, as arose here between Sayyidunā ‘Umar and Sayyidunā Abū ‘Ubaydah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا. What we see in this altercation is a clash between firm conviction in Qadar on the one side, and preventative measures on the other. The same paradox features once again in the incensed exchange between Sayyiduna ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ and his critics رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ a year later when he decided to scatter the threatened population of the settlements into the countryside. By the sheer nature of the problem, differences of opinion become unavoidable.
2. Differences of opinion are of two kinds:
 - **Differences of variation**, where one thing can be done in a variety of ways, with all of them being valid and correct, such as the three ways to combine ‘umrah with ḥajj.
 - **Differences of contradiction**, in which one of two contending views is the correct one.

The issue of contagious diseases is clearly a case of contradiction. Settling such differences requires preference to be assigned to one of the two sides. The assignation of preference here is rendered quite easy by the following factors:

- The personal distinction that Sayyidunā ‘Umar رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ holds over any of his adversaries, as evidenced by the aḥādīth quoted.
- The very obvious factor of his position aligning with the ḥadīth of Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ.
- A third and crucial factor: the course of action chosen by Sayyidna ‘Umar رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ is more likely to achieve one of the ultimate purposes of the Shari‘ah, which is the saving of lives.

3. What we also learn here from Sayyidunā ‘Umar رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ is the etiquette of conducting a dispute. He neither condemned nor slandered his opponents. Even the words with which he replied to what could potentially be an insinuation¹⁷ reflect only empathy, kindness and understanding: “How I wish those words were spoken by someone other than you!”
4. Not travelling to or from a land where a contagious disease has appeared is a preventative measure based upon the rule of adopting apparent physical means. It is through human contact that such diseases transfer from one person to another, and it is through travel that they jump from country to country and continent to continent. When the Sunnah prohibits travel, it is seeking to thereby restrict the spread of disease through blocking its means of transfer.
5. Following on from the previous point, the prohibition of travel clearly shows that the adoption of physical measures to counter the spread of disease has its roots in the Sunnah long before it could be enforced by any medical professional or government official. The order to adopt such measures comes not from government, but from Muḥammad Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ.

¹⁷ For people such as us, not for men such as Sayyidunā Abū ‘Ubaydah ibn al-Jarrāḥ رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ.

HADĪTH NO 9

Avoiding physical contact

عَنِ الشَّرِيدِ بْنِ السُّوَيْدِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ: كَانَ فِي
وَفْدِ ثَقِيفٍ رَجُلٌ مَجْذُومٌ، فَأَرْسَلَ إِلَيْهِ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ
عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: «إِنَّا قَدْ بَايَعْنَاكَ، فَارْجِعْ.» (رواه مسلم
(٢٢٣١)

Sharīd ibn Suwayd رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ narrates that there was a leper among the delegation from Thaqīf. The Messenger of Allah صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ sent a message to him, saying: “Return; we have received your pledge of allegiance.” [MUSLIM 2231]

Prevention continued

A tone was set by the previous ḥādīth: that of preventing the spread of disease through the adoption of physical measures: flee from a leper, do not mix camels, do not travel to or from lands where contagious diseases have broken out. That tone continues in the present ḥādīth.

In accepting the pledge of allegiance it was the habit of Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ to receive their hands into his own. This is alluded to in the verse of Sūrah al-Fath where Allah says:

﴿إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يُبَايِعُونَكَ إِنَّمَا يُبَايِعُونَ اللَّهَ، يَدُ اللَّهِ فَوْقَ أَيْدِيهِمْ﴾

Those who pledge allegiance to you are actually pledging allegiance to Allah. Allah's Hand is above theirs. [48:10]

Under normal conditions this is how the *bay'ah* pledge is always taken. But when the situation becomes abnormal, for whatever reason, the question arises whether the usual protocols will continue to apply, or whether they will be adapted to suit the situation.

The tendency to treat abnormal situations different from normal ones is extremely common in the Shari'ah. It is ubiquitous enough to have risen to one of the five cardinal maxims of fiqh: *Difficulty brings about ease*, alternatively expressed as, *It is when things become narrow that they grow wide*.

That same phenomenon, in tandem with the Shari'ah's ordering of *maqāṣid* values, manifests itself in this ḥadīth. The need to prevent harm and preserve life trumps the importance of the conventional form of the *bay'ah*. Touching the hand of a person carrying a contagious disease produces an opportunity for the disease to spread. The disease must be denied all such opportunity. Hence, no need for going through the normal formalities of *bay'ah*. The person's *bay'ah* would be accepted even without the laying of hands.

Fatalism and the practice of the Ṣaḥābah

Significantly, we see here no trace of the type of fatalism, often mistaken for religiosity, that says, *I will go on doing as I always have, and only that which has been decreed for me will befall me*. Indeed, only that can befall you that Allah has decreed, but this sort of fatalism is not part of the Sunnah. For the common man in the street, it is in fact antithetical to the Sunnah of he who taught us how to combine belief in fate with precaution in deed, صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ.

There is a significant counter-argument here. The practice of certain Ṣaḥābah رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُمْ would appear to demonstrate that they dispensed with precaution by freely interacting with people suffering from leprosy, and even eating with them. How does one resolve their example with the contention that dispensing with precaution is against the Sunnah?

There are two considerations that help to resolve this apparent contradiction:

- **Firstly**, some of the those Ṣaḥābah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ are recorded to have been unaware of the Nabī صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ's command to adopt precaution. About Umm al-Mu'minīn Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا, for example it is narrated that she was unaware that Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ had said, "Flee from a leper as you would from a lion."¹⁸
- **Secondly**, as a rule, deeds involving a supreme degree of *tawakkul* done by people of exceptionally high spiritual excellence, such as the Ṣaḥābah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ, do not set a norm for others to follow and imitate. In respect of this rule Imām Ghazālī writes:

You might say that it has been related about a group [of the pious ones] that some of them were unmoved even when a lion laid its paws on them. I say: It has also been related that some of them rode on the backs of lions and subdued them. This status [of theirs] should not deceive you, for although it is correct within itself, it is not proper for others to imitate them therein by learning this from them. Rather, this is a lofty level of the miraculous which is not a requirement for *tawakkul*, and in it there are secrets unknown to those who have not reached it.¹⁹

The example which Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ set for his Ummah applies not just to the upper echelons of the pious, but to all types of persons. As far as concerns the general masses, abstention from touching the hand of the leper is one of the numerous ways in which the Sunnah sets the tone in combatting the spread of contagious diseases.

No one would imagine even for the slightest moment that, in dispensing with the formality of taking hands, Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ lost sight of the fact that disease is caused only by Allah. What he صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ did here was to demonstrate through his own noble example that the adoption of physical measures of precaution and prevention is completely compatible with the belief that harm can only befall you

¹⁸ Ṭabarī, *Tahdhīb al-Āthār* vol. 1 p. 30

¹⁹ *Iḥyā' Ulūm al-Dīn* vol. 4 part 14 p. 2545

if Allah has decreed it.

Handshaking

An analogy extending to our situation would at this point be apposite. Under normal conditions, *muṣāfahah* or the shaking of hands, is a sunnah act. When reason exists to temporarily suspend this sunnah on account of the possible harm this might cause, this should not be taken as an insult, nor as indifference to or abandonment of the Sunnah. It is, in fact, the very essence of the Sunnah of Muḥammad Rasūlullāh ﷺ.

And as Allah says:

﴿لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ﴾ [الأحزاب ٢١]

There is for you in the Messenger of Allah a beautiful example. [33:21]

Actual vs possible affliction

It might now be counter-argued that the person whose hand Rasūlullāh ﷺ desisted from touching was already visibly afflicted with leprosy, whereas the analogy to handshaking would appear to be extended even to cases where infection is a mere possibility.

What this line of argument misses is that when something becomes a matter of common affliction where it affects society at large, or unusually large swathes of it, the Sharī'ah treats it different to how it would treat a single individual case. In the rule of *‘umūm al-balwā* (common affliction) where things intolerable at an individual level become, by necessity, tolerable on a societal plane, and the maxim which states that a *hājah* (second-tier need) is raised to the level of *ḍarūrah* (first-tier need) when it becomes common in society, we find reason enough to contend, with confidence, that within the context of a pandemic, the possibility of infection may in fact be equated with an actual case of infection.

ḤADĪTH NO 10

Eating with a leper

عَنْ جَابِرِ بْنِ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَخَذَ بِيَدِ مَجْذُومٍ، فَأَدْخَلَهُ مَعَهُ فِي الْقَصْعَةِ، ثُمَّ قَالَ: «كُلْ بِاسْمِ اللَّهِ تَقَةَ بِاللَّهِ وَتَوَكَّلًا عَلَيْهِ.» (رواه الترمذي ١٨١٧)

Jābir ibn ‘Abdillāh رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا narrates that the Messenger of Allah صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ took a leper’s hand, placed it in the bowl with him, and said: “Eat in the name of Allah, trusting in Allah, and relying upon Him.” [TIRMIDHĪ 1817]

Authenticity

Let it be said at the very outset that unlike the other aḥādīth in this collection up to this point, the authenticity of this ḥadīth was called into question by the ḥadīth experts. Indeed, Imām Tirmidhī included in his collection, but he is at pains to immediately point out the defects in its transmission. Other experts like Imām Dāraquṭnī concur.

Acceptance of this position on the ḥadīth’s authenticity should lead to the closure of discussion. It would be fair, however, to point out that there is a difference in expert opinion on the authenticity of this ḥadīth. Other experts like Ibn Ḥibbān and Ḥākim accept as authentic.

Those who are not satisfied of the authenticity of the ḥadīth clearly have no obligation to demonstrate how it squares with the rest of the aḥādīth in this

chapter. That obligation resides with scholars who admit it to be authentic.

Reconciliation

A number of pathways were advanced to reconcile the apparent conflict between this ḥadīth and the rest. One approach suggests that it is a case of abrogation where one of the two attitudes towards physical interaction with a leper—avoidance as in the ḥadīth of *bay'ah*, and non-avoidance as in this ḥadīth—abrogates the other.

Imām Nawawī, however, points out that there is no abrogation. Abrogation would in any event require us to know which ḥadīth preceded which, and that is unknown. He writes:

The correct view espoused by the majority of scholars, and aside from which there is no other viable option, is that there is no abrogation. The two instances must be reconciled by understanding the command to avoid contact with the leper, and to flee from him, as a recommendation and precaution, and not obligation; while eating with him was done in demonstration of basic permissibility.

We learn three things from this:

1. Wherever precautionary measures are prescribed, they are at the level of recommendation, and are not absolute and peremptory obligations.
2. Not abiding by the precautions do not within themselves constitute the commission of an unlawful act. As such, unless there are extenuating factors, non-abiders should not be condemned for committing ḥarām.
3. When the purpose for Rasūlullāh ﷺ doing something was to demonstrate basic permissibility, it indicates that no sin is incurred by doing it. It does not necessarily mean that this act should now be adopted as standard and continuous practice. This can be clearly seen in the ḥadīth of urinating from a standing position. One explanation of this act—there are others—is that it was done merely to demonstrate basic permissibility. Finding in it justification for continuous practice is an obviously flawed approach.

HADĪTH NO 11

Washing hands

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ أَنَّ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ: «إِذَا اسْتَيْقَظَ أَحَدُكُمْ مِنْ نَوْمِهِ فَلَا يَغْمِسُ يَدَهُ فِي الْإِنَاءِ حَتَّى يَغْسِلَهَا ثَلَاثًا، فَإِنَّهُ لَا يَدْرِي أَيْنَ بَاتَتْ يَدُهُ.» (رواه مسلم ٢٧٨)

Abū Hurayrah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ narrates that the Prophet صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ said: “When anyone awakens from sleep, he should not dip his hand into his ablution water before washing it three times, for he knows not where his hand might have gone.” [MUSLIM 278]

Ratio beyond text

In a law based on text, the problem of finite texts versus infinite human situations is not uncommon. Islamic law has as its foundations the Qurʾān and the Sunnah, to which is also added every instance of *ijmāʿ* or consensus. But whichever way one looks at these three sources, they are, in the end, finite. There is a limited amount of texts in the Qurʾān and the Sunnah, and the instances of historical *ijmāʿ* are similarly limited, while the potential for new cases of consensus is severely constrained by its stringent requirements.

To extend this textual law beyond the confines of the text there arises the solution of *qiyas*, or analogy. *Qiyās* essentially involves the process of identifying the *ʿillah* (or *ratio legis* to legal scholars) upon which a point of the law in authoritative text turns,

and then extending that law beyond the confines of the text as far as the ratio may stretch.

The ḥadīth under discussion presents just such an instance. It prescribes that hands be washed upon awakening from sleep, stating as reason that “you know not where your hands might have been”. What this means is that a chance exists, howsoever slight, that while you were asleep your hands came into contact with impurity. By now dipping your hand into your ablution water before washing them you cause the water to become impure, and therefore unusable.

Extension by analogy

Now consider how this same reason, stripped of circumstantial accretions, appears in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic where we are asked to wash hands frequently:

- We do not know for a fact that the harm-causing element is present on our hands.
- Yet we know that is a possibility, howsoever slight.
- Therefore, as a precaution against possible harm that might result from not washing the hands, let’s just wash them!

With greater force

Examining the analogy from another angle brings to light another aspect. Compare the harm that results from non-compliance in either case. In the case of water it is pollution of the particular amount of water in one’s wuḍū utensil, while in the case of a pandemic it is the onset of disease together with the chance of death. Clearly these two are not at the same level of undesirability and harm.

The type of *qiyas* that extends from a case where the *‘illāh* applies with lesser force or emphasis, to a case where the force or emphasis is greater, is known in *uṣūl al-fiqh* as *faḥwā l-khiṭāb* or *qiyas awlawī*. In English (together with a bit of Latin) it would be an *a fortiori* analogy. Such cases, says Imām Ghazālī, possess an authority equal to that of the text itself.

Sharī'ah or medicine?

In this manner a medical protocol turns into a point of Sharī' law. There is a significant difference, however, between abiding by something as a matter of medical protocol, and adhering to something as a prescription by the Sharī'ah. In the latter case your act becomes a gesture of obedience to Allah, bringing with it His pleasure and reward.

Anything done in compliance to the Sharī'ah is clearly motivated by the desire to please Allah. And the moment it becomes your intention to please Allah, your deed assumes a completely different character. For as we are taught by our Nabī

صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ،

إِنَّمَا الْأَعْمَالُ بِالنِّيَّاتِ.

Deeds are judged by their intentions.

HADĪTH NO 12

Covering the face when sneezing

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ أَنَّ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ كَانَ إِذَا عَطَسَ غَطَّى وَجْهَهُ بِيَدِهِ أَوْ بِثَوْبِهِ، وَغَضَّ بِهَا صَوْتَهُ. (رواه الترمذي ٢٧٤٥)

Abū Hurayrah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ narrates that when the Prophet صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ sneezed he would cover his face with his hand or his clothing, and he would suppress his voice. [TIRMIDHĪ 2745]

Benefits of the Sunnah

The habits and manners of Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ are filled with wisdom and benefit, some of which we understand, while others reveal themselves in the fullness of time. His manner of covering his face when sneezing contains the very obvious objective of courtesy and civility by not allowing anything expelled from nose or mouth to settle on those in his company or immediate vicinity.

However, what the body expels from mouth or nose during sneezing could well contain germs. Beyond the dimension of courtesy and good conduct there arises therefore also the aspect of preventing others from harm. By covering his face when sneezing our Nabī صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ was practicing what he preached when he said,

لَا ضَرَرَ وَلَا ضَرَارَ

Harm neither yourself nor another.

Having seen in the previous ḥadīth how one act prescribed in the Sunnah extends beyond its immediate confines by virtue of the *ratio* on which it operates, we may

well ask if any such extension is feasible in the case of the sunnah act of covering the face when sneezing.

Wearing masks

Wearing a mask in public has been widely advised as an effective method of curbing the spread of the coronavirus. At the same time, the practice has also received some criticism, if not forthright ridicule.

Wearing a mask is done for the same reason that Rasūlullāh ﷺ covered his face when he sneezed. A counter-argument may be anticipated here that sneezing happens at most for a few seconds, while masks tend to be worn for extended periods. What this line of argument misses is that it is not on the length of time that the matter turns, but on the purpose behind the act, and as long as there is concordance in that area—which there is—this is sufficient.

Also missing from this approach is the consideration that the coronavirus is often carried by completely asymptomatic, and therefore healthy-looking carriers. Add to this the extent to which the virus has by now spread, and you have a situation where anyone you meet and speak to could be a carrier. These considerations alone should suffice to create at least some tolerance for those who wear the mask.

Masks in ṣalāh

Wearing a mask in ṣalāh has been criticised on two counts: **one**, there is a ḥadīth specifically prohibiting the covering the face during ṣalāh; and **two**, the claim that wearing masks is an imitation of the fire-worshippers. Let us deal with each claim separately.

Covering the face during ṣalāh

As a rule, covering the face in ṣalāh is deemed undesirable. About that there is no difference, and the ḥadīth in Abū Dāwūd is quite categorical. But that is not the question. The question is whether that rule could ever yield in circumstances where factors of greater persuasion require that it does. Let us see what the fiqh legacy has to offer in this regard:

- Among the Mālikī jurists, Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr states: “There is consensus on the fact

that a woman must open her face in ṣalāh and iḥrām... However, if she does so *due to a need*, such as the presence of strange men, there is no repugnance.”²⁰

- The Ḥanbalī jurist al-Bahūtī clarifies that the rule of not covering the face in ṣalāh applies to cases where there is no need to the contrary: “It is disliked for a woman to pray with a face veil... *where there is no need*.”²¹ Then he goes on to cite Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr above.
- The Shāfi‘ī al-Khaṭīb al-Shirbīnī writes: “It is disliked for a man to pray with his mouth masked, or for a woman with a face veil, *except if it happens to be in a place where there are strange men* who would not desist from looking at her, in which case she may not raise her face veil.”²²
- Despite the fact that Ḥanafī jurists hold the covering of the face in ṣalāh to be *makrūh taḥrīmī*, they too, concur that this rule yields to need. Al-Kāsānī writes: “To cover the face in ṣalāh is disliked, since the Prophet ﷺ prohibited it... One who covers it with a cloth has imitated the Zoroastrians, for they mask themselves in their worship of fire, and the Prophet ﷺ prohibited the covering of the mouth and nose in ṣalāh; *except if covering occurs to suppress yawning*, for reasons mentioned.”²³ Ibn Amīr al-Ḥājj writes: “It is apparent that there is no difference on [covering the face in ṣalāh] being disliked *where there is no excuse*.”²⁴ Prominent contemporary Ḥanafī fatwā-issuing institutions such as Dār al-‘Ulūm Deoband²⁵ and Jāmi‘at al-‘Ulūm al-Islāmiyyah in Karachi²⁶ are on record to have issued fatwās obligating a woman to keep her face covered when she is constrained by circumstances to pray in a place where she is visible to strange men.

The point of all these citations is not a tour de force of fiqh. It is to demonstrate the willingness and amenability of the Sharī‘ah, in all madhāhib, to yield to factors of greater importance. What we see here is a rule of *karāhah* being relaxed for factors

²⁰ *al-Tamhīd*, vol. 6 p. 346

²¹ *Kashshāf al-Qinā‘*, vol. p.

²² *Al-Iqnā‘*, vol. 2 p. 111

²³ *Badā‘i‘ al-Ṣanā‘i‘*, vol. p.

²⁴ *Ḥalbat al-Mujallī*, vol. p. 231

²⁵ <https://darulifta-deoband.com/home/ur/women-s-issues/164045> , accessed 23/12/2020.

²⁶ <https://www.banuri.edu.pk/readquestion/2019-11-30/144104200031> عورت کا نقاب میں نماز پڑھنا۔ accessed 23/12/2020

as momentous as *ḥijāb*, to others as apparently mundane as yawning.

This creates a very obvious question: When the Sharī‘ah is so sensitive and responsive to need, why would it not relax the rule of *karāhah* for a factor as grim and grave as a pandemic? What reason could there be for this sudden ossification of the rule when it comes to the need to combat the spread of a potentially fatal disease?

Imitating fire-worshippers

Again, we must begin with a basic fact that ought to have been self-evident: the manner in which the rules apply under normal circumstances *simply cannot* be compared to the way in which they must be applied in an abnormal situation. Equating the normal with the abnormal is not correct and proper fiqh; if anything, it is an aberration of fiqh.

Phenomena which under normal circumstances amount to *tashabbuh bi l-kuffār*, or imitation of non-Muslims, will no longer be given the same characterisation when they are resorted to out of need.

- Wearing items of clothing exclusively associated with non-Muslims is considered a ḥarām act. Some even go to the extent of declaring the wearer an apostate. However, when a Zoroastrian cap (*qalansuwat al-majūs*) is worn with the specific purpose of warding against heat or cold, or a Christian belt (*zunnār*) is worn in order to secure the release of Muslim prisoners, the fuqahā have permitted it.²⁷
- Praying in a kneeling position is an act distinctly associated with Christians. However, kneeling in ṣalāh due to need and the inability to stand or sit in the normal manner is deemed to be not only permissible, but even obligatory where this is the only option.²⁸
- One of the obligatory aspects of farḍ ṣalāh is *qiyām*, or to stand. When someone who is fully able to stand, decides to sit in any of the farāʾiḍ, his ṣalāh will be invalid. He might even be criticised for adopting the manner of Christians who sit on benches and chairs during worship in churches. But despite this association of sitting on chairs with Christians, when someone is unable to stand, and this inability forces

²⁷ *Al-Fatāwā al-Hindiyyah*, vol.2 p. 276

²⁸ *Asnā al-Maṭālib*, vol. 1 p. 146

him to sit on a chair, he is permitted to do so.²⁹

When such is the degree of responsiveness to need which the Sharī'ah exhibits under abnormal circumstances, the insistence that the wearing of a mask in ṣalāh during the Covid-19 pandemic amounts to an act of imitating Zoroastrians will have to be dismissed—with all due respect and reverence to its proponents—as inconsistent with the Sharī'ah.

²⁹ In this regard, see the very detailed fatwā of Darul Uloom Deoband at http://darululoom-deoband.com/urdu/magazine/new/tmp/05-Kursi%20par%20Namaz_MDU_10-11_Oct%20&%20Nov_12.htm, accessed 24/12/2020.

HADĪTH NO 13

Keeping physical distance

عَنْ عَلِيِّ بْنِ أَبِي طَالِبٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ: «لَا تُدِيمُوا النَّظَرَ إِلَى الْمَجذُومِينَ، وَإِذَا كَلَّمْتَهُمْ فَلْيَكُنْ بَيْنَكُمْ وَبَيْنَهُمْ قِيدُ رُمْحٍ.» (رواه عبد الله بن أحمد في زوائد المسند ٥٨١)

‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ narrates that the Prophet صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ said: “Do not stare at lepers continuously. When you speak to them, let there be a spear’s length between you and them.” [‘ABDULLĀH IBN AḤMAD, ZAWĀ’ID AL-MUSNAD 581]

Authenticity

This ḥadīth is the second in this collection whose authenticity has been called into question. The first part of it, that speaks of not staring at a leper, is adequately supported by peripheral narrations to satisfy the rigorous requirements of authenticity.³⁰ The second part, about keeping a distance from lepers when speaking to them, also has corroboration of sorts from supporting narrations,³¹ but even collectively they fall short, in our considered view, of reasonable authenticity.

³⁰ *Sunan Ibn Mājah* no. 3543

³¹ These include the ḥadīth of ‘Abdullāh ibn Abī Awfā in *al-Kāmil* of Ibn ‘Adī vol. 2 p. 82, and Abū Nu‘aym in *al-Ṭibb*, no. 292, defective on account of al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Umārah, the severely impugned qāḍī of Baghdād; and two *mawqūf* narrations from ‘Umar رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ, both with interrupted chains, in Ṭabarī’s *Tahdhīb al-Āthār* vol. 1 p32. Their respective texts are inconsistent with one another.

Weak aḥādīth and precaution

As such, the ḥadīth is weak. However, it is not at such a severe level of weakness where it has to be set completely aside. Its weakness is of the type that still allows for use, though within much more restricted parameters. Imām Nawawī writes in the introduction to his book *al-Adhkār*:

The learned men from among the Muhaddithīn, the Fuqahā' and others say: In matters of merit (*faḍā'il*), encouragement and discouragement, it is permissible and desirable to practice upon a weak ḥadīth, provided it is not a forgery. As for matters of law, such as what is permissible and what is not, as well as contracts, marriage and divorce etc., in those areas only a *ṣaḥīḥ* or *ḥasan* hadith may be practiced upon—except if it pertains to precaution in any of those areas...³²

The ḥadīth before us might not be of the *ṣaḥīḥ* or *ḥasan* variety, but it does pertain to a matter of precaution, that precaution being the maintaining of distance from a person carrying a contagious disease. The same strain of precaution that characterises all the other aḥādīth of this chapter runs through this one as well, demonstrating that such precaution is by no means an isolated aberration.

Social distancing in ṣalāh

In terms of maintaining distance from victims of contagious diseases, let it be stated that the practice of the Ṣaḥābah رضي الله عنهم reflect both attitudes. Some of them maintained distance while others did not. We have already commented on that. The sensitive issue among us today, however, is that of maintaining distance in ṣaffs for congregational ṣalāh. This, without a doubt, has no direct precedent in our history. But is its permissibility contingent on precise precedent?

Precedent

As mentioned and emphasised in the preceding pages, abnormal situations often require to be treated in ways that also depart from the norm. This much, in

³² *al-Adhkār*, p. 5

principle, is affirmed by the Shari‘ah. That the pandemic we presently find ourselves in constitutes an abnormal situation should also be beyond question. What remains to be determined is whether, in the specific matter of how the ṣaffs are formed for congregational ṣalāh, we are constrained to abide by the norm.

The argument against departing from the norm in this matter would go as follows: What wasn’t done by the Ṣaḥābah رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُمْ and the great Fuqahā’ cannot be done by any of us, no matter what advances medicine and science have made. Without the benefit of a direct precedent our hands are tied.

However, our understanding of how the Shari‘ah and medicine collaborate towards achieving the purpose of saving lives leads us to a different conclusion. Every generation can only act on the medical knowledge available to it at the time, and there is no indictment on earlier generations if the medical knowledge available to them was in any way less than what later generations have. To insist that because the Ṣaḥābah رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُمْ were the best of creation after the Anbiyā’ عَلَيْهِمُ السَّلَامُ, they were also the possessors of the best medical knowledge, is absolutely without foundation. It is in the field of religious and spiritual distinction that they were unequalled.

Medical knowledge and expertise, on the other hand, is something which Allah grants to believer and unbeliever alike. Muslims inherited the great medical traditions of the nations before them and developed those traditions further before giving it back to the world. And let it be acknowledged that many of the early distinguished physicians of Umayyad and ‘Abbāsīd times were non-Muslim subjects of the Khilāfah.

In any event, when it comes to saving lives, The Shari‘ah has very broad guidelines, within the confines of which it is ready and willing to be guided by medicine. Let us consider the case of a medical procedure universally acknowledged to have saved many lives: birth by caesarean section. What does the Shari‘ah say about it?

The procedure itself predates Islam. It was known to the Egyptians, Indians, Greeks and Romans. Fiqh is known for its tendency to encompass just about any minute variation of human life. So did the Fuqahā’ ever discuss this procedure and its position in law?

Where something approximating caesarean section does come under discussion in fiqh it tends to be the surgical opening of the womb *after the mother has died* in order to rescue the child. And in this respect two views emerged among the Fuqahā³³. The Mālikīs and Ḥanbalīs generally tended to disallow this procedure, reasoning that the child's slim chances of survival do not form a sufficiently compelling case to violate the sanctity of the deceased mother's corpse. The Ḥanafīs and Shāfi'īs, on the other hand, allow the child to be surgically removed, giving preference to the living over the dead.³³

But properly speaking, this is not birth by caesarean section. Caesarean section is when the child is surgically extracted from the womb due to complications that occur *while the mother is alive*. Mention hereof appears to be extremely rare in our fiqh literature.³⁴ Where it does appear, the procedure is disallowed.³⁵

Today we empirically know that the reasoning that underpins that outcome no longer holds: surgery to remove the child does not necessarily endanger the mother's life. With the dilemma of having to choose between the life of the mother and that of the child removed, will the absolute imperative to save life reassert itself? It is almost impossible to imagine that any contemporary scholar would prohibit caesarean section where it can save a life, purely because our inherited tradition contains no precedent that permits it, or because the inherited precedent disallows it.

The same line of reasoning applies to standing separate in the ṣaff. Had there ever been a dispute about the sunnah of standing shoulder-to-shoulder itself, this would have surfaced long before the Covid-19 pandemic. The fact that it surfaced only during this crisis ought to demonstrate very clearly that this measure is resorted to, not out of any imagined secret hostility to the Sunnah of Rasūlullāh ﷺ,

³³ *al-Mawsū'ah al-Fiqhiyyah* vol. 16 p. 278

³⁴ It would be of interest to note that Islam's greatest pioneer of surgery, Abu l-Qāsim al-Zahrāwī (died 404/1013CE) makes no mention of caesarean section in his 30 volume magnum opus, *al-Taṣrif*, although he devoted a full section to operative obstetrics.

³⁵ Al-Rāzī, Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr, *Tuḥfat al-Mulūk*, p. 257; al-ʿAynī, *Minḥat al-Sulūk*, vol. 4 p. 182 (*al-Masbūk*).

but due to an earnest desire to fulfil an objective of which Allah speaks with high praise where He says:

﴿وَمَنْ أَحْيَاهَا فَكَأَنَّمَا أَحْيَا النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا﴾ [المائدة ٣٢]

Whoever saves one life, it is as he has saved all of mankind. [5:32]

HADĪTH NO 14

Remaining indoors

عَنْ عَائِشَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ: «لَيْسَ مِنْ رَجُلٍ يَقَعُ الطَّاعُونَ، فَيَمْكُثُ فِي بَيْتِهِ صَابِرًا مُحْتَسِبًا يَعْلَمُ أَنَّهُ لَا يُصِيبُهُ إِلَّا مَا كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَهُ، إِلَّا كَانَ لَهُ مِثْلُ أَجْرِ شَهِيدٍ.» (رواه أحمد ٢٦١٣٩)

‘Ā’ishah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا narrates that the Messenger of Allah صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ said: “Any man who stays within his house when the plague strikes, patiently and in the hope of reward, knowing that only that will afflict him which Allah had written for him, will have the reward of a martyr.” [AḤMAD 26139]

The central point of this ḥadīth, for our present purposes, is that it encourages people to remain indoors during pandemics. Knowing about pandemics what we do—that, at the level of mundane cause and effect, they spread chiefly through human contact and interaction—the prescription to remain indoors makes perfect sense.

At the outbreak of the Plague of Emmaus in Palestine (known to the Arabs as ‘Amawās or ‘Imwās) in the year 18AH, it was this specific aspect of the plague which Sayyidunā ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ observed. When he addressed the people to lay before them his plan of action, he said:

أيها الناس، إن هذا الوجد إذا وقع فإلما يشتعل اشتعال النار، فتحصنوا منه في الجبال.

*O people, when this painful disease strikes, it spreads like fire. So protect yourselves against it in the mountains.*³⁶

His strategy was not unopposed. As pointed out before, the very nature of this problem creates sensitivity. However, he was not deterred from his course, and very soon the action taken yielded positive results.

In the course of all of that, it remains our firm conviction that not a single Ṣaḥābī or Tābi‘ī who participated in the preventative action lost sight of the fact that illness, recovery and death all reside within the control of Allah alone—not even for the slightest moment.

For the one who is able to maintain such full conviction, acknowledging deep within himself that even together with the isolation which he imposes on himself, he will still fall victim to a disease if Allah has ordained for that to happen; for the one who is enabled by the strength of his faith to straddle this apparent paradox, and is able thereafter to bear the discomfort and difficulties of isolation with forbearance and hope—for such a person, this ḥadīth promises the reward of a martyr.

³⁶ al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, vol. 4 p. 62. On the authenticity of this report, see the footnote to the foreword to this book.

Chapter Three

**MASĀJID IN
PANDEMICS**

HADĪTH NO 15

“Pray at home!”

عَنْ ابْنِ عُمَرَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا أَنَّهُ أَذِنَ بِالصَّلَاةِ فِي لَيْلَةِ
ذَاتِ بَرْدٍ وَرِيحٍ، ثُمَّ قَالَ: أَلَا صَلُّوا فِي الرَّحَالِ. ثُمَّ
قَالَ: إِنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ كَانَ يَأْمُرُ
الْمُؤَدِّنَ إِذَا كَانَتْ لَيْلَةٌ ذَاتُ بَرْدٍ وَمَطَرٍ، يَقُولُ: أَلَا
صَلُّوا فِي الرَّحَالِ! (رواه البخاري ٦٦٦)

Once on a cold and windy night, ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Umar رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا made the adhān. Then he said: “Lo, pray at home!” He went on to say that when the night was cold and rainy the Messenger of Allah صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ used to have the mu’adhdhin say: “Lo, pray at home!”
[BUKHĀRĪ 666]

One of the most sensitive issues to emerge from the Covid-19 crisis must be acknowledged to be the closure of the masājid. The attachment that our community has to the masājid is very deep.

Our masājid are the physical manifestations of Islam in our communities, and the level to which Dīn is alive in a community may often be inferred from activity at the masjid. Anything that even appears to threaten the operation of our masājid is immediately viewed with deep suspicion, and often rightfully so. The question is whether closure of the masājid in the face of the Covid-19 threat should be treated the same as other malicious threats.

Of all the challenges thrown out by this pandemic, that of closing the masājid must be acknowledged to have been the most difficult and heart-wrenching. To have taken this decision broke the heart of many among us. Others could barely hold back their tears. So, if such was the level of heartbreak and grief, why still go ahead with the decision?

This is one common question. The other equally common contention is that there is no precedent for the organised closure of masājid in history. Let us respond to both.

The decision to amputate a limb, or to switch of a life support system, or to terminate a pregnancy that threatens the mother's life, is no less heart-wrenching. It is not on emotional turbulence that the correctness of a decision turns, but on the weight of the Sharī evidence that supports it. What we learn from the ḥadīth above is that Rasūlullāh ﷺ instructed the community to pray at home on account of inclement weather. The question we have to ask ourselves is this: is the threat that a pandemic holds on human life less than, equal to, or more emphatic than that of bad weather?

It is only an exceptionally literalistic interpretation of the Sharī'ah that would refuse to extend to the rule associated with bad weather, to the situation of a pandemic. Indeed, there did once exist a literalist school of fiqh—the Zāhirī school—but it died out, as all forms of inveterate literalism are bound for extinction.

If Dīn is to survive in this day and age, it cannot be in any obscurantist literalist streak. As the survival of Four Madhāhib amongst many has shown, and as the efforts of many of our greatest Mujaddids demonstrate, Islam survives, by the permission of Allah, in the convergence of authentic revelation with reason that is astute and judicious, but never unbridled.

Regarding precedent, there may be repeated here what was stated earlier: We are by no means averse to being informed by advances in medicine. Medical and scientific fact does not threaten the fabric of faith; it strengthens it.

With due respect to any contending view, we found in the basic idea of social contact being amenable to transmission at the level on which the world ordinarily functions, sufficient justification from the Sunnah, and thereafter from the precedents of at least some of the Ṣaḥābah رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُمْ, to call for the generalised closure of masājīd for limited periods. And when those periods passed, the masājīd reopened.

When such a call is made, it is not to obstruct the functioning of the masājīd, but in order to ensure that after the pandemic has passed, there remains enough of normal life to continue the duty of keeping alive the Houses of Allah. Consider the following excerpts from history:

- Ibn al-Jawzī on the epidemic of Transoxania in 449AH: “In Jumādā al-Ākhirah a letter arrived from the traders of Transoxania informing that there happened in this land a great and extraordinary epidemic, exceeding all limits, to the extent that there were 18,000 funerals on one day in this region. Till the time the letter was written the total number of deaths was 1,650,000. People pass through these lands and see nothing but empty markets and abandoned streets. Most masājīd have run empty; there are no congregational prayers.”³⁷
- Ibn ‘Adhārī on the North African epidemic of 395AH: “Most people died, rich as well as poor. The only ones who could be seen to remain active were those were caring for or visiting the sick, or preparing corpses for burial. The masājīd of Qayrawān were empty.”³⁸
- Al-Dhahabī on the epidemic of Spain in 448AH: “In this year there was a great famine and epidemic in Andalus. In Seville people died to the extent that the masājīd were closed, having no one to pray in them.”³⁹
- Ibn Ḥajar, on Makkah in 827AH: “At the beginning of this year there happened in Makkah a great epidemic, to the extent where 40 people were dying per day. In the month of Rabī‘ al-Awwal alone the total of fatalities was placed at 1700. The imām who led the prayer at the Maqām is said to have had only two people behind him

³⁷ *Al-Muntaẓam* vol. 17 p. 17

³⁸ *Al-Bayān al-Mughrib* vol. 1 p. 280

³⁹ *Tārīkh al-Islām* vol. 30 p. 25

in ṣalāh during those days. The other imāms stopped leading the ṣalāh altogether due to there being no followers.”⁴⁰

Against such possible grim consequences of an unmanaged epidemic, the temporary closure of the masājīd is a price we are willing to pay, over and over should it be required. We duly acknowledge the possibility, as any reasonable scholar should, that we may be right or wrong. We say, as Sayyiduna Abū Bakr and Sayyiduna ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُمَا once said: “Such is our view. If we are right, it is from Allah. If we are wrong, it is from us and from Shayṭan.”

But when we compare this approach to the potentially gruesome and disastrous dimensions of the opposite outcome, we can only say with hope, as did Sayyidunā ‘Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ once:

والله، لئن كان ذنبا إنه لصغير مغفور، ولئن كان حسنا إنه لعظيم مشكور.

By Allah, if this is a sin, it is indeed small and forgiven; and if it is a good thing, it is great and will be rewarded!”⁴¹

⁴⁰ *Imbā‘ al-Ghumr* vol. 3 p. 326

⁴¹ Al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu‘jam al-Kabīr*, no. 319, vol. 1 p. 144

HADĪTH NO 16

Obstruction by a valid cause

عَنْ أَنَسٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ أَنَّ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ
كَانَ فِي غَزَاةٍ، فَقَالَ: «إِنَّ أَقْوَامًا خَلَفْنَا بِالْمَدِينَةِ، مَا
سَلَكْنَا شِعْبًا وَلَا وَادِيًّا إِلَّا وَهُمْ مَعَنَا فِيهِ، حَبَسَهُمُ
الْعُدْرُ» (رواه البخاري ٢٨٣٩)

Anas رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ narrates that the Messenger of Allah صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ was on an expedition when he said: “There are people left behind in Madīnah who are with us through every valley and cleft that we have travelled through. They were detained by a ‘valid’ excuse.” [BUKHĀRĪ 2839]

Our best intentions are at times obstructed by factors beyond our control. When such factors present themselves, we are forced to set aside what we intended to do. When we have every intention of doing what circumstances force us to desist from, how does this affect our standing with Allah?

For this we need to return to a specific moment in the Sirah, the history of Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ. This was the occasion of the expedition to Tabūk in Rajab of the 9th year after the Hijrah. It was at this time of shortage in Madīnah that the command came to prepare for an expedition towards Roman territory.

Many could not manage, but Sayyidunā ‘Uthmān رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ stepped up to equip half of the army with a thousand dīnārs from his own pocket. In response to his gesture

Rasūlullāh ﷺ stood and declared to all and sundry, “Nothing which ‘Uthmān does after today can ever harm him.”⁴²

But even the generosity of ‘Uthmān رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ could only go so far. There were still some who could not be accommodated. A group of them approached Rasūlullāh ﷺ for assistance, only to be told that he had nothing to help them with. Tears flowed from their eyes as they turned away in disappointment. That poignant moment was captured in revelation to be recited for ever more:

﴿تَوَلَّوْا وَأَعْيُنُهُمْ تَفِيضُ مِنَ الدَّمْعِ حَزَنًا أَلَّا يَجِدُوا مَا يُنْفِقُونَ﴾ [التوبة ٩٢]
*They left with tears flowing from their eyes out of grief
that they had nothing to contribute. [9:92]*

Throughout this expedition they remained on the mind of Rasūlullāh ﷺ. As they travelled through the heat of the desert, crossing valleys and passing through craggy clefts, he thought of them. Those who were enduring the rigours of travel with him ﷺ might possibly have imagined that the reward for these hardships was theirs alone. But before any such thought could take root, Rasūlullāh ﷺ expunged it.

Those in Madīnah whose hearts were pining to be here with them on their expedition, but who were constrained by circumstances, *were here with them*, if not in person, then in terms of Allah’s reward.

If today we are prevented by circumstances from attending our masājid, we hope that for as long as the flame of intention remains alive in our hearts, we will continue to reap the reward of congregational ṣalāh.

May Allah keep that flame alive!

⁴² *Jāmi‘ al-Tirmidhī* no. 3701

HADĪTH NO 17

Illness or fear: valid causes

عَنْ ابْنِ عَبَّاسٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: «مَنْ سَمِعَ الْمُنَادِيَ فَلَمْ يَمْنَعْهُ مِنْ اتِّبَاعِهِ عَذْرٌ—قَالُوا: مَا الْعُذْرُ؟ قَالَ: خَوْفٌ أَوْ مَرَضٌ—لَمْ يَقْبَلْ مِنْهُ الصَّلَاةُ الَّتِي صَلَّى.» (رواه أبو

داود ٥٥١)

‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abbās رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا narrates that the Messenger of Allah صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ said: “The person who hears the caller ‘to prayer’ and was not prevented by an excuse from following him, will not have the ṣalāh which he made accepted.” They asked: “What would be an excuse?” He said: “Fear or illness.” [ABŪ DAWŪD 551]

Performing ṣalāh in congregation is one of the most visible and prominent *sha‘ā’ir*, or symbolic rites, of Islam. It is underpinned by both the Qur’ān and the Sunnah; in fact, listing the aḥādīth that stress its importance would fill several pages.

However, together with all the importance that the Shari‘ah attaches to ṣalāh in *jamā‘ah*, it has been equally emphatic and unambiguous about a concomitant aspect of it: when faced with a situation of more immediate or greater need, the duty of ṣalāh in *jamā‘ah* readily yields.

The previous ḥadīth, about the instruction to pray at home during bad weather, is one of several examples of *ṣalāt al-jamā'ah* yielding to the greater need within the formative period of the Sunnah. In the ḥadīth presently before us Rasūlullāh ﷺ can be clearly seen to make the duty of praying in congregation contingent on there being no extenuating circumstances. On being asked by his students what would be a valid excuse, Sayyidunā ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abbās رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ identifies illness and fear as two very broad general categories.

The Fuqahā of the Ummah would later go on to outline in painstaking detail what constitutes a valid excuse for missing congregational ṣalāh. One fiqh text states:

Congregational ṣalāh may be left out for:

- a **general cause**, such as rain and snow which cause clothes to become wet, strong winds at night, extreme darkness, mud, simoom desert winds, heat or cold, and an earthquake;
- or a **specific cause**, such extreme drowsiness; illness causing unbearable difficulty; extreme obesity; the need to nurse a relative, wife, in-law, or friend who have no one else to tend to them, or to provide them company, or them being at the edge of death, or to nurse an derelict stranger; and fear for loss of even a small amount of property such as bread in an oven; fear for someone whose defence is your duty; fear for something deposited with you for safekeeping; fear that a creditor might imprison you or go after you when you are unable to meet financial obligations as well as to prove that inability; fear of punishment by another person of whose forgiveness you are hopeful when you stay away...; suppressing the need to answer the call of nature, where making ṣalāh with that is disliked; severe hunger and thirst, in which cases it is preferred to stay away from congregational ṣalāh in order to [respectively] answer nature’s call and fulfil the desire [to eat or drink]...; and having eaten raw something with an offensive smell which cannot be easily treated.⁴³

⁴³ Al-Muzajjad, *al-‘Ubāb* vol. 1 p. 260

Reading through a list such as this provides a clear glimpse into the type of realism which the Fuqahā brought to bear on the identification of causes for dispensing—very temporarily, of course—with the duty of making ṣalāh in congregation. What is particularly significant about it is the fact that it separates general causes from specific ones. General causes affect the entire community, while specific ones tend to apply to individual persons at specific times. It should probably go without saying that where a reasonable general cause exists, *ṣalāt al-jamā‘ah* will be set aside, for the required period, by the community as a whole.

In any event, having seen the realism of the Fuqahā, two questions arise for consideration:

- **One:** Is the list of excuses restricted to only the ones tabulated here?
- **Two:** Should pandemics be included in this list?

Only an intransigent literalist could ever answer positively to the first question. As for the second, before any generalised answer is given, what must be considered is that pandemics cannot all be assumed to be the same in every respect. What must be recognised is that asymptomatic transmission is a factor with the potential to affect the approach to this question.

Asymptomatic transmission means that a person who does not exhibit any symptom associated with the disease could in fact not only be carrying the disease, but could also transfer it to another. This factor on its own does not yet constitute the factor of influence. It is when we add to it the angle of community-wide transmission that it comes to have an impact. Contagious diseases that only spread symptomatically might not necessarily qualify as a valid cause for the communal relaxation of the rule of *ṣalāt al-jamā‘ah*, since for such diseases, avoidance of contact with the infected is relatively easy. However, the phenomenon of a contagious disease making its way through society all over the world in an asymptomatic manner, with the symptoms of infection only becoming apparent a week or two later, *must be treated differently*.

With a phenomenon of such description, the insistence that it cannot be added to the list of valid excuses for dispensing with *ṣalāt al-jamā'ah* is, from our point of view, and with due respect to any contending opposite opinion, ill-advised and foolhardy. The argument of lack of specific precedent is in itself rooted in a certain degree of literalism. Others might choose to go this way; we, for all the reasons spelled out in this book, cannot.

Ours is a position founded neither upon obscurantism, nor the paranoia of conspiracy theorism. At the same time, it is also not founded upon the arrogance of imagining that only we could ever be correct. When all this has blown over and the pandemic has gone—as it must, by the mercy and permission of Allah—and we are then proven to have been mistaken in our view, we will look back at a legacy of temporarily suspending certain aspects of our practice as Muslims. By the grace of Allah, we would never have to apologise for the loss of so many lives through having advocated a different course.

A counter-argument may be anticipated here, stating that loss of life is by Allah's decree only, and that under no circumstances do advocates of alternative approaches hold any eventual responsibility. For a response to this argument, please go on to read Ḥadīth no. 21 and its commentary.

ḤADĪTH NO 18

Reward for deeds missed due to an excuse

عَنْ أَبِي مُوسَى الْأَشْعَرِيِّ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: «إِذَا مَرِضَ الْعَبْدُ أَوْ سَافَرَ كُتِبَ لَهُ مِثْلُ مَا كَانَ يَعْمَلُ مُقِيمًا صَحِيحًا.»
(رواه البخاري ٢٩٩٦)

Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ narrates that the Messenger of Allah صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ said: “When a believer falls ill or travels there is recorded for him the same reward as ‘for the deeds’ he would do if he were at home and healthy.” [BUKHĀRĪ 2996]

The extent to which our Shari‘ah is responsive and sensitive to obstructions that may beset the normal course of life is evidenced in this ḥadīth. More important than the actual physical performance of deeds is the reward that its performance brings.

Such is the vast mercy and infinite generosity of Allah, that when circumstances beyond our control obstruct performance, He still grants us the reward we would have gained had the obstacle not been there.

There is only one precondition, and that is that complacency at the obstructed status quo should never set it. At the level where it most matters—our intentions—the intention to join the jamā‘ah should never falter. Together with that should go the firm determination to stream back to the masājid the moment Allah removes the obstruction.

With that condition in place, reward remains assured despite actual non-performance. As Ḥāfiẓ Ibn Ḥajar points out, what applies to the excuses of travel and illness mentioned in the ḥadīth, extends to all other comparable situations.⁴⁴

May that moment come very soon, *in shāʾ Allāh*.

⁴⁴ *Fatḥ al-Bārī* vol. 6 p. 159

HADĪTH NO 19

Barring certain persons from the masjid

عَنْ عُمَرَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ: إِنَّكُمْ أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ تَأْكُلُونَ
مِنْ شَجَرَتَيْنِ لَا أَرَاهُمَا إِلَّا خَبِيثَتَيْنِ: هَذَا الثُّومُ وَالْبَصَلُ.
لَقَدْ كُنْتُ أَرَى نَبِيَّ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يَجِدُ
رِيحَهُمَا مِنَ الرَّجُلِ، فَيَأْمُرُ بِهِ فَيُؤْخَذُ بِيَدِهِ، فَيُخْرَجُ بِهِ
مِنَ الْمَسْجِدِ حَتَّى يُؤْتَى بِهِ الْبَقِيعَ. (رواه أحمد ٨٩)

‘Umar رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ said: “O people, you eat of two plants that I see as nothing other than abominable: this garlic and onion. I would see the Prophet of Allah صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ getting their odour from a person. He would order that person to be taken by the hand and led out of the masjid all the way up to Baqī’.”
[AHMAD 89]

There is one seminal error that has been at the core of many of the objections against preventative measures such as the wearing of masks, spacing of şaffs, and denying certain persons entry to masājid. This is the error of applying normal rules to a clearly abnormal situation.

This error is rooted in either a denial of crisis, or the claim that while the crisis does exist, it requires either no preventative measures, or not these specific ones. In the case of access to the masājid it is not uncommon to hear the objection presented in the context of the verse of Sūrah Baqarah in which Allah says:

﴿وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ مَنَعَ مَسْجِدَ اللَّهِ أَنْ يُذَكَرَ فِيهَا اسْمُهُ وَسَعَىٰ فِي خَرَابِهَا﴾ [البقرة ١١٤]

Who is more unjust than he who prevents Allah's name from being mentioned in His places of worship and strives to destroy them? [2:114]

Inserting this verse into the context of efforts to combat a destructive virus is as unfortunate as it is flawed. Underlying it are several factors that ought to give cause for serious concern:

- Firstly, the willingness on the part of some to believe that those who differ with them in this regard actually do not care for the masājid.
- Beyond that, their willingness to believe that others are motivated by evil intentions on account of which they have no compunctions about actively striving for the destruction of the masājid. It takes but an inch of charity to assume positive intentions for an opponent in the best tradition of *ḥusn al-ẓann*, or entertaining good thoughts and thinking positively, within the context of scholarly difference of opinion.
- Next, the willingness to violate the rules of *tafsīr* by applying verses about non-Muslims to Muslims, in the worst tradition of the Khawārij.

But aside from that, what tends also to be overlooked, both in the context of access to the masājid and the other precautions, is that these all have their roots within the Sunnah itself. In the case of the masājid, we learn from this ḥadīth that Rasūlullāh ﷺ used to have physically removed from the masjid people who had eaten things which continue to give off offensive smells.

The harm of an offensive smell is very temporary. The harm that infection may potentially have is of the highest degree. Nothing should reasonably stand in the way of extending the rule of the textual case to the new exigency, except perhaps a denial of crisis, or an inability to comprehend the workings of analogy in Shari‘ah.

The simple rule of analogy that applies here is as follows: once a *ratio* has been identified in a rule within a text, the application of that rule to a different situation will require that the *ratio* applies in the second situation as well, with either equal or greater force.

In our situation, the rule of the text concerns certain people being removed from the masjid. For the rule to apply to the situation of a pandemic by removing from the masjid people whose behaviour constitutes a threat to others, or restricting them from entry, requires that the *ratio* identified here as offense, should apply equally or with greater force to the situation of a pandemic. As is manifestly clear, the imperative of preserving life exceeds the need to curtail olfactory offensiveness by far.

HADĪTH NO 20

Missing Jumu‘ah out of negligence

عَنْ أَبِي الْجَعْدِ الضَّمْرِيِّ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: «مَنْ تَرَكَ الْجُمُعَةَ ثَلَاثَ مَرَّاتٍ تَهَاوُنًا بِهَا طَبَعَ اللَّهُ عَلَى قَلْبِهِ.» (رواه الترمذي ٥٠٠)

Abu l-Ja‘d al-Ḍamrī رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ narrates that the Allah’s Messenger صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ said: “Whoever omits Jumu‘ah three times out of sheer indifference, Allah seals his heart.” [BUKHĀRĪ 5707]

Jumu‘ah is an even greater symbolic rite of Islam than the regular performance of ṣalāh in congregation. Therefore, when precautionary measures come to impact even upon the performance and attendance of Jumu‘ah, it is natural for questions to be asked. Just about everyone is vaguely aware of the ḥadīth about missing Jumu‘ah thrice.

For our present purposes, the point of focus in the ḥadīth must be the qualitative phrase: *out of sheer indifference*. This phrase alone should suffice to set at ease the minds of those worried that their ongoing missing of Jumu‘ah under these circumstances endangers their very faith. As long as they have not developed the attitude that says, *I do not care about Jumu‘ah any longer*, their īmān is safe, *in shā’ Allāh*.

Over and above that, how are we supposed to deal with the restrictions on Jumu‘ah, necessary as they are? This is where we have to avail ourselves of the mercy of Allah which presents itself in the broad spectrum of differing opinions in the Shari‘ah.

‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ famously stated: “I would not have liked it had there been no differences between the Ṣaḥābah رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُمْ, for if they did not differ, we would be deprived of dispensations.”⁴⁵

The Shāfi‘ī madhhab, for example, requires 40 resident adult men for the valid performance of Jumu‘ah. Where restrictions apply it becomes more important, in our considered view, to maintain the sanctity of Jumu‘ah than to stick to the preferred view of a madhhab. A number of recognised *mujtahids* of the madhhab, such as the imāms Muzanī, Ibn al-Mundhir and Suyūṭī, hold the view that 3 persons with an imām suffice for the performance of Jumu‘ah. And the madhhab is in general sensitive to restriction, responding by relaxing its requirement of no more than one performance of Jumu‘ah per location.

For these reasons it becomes permissible, under restricted conditions, to avail oneself of the latitude of performing Jumu‘ah with a minimum of 3 persons plus and imām at multiple locations in one settlement. Restrictions even permit, in our view, the performance of multiple successive Jumu‘ahs at the same venue.⁴⁶

With all of this latitude, there would still be those who, for some reason or the other, cannot be accommodated for Jumu‘ah at any of the locations where it is performed, or who do not fulfil any of the requirements. People such as these should simply perform Ṣuḥr ṣalāh instead of Jumu‘ah. As long as they remain conscious of Jumu‘ah, and never become complacent and indifferent about it, they need not be concerned that their failure to perform Jumu‘ah has affected their faith.

⁴⁵ Ascribed by Munāwī in *Fayḍ al-Qadīr* vol. 1 p. 209 to Bayhaqī’s *Madkhal*. The published edition does not appear to contain it, though. Munāwī mentions it in his commentary on the putative ḥadīth that states, “Differences in my Ummah are a mercy.” To the best of our knowledge this is not a ḥadīth.

⁴⁶ Anyone who harbours doubt about the performance of Jumu‘ah as outlined here should simply perform the precaution of making Ṣuḥr after his Jumu‘ah.

HADĪTH NO 21

“They killed him; may Allah kill them!”

عَنْ جَابِرِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ: خَرَجْنَا فِي سَفَرٍ، فَأَصَابَ رَجُلًا مَنَا حَجْرٌ، فَشَجَّهُ فِي رَأْسِهِ، ثُمَّ احْتَلَمَ، فَسَأَلَ أَصْحَابَهُ فَقَالَ: هَلْ تَجِدُونَ لِي رُخْصَةً فِي التَّيْمُمِ؟ فَقَالُوا: مَا نَجِدُ لَكَ رُخْصَةً وَأَنْتَ تَقْدِرُ عَلَى الْمَاءِ. فَاعْتَسَلَ، فَمَاتَ. فَلَمَّا قَدِمْنَا عَلَى النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أُخْبِرَ بِذَلِكَ، فَقَالَ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: «قَتَلُوهُ، قَتَلَهُمُ اللَّهُ! أَلَا سَأَلُوا إِذْ لَمْ يَعْلَمُوا؟ فَإِنَّمَا شِفَاءُ الْعِيِّ السُّؤَالُ.» (رواه أبو داود ٣٣٦)

Jābir رضي الله عنه says: We departed on a journey. One of us was hit by a stone that caused a wound in his head. Thereafter he had a nocturnal emission, due to which he asked his companions if they found license for him to perform *tayammum*. They said, “We find no such license for you since you are able to use water.” He bathed, and died.

When we returned to Rasūlullāh صلى الله عليه وسلم he was informed of what happened. He صلى الله عليه وسلم said: “They killed him; may Allah kill them! When they didn’t know, why didn’t they ask? The cure for ignorance is but to ask.” [ABŪ DAWŪD 5707]

If this ḥadīth could be condensed into a single sentence, it would be: *Fatwās have consequences.*

When a fatwā leads to loss of life or property, does the issuer of that fatwā have any personal responsibility for the loss? Much has been written by the Fuqahā about the extent of a muftī's responsibility, and under which circumstances such would responsibility apply. To some it is the unqualified mufti who must take responsibility, while others locate the responsibility in case of an unqualified mufti on the questioner for his negligence in referring his query to the unqualified. Others take the view that when the evidence is conclusive it is the qualified mufti who takes responsibility.⁴⁷ There are other permutations of this problem and its respective solutions.

What is of importance to us, for the purposes of this book, is to note the extremely grim and sombre note that this ḥadīth strikes about a situation where an incorrect fatwā led to a loss of life. We must remember that this is Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ, that embodiment of mercy about whom Allah says:

﴿عَزِيزٌ عَلَيْهِ مَا عَنِتُّمْ حَرِيصٌ عَلَيْكُمْ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ رَءُوفٌ رَحِيمٌ﴾ [التوبة ١٢٨]

*He is concerned for your suffering, anxious for your well-being,
and with the Believers he is gracious and merciful. [9:128]*

Yet so deep was his anguish at a death that could have been prevented, in the ordinary course of affairs, that his response came in the form of a terrible du'ā against the ones guilty of the wrong advice.

What we learn from it is that where death occurs under such easily preventable circumstances, we have no right to simply invoke *taqdīr* and say that it was predestined. Not when Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ himself went to such great lengths to teach us the sunnah of prevention, even setting the example for us in his own personal practice.

⁴⁷ This is the view of the Shāfi'ī jurist Abū Ishāq al-Isfarāyīnī. See Nawawī, *al-Majmū'* vol. 1 p. 45, and Zarkashī, *al-Manthūr* vol. 1 p. 134; Ibn al-Najjār, *al-Kawkab al-Munīr* vol. 4 p. 514.

What we learn here is that those who hold aloft a ḥadīth—unauthentic at worst and inapplicable at best⁴⁸—to the effect that it is impossible to be infected in a masjid, might someday probably have more to contend with than just the debate around the authenticity of their ḥadīth.

What so many incidents in our history tell us—from the attack of a jinnī on Rasūlullāh ﷺ in the masjid, to the assassinations of Sayyidunā ‘Umar and Sayyidunā ‘Alī رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُمَا in the masjid, to so many other unspeakable incidents—what all these have shown is that while the masjid is indeed sacred space, that sanctity is often violated by things both seen and unseen.

We seek refuge with Allah from ever falling within the terrible purview of the last ḥadīth in this chapter!

⁴⁸ The said ḥadīth appears in a number of sources: Bayhaqī, *Shu‘ab al-Īmān* no. 2686; Ibn ‘Adī, *al-Kāmil* vol. 2 p. 234; and Abū Nu‘aym, *Tārīkh Iṣbahān* vol. 1 p. 196. The lone narrator upon who its authenticity turns is one Zāfir ibn Sulaymān of Quhistān. While basically a truthful person, this transmitter, according to Ibn Ḥajar, suffered from a defective memory that led to an abundance of mishaps in the transmission of ḥadīth. In matter that potentially affects human life, store cannot possibly be set by one such as he.

Even on the assumption of authenticity, two factors remain to militate against setting store by this ḥadīth in the present context: **one**, it contradicts empirical data, a factor listed by Ibn al-Qayyim as in itself indicative of forgery (see *al-Manār al-Munīf* p. 39); and **two**, the text lends itself to plausible alternative interpretations and does not explicitly negate infection in the masjid.

Whichever way one chooses to look at it, wagering religious truth and the very foundations of the Sunnah on the slippery slopes of a ḥadīth this questionable is, in a nutshell, ill-advised.

Chapter Four

**DEALING WITH
DISPENSATIONS**

HADĪTH NO 22

Conformance to the extent of your ability

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ: «إِذَا نَهَيْتُكُمْ عَنْ شَيْءٍ فَاجْتَنِبُوهُ، وَإِذَا أَمَرْتُكُمْ بِأَمْرٍ فَأَتُوا مِنْهُ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ.» (رواه البخاري ٧٢٨٨)

Abū Hurayrah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ narrates that the Prophet صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ said: “When I prohibit something for you, abstain from it. And when I order you to do something, then do of it what you are able to do.” [BUKHĀRĪ 7288]

If all of the Sharī‘ah’s obligations could be reduced into a simple description, it would probably be something along the lines of, *Obeying all Allah’s commands, and abstaining from all His prohibitions*. And if all of that has to be given one single name, that name would be, *taqwā*.

For the purposes of this chapter, there is a question we need to ask about *taqwā*: Is the imperative to observe *taqwā* so absolute, implacable and unrelenting that it never ever yields to less-than-ideal circumstances? In answer, Allah states in the Qurʾān:

﴿فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ﴾ [التغابن ١٦]

Observe *taqwā* towards Allah to the best of your ability. [64:16]

In line with this same idea of *taqwā* to the best of one’s ability comes this ḥadīth: “When I order you to do something, do of it as much as you are able to do.” From

these origins in the Qurʾān and the Sunnah arose the twin concepts which the Fuqahā call *ʿazimah* and *rukḥṣah*, or “rule” and “exception”.

Intrinsic within these concepts lies the recognition that circumstances are not always going to be ideal. When a change in circumstances brings about difficulty, specifically with reference to the performance of our religious obligations, the *ʿazimah*, or the rule, readily yields and has its place taken by an easier option. To this easier option we refer as the *rukḥṣah*, the exception or the dispensation.

One of the signs of a healthy appreciation of the Sharīʿah is the recognition of the place and relevance of the *rukḥṣah*. Just as Islam is in itself a balancing act between the mundane and the spiritual, and just as a proper understanding of *tawakkul* and *taqdīr* demands a convergence and balance between relying upon Allah and using apparent means, so too, does the proper comprehension and implementation of the Sharīʿah require that the equilibrium between *rukḥṣah* and *ʿazimah* be carefully maintained.

It is too often that the tendency to do nothing but prohibit and proscribe gets to pass as real knowledge. Real knowledge, says Imām Sufyān Thawrī رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ، is something quite different:

إِنَّمَا الْعِلْمُ عِنْدَنَا الرَّخْصَةَ مِنْ ثِقَةٍ، أَمَا التَّشْدِيدُ فَكُلُّهُ يُحْسِنُهُ.

“In our estimation, true knowledge is the dispensation received from a reliable scholar. As for making things difficult, anyone can do that.”⁴⁹

The remaining aḥādīth in this chapter address various aspects of the *rukḥṣah*, in *shāʾ Allāh*.

⁴⁹ Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *Jāmiʿ Bayān al-ʿIlm wa Faḍliḥī*, no. 1467

HADĪTH NO 23

Allah's charity

عَنْ يَعْلَى بْنِ أُمَيَّةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ: قُلْتُ لِعُمَرَ بْنِ
الْخَطَّابِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ: «لَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ جُنَاحٌ أَنْ
تَقْصُرُوا مِنَ الصَّلَاةِ إِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَنْ يَفْتِنَكُمُ الَّذِينَ
كَفَرُوا» فَقَدْ أَمِنَ النَّاسُ. فَقَالَ: عَجِبْتُ مِمَّا عَجِبْتَ
مِنْهُ، فَسَأَلْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ عَنْ
ذَلِكَ، فَقَالَ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: «صَدَقَةٌ تَصَدَّقَ اللَّهُ
بِهَا عَلَيْكُمْ، فَاقْبَلُوا صَدَقَتَهُ.» (رواه مسلم ٦٨٦)

Ya'la ibn Umayyah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ says: I said to 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ 'that the Qur'ān states: 'There is no harm if you shortened the prayer if you fear that the unbelievers would attack you; whereas now people are safe. He replied: "What intrigues you intrigued me as well, so I asked the Messenger of Allah صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ . He صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ said: "It is Allah's charity, so accept His charity." [MUSLIM 686]

How are we to conceive of the dispensations which the Shari'ah offers? Are they supposed to be seen as measures which only applied once upon a time and no longer have a role to play? Or are they for the weaker and less religious among us, with the more observant ones being expected to practice only the rule of the 'azā'im?

In this ḥadīth we encounter one of the most prominent dispensations: the shortening of ṣalāh during travel. Here there existed every reason to believe that the dispensation was bound by time and circumstances, and would be in effect only where the factor of fear of harm from unbelievers prevailed during a journey. After all, this was what the Qurʾān seemed very clearly to be saying: *If you fear that the unbelievers would attack you.* So, what happens when that fear no longer exists? Does the dispensation cease? This was the question in the mind of Sayyidunā ‘Umar رضي الله عنه.

From the answer Rasūlullāh صلى الله عليه وسلم gave him we learn two important things:

- **Firstly**, that in this specific case, nothing is to be inferred from the conditional phrase “if you fear...”.
- **Secondly**, that the dispensations which are built into the Sharī‘ah are the manifestations of Allah’s generosity upon this Ummah.

If the dispensations are indeed Allah’s charity, all we need to ask ourselves is: is there any of us who is not in need of Allah’s charity?

ḤADĪTH NO 24

Making use of dispensations is beloved to Allah

عَنْ ابْنِ عُمَرَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: «إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ أَنْ تُؤْتَى رُخْصَةٌ كَمَا يَكْرَهُ أَنْ تُؤْتَى مَعْصِيَةٌ.» (رواه أحمد ٥٨٦٦)

‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Umar رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا narrates that the Messenger of Allah صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ said: “Allah loves that you perform the dispensations as much as He hates that you indulge in sin.”
[AḤMAD 5866]

When any of us gives charity, how do we feel when it gets rebuffed? The dispensations which Allah gave us are His charity. As much as we love that our charity be accepted by the ones to whom we offer it, Allah also loves that we display our indigence before Him by gladly accepting His charity.

In this ḥadīth Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ compares the love Allah has for us to practice on His dispensations with the hatred He has for sin. An alternative version of the ḥadīth states that the love that Allah has for practicing the dispensations is exactly the same as the love He has for practicing the normal unrelaxed ‘azā’im.⁵⁰

Aḥādīth of this nature are intended to convey a certain very important conceptual point. By their very nature dispensations constitute a lesser burden than the original rules. Left to their own devices, it is not unlikely that people will associate the dispensations with laziness, or lesser degrees of religious consciousness and observance.

⁵⁰ Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan al-Kubrā* vol. 3 p. 140; Ibn Ḥibbān, *Ṣaḥīḥī* no. 914

Wherever the potential for such misunderstandings exist, Rasūlullāh ﷺ will step in to restore the balance and rectify the misconception. And in the case of this and other similar aḥādīth, he does this by informing us, very clearly and unambiguously, that between *rukḥṣah* and *‘azīmah*, neither has the edge of superiority over the other. Both come from Allah, and Allah loves both equally.

Let us bring this understanding to bear in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. What we learn from it is the following:

- Each of the preventative measures not only has a solid foundation in the Sunnah, as demonstrated before, but they constitute Allah’s charity to us.
- Allah loves them no less than He loves the original *‘azā’im* rules from which they originate and depart.
- The attitude that perceives them to somehow represent a lower level of devotion, or a lesser degree of obedience to Allah, is out of sync with the Sunnah of Rasūlullāh ﷺ, and is therefore in need of recalibration.

HADĪTH NO 25

Fasting on a journey

عَنْ جَابِرِ بْنِ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا قَالَ: كَانَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فِي سَفَرٍ، فَرَأَى زِحَامًا وَرَجُلًا قَدْ ظَلَلَ عَلَيْهِ، فَقَالَ: «مَا هَذَا؟» فَقَالُوا: صَائِمٌ. فَقَالَ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: «لَيْسَ مِنَ الْبِرِّ الصَّوْمُ فِي السَّفَرِ.» (رواه البخاري ١٩٤٦)

Jābir ibn ‘Abdillāh رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا says: The Messenger of Allah صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ was on a journey when he saw a crowd around a man being shadowed. He asked: “What is this?” They said: “He is fasting.” Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ said: “Fasting on travel is not an act of piety.” [BUKHĀRĪ 5707]

Human tendencies are not always and exclusively hedonistic and decadent. Once imbued with faith in Allah, it is not uncommon to find within some of us the tendency to exert ourselves in the search for Allah’s pleasure to an extent not required by Allah. The Qur’ān speaks of this in relation to the monasticism which developed in Christianity:

﴿وَرَهْبَانِيَّةً ابْتَدَعُوهَا مَا كَتَبْنَاهَا عَلَيْهِمْ إِلَّا ابْتِغَاءَ رِضْوَانِ اللَّهِ فَمَا رَعَوْهَا حَقًّا رِعَايَتِهَا.﴾ [الحديد ٢٧]

As for monasticism, they made it up—We never ordained it for them—“they did so” only to seek Allah’s pleasure; but “even then” they did not duly observe it. [57:27]

This Ummah, being as human as those before it, was prone to fall prey to the same tendencies. However, Allah gave this Ummah in its Nabī ﷺ a teacher who by his own word corrected misgivings, and by his own deed set the standard of moderation. Whenever exaggeration threatened to arise, he would immediately quell it and restore that balance which is the hallmark of this faith. Consider the following examples:

- A group of Ṣaḥābah came to the house of Rasūlullāh ﷺ to enquire about his personal worship. When they didn't hear what they expected, they put it down to the fact that his special status required much less exertion from him, while they themselves needed to do more. One vowed to spend the entire night in ṣalāh; the other to fast continuously; and the third never to marry. When Rasūlullāh ﷺ heard of it he told them, “Among us all I am the one most fearful of Allah, and with the most taqwā. But I fast, and I eat; I pray, and I sleep; and I marry women. So, whoever is averse to my Sunnah is not of me!”⁵¹
- Sayyidunā ‘Uthmān ibn Maz‘ūn رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ sought permission to castrate himself. Rasūlullāh ﷺ refused, telling him, “‘Uthmān, I have not been commanded with monasticism. Are you averse to my Sunnah?”⁵²
- During an illness, Sayyidunā Sa‘d ibn Abī Waqqāṣ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ once wanted to give all his wealth away in charity. Rasūlullāh ﷺ prohibited him, allowing only one-third to be disposed of in bequest.⁵³

Examples of the tendency to overdo, and of corresponding corrective action by Rasūlullāh ﷺ literally punctuate the ḥadīth literature. The ḥadīth presently before us is one of them. In it we find a person abandoning the dispensation and insisting on practicing the ‘azīmah of fasting during a journey. This undertaking ended up causing him major difficulty, but in his zeal he refused to avail himself of the dispensation. Others had to step in to cast shade over him in the heat of the desert journey.

⁵¹ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī no. 5063

⁵² Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī no. 5073; Sunan al-Dārimī no. 2215

⁵³ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī no. 2744

The moment Rasūllullāh صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ became aware of it he stepped in to draw an unmistakable line between well-intented but still exaggerated piety, and the moderation which is the hallmark of his Ummah. In itself, fasting during a journey is not necessarily bad—many Ṣaḥābah used to do it—except when it causes the precise type of difficulty for which the dispensation was prescribed in the first place.

As history has shown, exaggerated devotion to worship is often the root of innovation. In Islam this would not be allowed to take root. Rasūllullāh صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ was therefore very emphatic in his pronouncement: Exaggerated piety which brings undue and unrequired hardship upon oneself is no piety at all.

Chapter Five

MEDICATION

HADĪTH NO 26

For every disease a cure

عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ مَسْعُودٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ أَنَّ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ: «مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ دَاءً إِلَّا وَقَدْ أَنْزَلَ لَهُ شِفَاءً، عَلَيْهِ مِنْ عَلَيْهِ، وَجِهَهُ مِنْ جِهَلِهِ.»
(رواه أحمد ٣٥٨٧)

Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ narrates that the Prophet صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ said: “No disease did Allah send down, except that He sent with it a cure for it. Those who know it, know it; and those who don’t know it, don’t know it.”
[AḤMAD 3587]

Disease is one of the armies of Allah through which He achieves universal purposes far beyond the reach of human perception and understanding. The mercy of Allah, however, is never far from His wrath. In the case of disease, that mercy manifests itself in the assurance that no single physical disease is ever created except that it is accompanied by a cure.

Medicine, and the search for cure to disease, has never been the exclusive domain of believers. As a physical science it was dominated by various nations and cultures through different eras of human history. With the rise of Muslim civilization the collective medical traditions of the Egyptians, Indians and Greeks were inherited by Muslims who built upon existing foundations to develop this science to new heights, freely sharing thereafter in the medical schools of Baghdad and Cordoba with whoever desired it. Let it also never be forgotten the most prominent physicians of the formative period of Islamic history were not Muslim Arabs, but

Syriac Christians. In the 8th chapter of his work on the biographies of physicians, Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘ah lists about 3 dozen of them.⁵⁴

This specific aspect of medical knowledge—the fact that it is a broad-based human tradition that transcends religious affiliation—is acknowledged in the ḥadīth where it states, “Those who know it, know it; and those who don’t know it, don’t.”

The search for a vaccine against the coronavirus is a broad human undertaking. While it is a matter of special pride to us that there are Muslims who are playing a prominent role in this search,⁵⁵ we duly acknowledge each and every doctor, scientist, laboratory worker, assistant and volunteer who is contributing towards finding the cure that Allah created.

⁵⁴ Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘ah, *‘Uyūn al-Anbā* vol. 1 pp. 123-303

⁵⁵ Dr Ughur Şahin and his wife Dr Özlem Türeci.

HADĪTH NO 27

Medication is part of predestination

عَنْ أَبِي خُزَامَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ: سَأَلْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فَقُلْتُ: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ، أَرَأَيْتَ رُقِيَّ نَسْتَرِقِيهَا، وَدَوَاءً نَتَدَاوَى بِهِ، وَتَقَاةً نَتَقِيهَا، هَلْ تَرُدُّ مِنْ قَدَرِ اللَّهِ شَيْئًا؟ قَالَ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: «هِيَ مِنْ قَدَرِ اللَّهِ.» (رواه الترمذي ٢٠٦٥)

Abū Khuzāmah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ says: I asked the Messenger of Allah صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: “O Messenger of Allah, these incantations which we recite, and this medicine that we use, and these measures of prevention which we adopt: do they keep away anything that Allah has predestined?” Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ replied: “They are part of what Allah has predestined.” [TIRMIDHĪ 2065]

Taqdir, or *Qadar*, or Predestination. Belief in this doctrine is essential for a Muslim. However, we encounter problems when we try to square this doctrine with the logic which is hardwired into our limited human brain. The problems continue when we attempt to reconcile it with an approach that is either entirely faith-based, or relentlessly rational. The ḥadīth before us presents an example of how even a purely faith-based approach may also at times miss the elusive balance.

If everything is predestined, what reason would there be to intervene by using medication when illness sets in? It is when questions such as these arise—as they

are indeed bound to—that we step away from the limited reach of our own logic, as well as what our own defective faith might dictate, to submit to the teachings of our Nabī ﷺ.

The faith against the backdrop of which the question arises is commendable. The question itself, however, is born from a defective understanding of how Qadar operates and dovetails with the apparent causes of this physical world. Restoration of that fine balance is the duty of Rasūlullāh ﷺ, and what he does in this ḥadīth is precisely that.

Neither medicine, nor a mask, nor social distancing, nor abstention from physical contact, nor even a vaccine falls outside of the ambit of Qadar. Not a single one of these precautions seeks to overthrow or supercede Allah’s control of His creation. As this ḥadīth teaches, it all occurs very much within the context of Qadar, in a manner that transcends full human comprehension.

HADĪTH NO 28

Is there any sin in not using medicine?

عَنْ أُسَامَةَ بْنِ شَرِيكَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ: شَهِدْتُ
الْأَعْرَابَ يَسْأَلُونَ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: أَعْلَيْنَا
حَرَجٌ فِي كَذَا؟ أَعْلَيْنَا حَرَجٌ فِي كَذَا؟ فَقَالُوا: يَا رَسُولَ
اللَّهِ، هَلْ عَلَيْنَا جُنَاحٌ أَنْ لَا نَتَدَاوَى؟ قَالَ صَلَّى اللَّهُ
عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: «تَدَاوَوْا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ، فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ سُبْحَانَهُ لَمْ
يَضَعْ دَاءً إِلَّا وَضَعَ مَعَهُ شِفَاءً، إِلَّا الْهَرَمَ.» (رواه ابن
ماجه ٣٤٣٦)

Usāmah ibn Sharīk رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ says: I saw the Bedouins asking the Prophet صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: “Is there any harm on us in this? Is there any harm on us in that?” They asked: “O Messenger of Allah, is there any sin on us if we do not use medicine?” Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ said: “Slaves of Allah, by all means use medicine, for Allah placed no disease except that with it He placed its cure—with the exception of old age.” [IBN MĀJAH 3436]

Like any other primitive culture, the Arabs of the Jāhiliyyah were prone, in their ignorance and superstition, to ascribe the effects they saw to any range of imagined supernatural causes. This was especially true of illness and apparent misfortune. Restoring them to the purity of *tawhīd* would have to address this tendency.

In Chapter One we encountered the aḥādīth by means of which that process of restoration was undertaken. At this point we may now ask: how successful was Rasūlullāh ﷺ in this task?

Let us leave aside for the moment the eminent Muhājirīn and Anṣār. Let us look at the Bedouins of the desert. It was among them, more than the city dwellers, that superstition was both born and flourished. The Ṣaḥābī who narrates this ḥadīth was with Rasūlullāh ﷺ during the Farewell Ḥajj, 22 years after the mission had begun. Bedouins from all parts of the Arabian peninsula were converging upon Rasūlullāh ﷺ, presenting a unique opportunity to survey the extent to which *shirk* and superstition had come to be replaced by *tawḥīd* and *tawakkul* through the efforts of Rasūlullāh ﷺ and the Ṣaḥābah رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُمْ.

The results are astonishing. Bedouins who were once given to ascribe the slightest misfortune to a supernatural cause other than Allah had now become so imbued with *īmān* and *yaqīn* that they were willing to give up medication, out of absolute reliance upon Allah.

For them to have reached this level gave two indications: **one**, that all vestiges of disbelief and polytheism had now departed from their hearts; and **two**, all that remained was the need to restore the balance between *tawakkul* and *asbāb*, or apparent causes. And with that being done in this ḥadīth, this generation of men became ready to bear the message of Islam to wherever they needed to go.

Even today, *tawakkul* and *yaqīn* continues to thrive in Muslim hearts. At times, though, it only needs to be tempered with a little bit of the balance of Rasūlullāh ﷺ.

HADĪTH NO 29

Vaccination, īmān and the destiny of the Ummah

عَنْ أَنَسِ بْنِ مَالِكٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ: «سَأَلْتُ رَبِّي ثَلَاثًا، فَأَعْطَانِي ثِنْتَيْنِ وَمَنْعَنِي وَاحِدَةً. سَأَلْتُهُ أَنْ لَا يَبْتَلِيَ أُمَّتِي بِالسِّنِينِ، فَفَعَلَ. وَسَأَلْتُهُ أَنْ لَا يُظْهِرَ عَلَيْهِمْ عَدُوَّهُمْ، فَفَعَلَ. وَسَأَلْتُهُ أَنْ لَا يَلْبِسَهُمْ شِيعًا، فَأَبَى عَلَيَّ.» (رواه أحمد ١٢٤٨٦)

Anas ibn Mālik رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ narrates that the Messenger of Allah صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ said: “I asked my Lord for three things of which He granted me two and denied me one. I asked Him not to test my Ummah with famine; this He granted. I asked Him not to give their enemy the upper hand against them; this He granted. And I asked Him not to divide them into internecine factions, and this He denied me.” [AḤMAD 12486]

The search for a vaccine has not been free from dark speculation about possible nefarious motives. How should we as Muslims react to these mutterings?

In his *Iḥyā'*⁵⁶ Imām Ghazālī identifies the methodological paradigm along which we ought to proceed. The things against which we take precaution exist at three levels:

⁵⁶ *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* vol. 4 part 14 p. 2545

- **One**, that which is *maqtūʿ*^c, or definitive and certain. Against threats that are definitive it is reasonable to adopt precaution.
- **Two**, that which is *maznūn*, or probable. Here again, precaution is in order, more especially where the probable threat becomes widespread.
- **Three**, that which is *mawhūm*, or imagined, without any definite or probable evidence to support it. Imām Ghazālī says that *tawakkul* demands that we dispense with precaution against this type of threat.

In our estimation, and with all due regard to the advocates of conspiracies in this regard, whatever has been said thus far about nefarious conspiracies around the vaccine does not manage to exit the perimeter of the imagination.

But let us for a moment imagine that there is in fact a plot to inject microchips into Muslims for the purpose of destroying their faith. What is the level of danger in such a threat?

Īmān, my dear reader, is not simply a chemical arrangement of molecules within your DNA that can be broken, rearranged and manipulated by an electronic microchip or any other man-made device. Īmān is Allah’s greatest gift to humanity. It is, as Rasūlullāh ﷺ said, a Nūr which Allah casts into the heart.⁵⁷ To succumb even for the slightest moment to the apprehension that it could be corrupted by a microchip betrays ignorance of the reality of īmān.

Then, beyond the īmān of an individual, stands the universal mission of the Ummah of Muḥammad ﷺ. What we learn from the ḥadīth above is that Allah has guaranteed to His Messenger that no threat from the outside would ever deter his Ummah from fulfilling their mission, neither natural calamity nor machinations of man. With such assurance from Allah Himself, what reason remains for fear of meddling with our faith through the vaccine? The Allah who instructed the fire to cool for Ibrāhīm عليه السلام and the sea to open for Mūsā عليه السلام remains as able today to

⁵⁷ Ibn Abī Shaybah, *Muṣannaf* no. 35456

nullify the effect of any puny human threat against the destiny of the Ummah of His Beloved Messenger Muḥammad ﷺ.

If ever *tawakkul* had a place in this crisis, this is that place.

Chapter Six

SEEKING SAFETY

HADĪTH NO 30

Pray profusely for safety

عَنْ ابْنِ عَبَّاسٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا أَنَّ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ لِعَمِّهِ: «أَكْثِرِ الدُّعَاءَ بِالْعَافِيَةِ.» (رواه الحاكم ١٩٨٢)

Ibn ‘Abbās رضي الله عنهما narrates that the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said to his uncle: “Pray for safety profusely.” [HĀKIM 1982]

It is no secret that life is a series of ups and downs, fortuitous events as well as misfortunes. None of us can go through life without encountering misfortune somewhere along the line.

As humans we are created with a natural instinct to desire ease and comfort, to dislike difficulty, and to shy away from hardship. What this ḥadīth teaches us is that this instinct is by no means antithetical to Islam. Seeking safety and relief from difficulties is something which Allah expects us to do, since it reveals a degree of optimistic trust in Allah. As Allah says in a *ḥadīth qudsī*, “I am as my slave expects me to be.”⁵⁸

What the ḥadīth also teaches is that we should not without reason go out to seek difficulty or hardship. What has been transmitted to us about certain Ṣaḥābah رضي الله عنهم expressing happiness at being afflicted by the plague, and actually praying for the plague—all of this we understand to be the type of act of which Imām Ghazālī spoke: acts by people of extremely high *tawakkul*, which lesser mortals may admire, but should never imitate.

⁵⁸ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī no 7405

HADĪTH NO 31

The most beloved prayer

عَنْ مُعَاذِ بْنِ جَبَلٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ
اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: «مَا مِنْ دَعْوَةٍ أَحَبَّ إِلَى
اللَّهِ أَنْ يَدْعُوَهُ بِهَا عَبْدٌ مِنْ أَنْ يَقُولَ: اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْأَلُكَ
الْمُعَافَاةَ - أَوْ قَالَ: الْعَافِيَةَ - فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ.»
(رواه الطبراني في الكبير ٣٤٦، ١٦٥/٢٠)

Mu‘adh ibn Jabal رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ narrates that the Messenger of Allah صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ said: “No prayer a slave may make to Allah is more beloved to Him than saying: O Allah, I ask of You safety in this world as well as in the hereafter.” [ṬABARĀNĪ, AL-MU‘JAM AL-KABĪR 346, 20:165]

Among all things one may ask, what is it that makes this du‘ā so beloved to Allah? It is the positive expectation that the slave has of his Lord.

Of all Allah’s attributes, the one which He chose for the repetitive opening verse in the Qur’ān is the attribute of mercy. In the Qur’ān there is a norm in terms of which verses of mercy and wrath usually balance one another out. The opening formula of the *Basmalah* was going to have two of Allah’s attributes; it would be logical to expect that here too, Mercy would be balanced against a Name of Allah reflecting His might or wrath. Instead, what do we find? Not just one expression of Divine Mercy, but two, *Raḥmān* and *Raḥīm*, emerging from the same root along divergent paths of etymological derivation to reflect different aspects of the same attribute of Mercy.

The person whose focus is upon that attribute of Mercy has no reason to dwell in pessimism and depression. Where difficulty has set in, he knows his Rabb will bring relief; and where safety from hardship reigns, he prays for it to continue. He does that because he knows Allah is the All Merciful One who says:

﴿وَرَحْمَتِي وَسِعَتْ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ﴾ [الأعراف ١٥٦]

My Mercy encompasses all things. [7:156]

And that is what Allah loves.

HADĪTH NO 32

After certainty, safety

عَنْ أَبِي بَكْرٍ الصِّدِّيقِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ أَنَّهُ قَامَ عَلَى الْمُنْبَرِ فَقَالَ: قَامَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ عَامَ الْأَوَّلِ عَلَى الْمُنْبَرِ - ثُمَّ بَكَى - فَقَالَ: «اسْأَلُوا اللَّهَ الْعَفْوَ وَالْعَافِيَةَ، فَإِنَّ أَحَدًا لَمْ يُعْطَ بَعْدَ الْيَقِينِ خَيْرًا مِنَ الْعَافِيَةِ.» (رواه الترمذي ٣٥٥٨)

Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ stood on the pulpit and said: It was but last year that the Messenger of Allah صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ stood on this pulpit—and here Abū Bakr cried—saying: “Ask Allah for forgiveness and safety, for after certainty there can be no greater gift than safety.” [TIRMIDHĪ 3558]

The occasion of the demise of our Nabī صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ was one of the most calamitous events in the early history of Islam. The reeling Ummah was brought stability when Sayyidunā Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ was elected as the first khalīfah. The occasion of his first address to the Ummah was a momentous one. What was he going to speak of? What lessons did this closest of companions imbibe during his decades of friendship with Allah’s Messenger صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ that he would find important enough as a lesson to pass to the Ummah on this solemn occasion?

The fact that he chose to speak to them here of ‘āfiyah, or safety, is significant. And the aspect of safety which he brought to their attention, through what he narrated from Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ, is of great consequence.

Safety from illness, calamity and hardship may be enjoyed by anyone. To a Muslim, however, safety must exist against the backdrop of something even more important, and that is *yaqīn*, absolute certainty in Allah as the Supreme Cause of all effects. Whether it is good fortune or misfortune that I encounter, my mind should never slip into the mistake of attributing any of it to its apparent cause and lose sight of Allah. Good fortune comes not because I have worked hard for it, but because Allah bestowed it upon me. Misfortune strikes not because of some or other omen or the ill-will of another, but because Allah destined it.

Of what value is safety and security when we fail to recognise its source? But when the gift of safety and security coexists with this *yaqīn*, then it indeed becomes one of Allah's greatest gifts.

May Allah soon restore our *ʿāfiyah* from this calamity.

HADĪTH NO 33

Warding against a reversal of safety

عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ عُمَرَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا قَالَ: كَانَ مِنْ دُعَاءِ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: «اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنْ زَوَالِ نِعْمَتِكَ، وَتَحَوُّلِ عَافِيَتِكَ، وَجُفَاءِ نِقْمَتِكَ، وَجَمِيعِ سَخَطِكَ.» (رواه مسلم ٢٧٣٩)

‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Umar رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا says: One of the prayers of Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ was: “O Allah, in You I seek refuge from the loss of Your favour, the reversal of Your safety, the sudden descent of Your punishment, and from all things that incur Your displeasure.”
[MUSLIM 2739]

Being safe from disease and enjoying good health is a great gift from Allah. We know that life, however, never stays the same. Where there is health today there might be illness tomorrow.

So, what attitude are we to adopt towards the good health which we now enjoy? Should we mentally prepare all the time for what might come next when there is a reversion of our present ‘āfiyah? After all, we do know that good things will come to an end at some point in time.

This ḥadīth offers us guidance in this respect. Although we know that situations do change, we must still continue to focus on the positive by not only praying to Allah for ‘āfiyah, but even praying for the gift of ‘āfiyah not to be reversed.

Those of us that remain, by Allah's grace, safe from infection during these times should continue making du'ā for Allah to maintain the good health they enjoy, as much as they make du'ā for the restoration of health to their affected brethren.

HADĪTH NO 34

Safety is more comfortable

عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ جَعْفَرٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا قَالَ: لَمَّا تُوِّفِيَ أَبُو تَالِبٍ خَرَجَ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ إِلَى الطَّائِفِ مَاشِيًا عَلَى قَدَمَيْهِ، فَدَعَاهُمْ إِلَى الْإِسْلَامِ فَلَمْ يُجِيبُوهُ، فَانصَرَفَ. فَأَتَى ظِلَّ شَجَرَةٍ فَصَلَّى رَكَعَتَيْنِ، ثُمَّ قَالَ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: «اللَّهُمَّ إِلَيْكَ أَشْكُو ضَعْفَ قُوَّتِي وَقِلَّةَ حِيلَتِي وَهَوَانِي عَلَى النَّاسِ. إِلَى مَنْ تَكَلِّفُنِي؟ إِلَى عَدُوِّ يَتَّجَمَّنِي؟ أَوْ إِلَى قَرِيبٍ مَلَكَتْهُ أَمْرِي؟ إِنْ لَمْ تَكُنْ غَضَبَانَ عَلَيَّ فَلَا أَبَالِي، غَيْرَ أَنَّ عَافِيَتَكَ أَوْسَعُ لِي. أَعُوذُ بِنُورِ وَجْهِكَ الَّذِي أَشْرَقَتْ لَهُ الظُّلُمَاتُ وَصَلَحَ عَلَيْهِ أَمْرُ الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ أَنْ تَنْزِلَ بِي غَضَبَكَ، أَوْ تَحُلَّ عَلَيَّ سَخَطُكَ. لَكَ الْعُتْبَى حَتَّى تَرْضَى، وَلَا حَوْلَ وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ.» (رواه الطبراني في الدعاء

(١٠٣٧)

‘Abdullāh ibn Ja‘far رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا narrates that when Abū Tālib died the Messenger of Allah صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ travelled to Ṭā’if on foot. He called them to Islam, but they failed to accept, so he left. He came to a tree in whose shade he prayed two rak‘ahs, and then said: “O Allah,

to You do I complain of my weakness, my lack of resourcefulness, and my significance to people. To who have You consigned me? To an enemy who would treat me harshly? Or to someone close who You gave power over me? As long as You are not angry with me I do not care—but Your safety is more comfortable to me. I seek refuge in the Light of Your Countenance through which the darkness becomes illuminated, and by which matters of this world and the hereafter are set in order, from You sending Your anger down on me, or from Your displeasure befalling me. To you I keep returning until You are pleased. And there is no strength nor power except by Allah.”
 [ṬABARĀNĪ, KITĀB AL-DU‘Ā 1037]

The story to which this beautiful du‘ā belongs is one of the most emotional and evocative episodes in the Sīrah of Rasūlullāh ﷺ. Few are those who have not encountered at least some retelling of it.

Nowhere in the Sīrah is the personal suffering of Rasūlullāh ﷺ represented with as much poignancy as in his visit to Ṭāʾif. Having suffered ridicule and stoning at the hands of Ṭāʾif’s miscreants to the point where he had to stop his own blood from falling on the ground, he took refuge beneath a tree where he did what he always did whenever calamity struck: he raised his hands in du‘ā to Allah. What he said in that du‘ā is important on account of what it tells us about the ideal relationship between Creator and created in the context of suffering.

As great a gift as health, safety and security are, they mean nothing when the relationship we have with Allah is neglected and decays. First and foremost, before and above everything else comes our relationship with Allah. When that

relationship is healthy, strong and stable, it matters not what trials and tribulations come our way. We face them willingly, and we bear them patiently, in the joyous knowledge that Allah is not displeased.

However, even as we patiently bend under misfortune's yoke, and even as we pass through the darkest depths of tribulation with forbearance, we do not forget how wonderful Allah's gift of *'āfiyah* is. And as we do, we say together with our Nabī

صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ:

“But *'āfiyah* from You, O Allah, is still more comfortable to me!”

Chapter Seven

**PATIENCE IN
AFFLICTION**

HADĪTH NO 35

Reaching a status foreordained

عَنْ الْجَلَّاجِ بْنِ حَكِيمٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ: سَمِعْتُ
رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يَقُولُ: «إِنَّ الْعَبْدَ إِذَا
سَبَقَتْ لَهُ مِنْ اللَّهِ مَنزِلَةً لَمْ يَبْلُغْهَا بِعَمَلِهِ، ابْتَلَاهُ اللَّهُ
فِي جَسَدِهِ، أَوْ فِي مَالِهِ أَوْ فِي وَلَدِهِ.» (رواه أبو داود
(٣٠٩٠)

Al-Lajlāj ibn Ḥakīm رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ says: I heard the Messenger of Allah صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ say: “If a slave has a preordained status with Allah which he did not reach through his deeds, then Allah afflicts him in his body, his property or his children.” [ABŪ DĀWŪD 3090]

Who is there who can fully grasp the secret ways and myriad means by which everything in existence fits into the fullness of Allah’s divine plan? When all things are duly considered, the very limited reach of our human senses and the restrictions of the intellect of which we so proudly boast—all of these fall far short of encompassing the totality of Allah’s Will in His creation.

At times, though, we are afforded a little glimpse into some of that hidden reality. We enjoy good health by Allah’s favour. But some of us will inevitably fall victim to illness, and that causes suffering and hardship. Why is that so? This is where Allah’s Messenger صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ steps in to give us that partial glimpse into the workings of Destiny.

Fortunate are those among us who live the kind of exemplary lives whereby they reach the heights of *wilāyah*, or Allah’s friendship. Sainthood, if you would. The surprising thing here is that there are others among us whose lives are just not that saintly—and yet, in the divine records their status is already inscribed as lofty and sublime. It might even be on par with that of Allah’s saintly friends. By which secret pathway does an ordinary person leading an ordinary life reach such extraordinary status?

What we are told in this ḥadīth by Rasūlullāh ﷺ is that the suffering that comes to us in this world—illness, reversion of fortune, loss of property, or even of life—all of these constitute one of the fast-tracking detours by which Allah raises some nondescript individuals to the lofty stations which He foreordained for them, just because such is His Will and His Mercy.

May Allah raise all those who suffer from Covid-19 to the station of faith, purity and sainthood.

HADĪTH NO 36

“Wonderful is the situation of a believer!”

عَنْ صُهَيْبِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: «عَجَبًا لِأَمْرِ الْمُؤْمِنِ، إِنَّ أَمْرَهُ كُلَّهُ خَيْرٌ، وَلَيْسَ ذَلِكَ لِأَحَدٍ إِلَّا لِلْمُؤْمِنِ. إِنْ أَصَابَتْهُ سَرَاءٌ شَكَرَ، فَكَانَ خَيْرًا لَهُ. وَإِنْ أَصَابَتْهُ ضَرَاءٌ صَبَرَ، فَكَانَ خَيْرًا لَهُ.» (رواه مسلم ٢٩٩٩)

Ṣuhayb رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ narrates that the Messenger of Allah صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ said: “Wonderful is the situation of a believer! Everything that happens to him is to his advantage, and that is for the believer only, and no one else. When good comes to him he gives thanks—which is to his advantage; and when harm befalls him he practices patience—which is to his advantage.” [MUSLIM 2999]

Life is a series of alternating blessings and setbacks, prosperity and adversity, victories and defeats. Amidst these ever-changing currents, a Muslim is still expected to maintain optimism and good cheer. How can that be achieved?

It all begins from *īmān* and *yaqīn* that all things come from Allah. Once that is in place, one will understand that whatever life hurls at him does not come from what appears to be its cause, but originates with Allah. Then he might ask himself why Allah would burden him with adversity the one moment when He had just blessed with him great prosperity and good health. When he ponders this, he comes to the

realisation that every situation, no matter how desirable or undesirable, is in truth a test from Allah.

To pass his tests he needs only two responses: *shukr* in prosperity, and *ṣabr* against any setback. With *ṣabr* and *shukr* on his side, nothing remains to dampen the perennial good cheer and high spirits of a believer.

ḤADĪTH NO 37

Allah afflicts those for who He wants good

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: «مَنْ يُرِدِ اللَّهُ بِهِ خَيْرًا يُصِبْ مِنْهُ.» (رواه البخاري ٥٦٤٥)

Abū Hurayrah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ narrates that the Messenger of Allah صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ said: “Those for whom Allah wants good, He afflicts.”
[BUKHĀRĪ 5645]

At some or other point in our life, each one of us will be struck by an affliction. From this there is no escape. However, we often slip into the error of interpreting it as Allah’s punishment. The abode of punishment and reward is not this world; it is the hereafter.

As for illness and other afflictions, they are often a sign, not of Allah’s wrath, but of His special favour. As we have seen in Ḥadīth no. 35, these calamities that befall us could often be the ladders whereby Allah raises us to stations that our deeds fell short from making us reach.

Furthermore, if illness and adversity had to be punishment, they would never befall Allah’s chosen ones, the Prophets and the saints. And yet, Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ himself had to endure setbacks, illness, pain and adversity of all sort. He teaches us that the ones whom Allah tests most severely are the Ambiyā³, and after them, those who hold the greatest degree of resemblance to them.

The present ḥadīth reiterates that same point. Being afflicted by Allah with illness or otherwise is not a sign that Allah is dissatisfied and angry with you. If anything,

it is a sign that Allah wants good for you, and this illness might well be your pathway to the great good that awaits you.

May Allah raise all our afflicted brothers and sisters to the stations which He has foreordained for them.

HADĪTH NO 38

Reward for even the slightest discomfort

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ وَأَبِي سَعِيدٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ أَنَّ رَسُولَ
اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ: «مَا يُصِيبُ الْمُؤْمِنَ مِنْ
وَصَبٍ، وَلَا نَصَبٍ، وَلَا هَمٍّ، وَلَا حَزَنٍ، وَلَا أَذًى،
وَلَا غَمٍّ، حَتَّى الشَّوْكَةِ يُشَاكُهَا، إِلَّا كَفَّرَ اللَّهُ مِنْ
خَطَايَاهُ.» (رواه أحمد ٨٠٢٧)

Abū Hurayrah and Abū Sa‘īd رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا narrate that the Messenger of Allah صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ said: “Neither pain, nor fatigue, nor worry, nor sorrow, nor harm, nor depression, and not even the prick of a thorn afflicts a believer except that Allah expiates some of his sins.” [AḤMAD 8027]

Dear brother or sister afflicted with Covid

Know for a fact, that no second passes, as you labour under the impact of this illness, and as you suffer to draw breath into your lungs, except that your sins are being washed away. If Allah bestows this great blessing even in lieu of the prick of a thorn, then just imagine what He washes away when you patiently bear the terrible rigours of this illness!

The rest of us who have not been afflicted still have to repent for our sins and hope that Allah will forgive us. As for you, you are blessed in more than one way. You are blessed because Allah has by His own Will decided to cleanse you; you do not have

to repent and hope for acceptance. You will emerge from your illness, *in shā' Allah*, with a clean new slate.

But also, there is one other thing we would like you not to forget. The state you are presently in brings you very close to Allah. Our Nabī ﷺ taught us to ask those who are ill to make du‘ā for us. And he gave a reason for it as well.

Sayyiduna ‘Umar رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ narrates that Rasūlullāh ﷺ said: “The du‘ā of the sick person is like the du‘ā of the Malā’ikah.”⁵⁹

Dear brothers and sisters who are ill with Covid, please make du‘ā for us all. Make du‘ā for the Ummah of Muḥammad ﷺ.

⁵⁹ *Sunan Ibn Mājah* no. 1441

HADĪTH NO 39

Not complaining upon affliction

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: «قَالَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى: إِذَا ابْتَلَيْتُ عَبْدِي الْمُؤْمِنَ وَلَمْ يَشْكُنِي إِلَى عَوَادِهِ، أَطَلَقْتُهُ مِنْ أَسَارِي، ثُمَّ أَبَدَلْتُهُ لِحْمًا خَيْرًا مِنْ لَحْمِهِ، وَدَمًا خَيْرًا مِنْ دَمِهِ، ثُمَّ يَسْتَأْنِفُ الْعَمَلَ.» (رواه الحاكم ١٣٣٠)

Abū Hurayrah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ narrates that the Messenger of Allah صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ said: “Allah says: When I afflict my believing slave and he refuses to complain to his visitors of Me, I set him free from My incarceration. Then I replace his flesh with better flesh, and his blood with better blood. Then he begins his deeds all over again.” [HĀKIM 1330]

Dear brother and sister suffering from Covid

Although the nature of this disease prevents us from the sunnah of visiting you, you remain in our thoughts. As you suffer to breathe, with fear of the worst never far away from the mind, please bear it all with patience and fortitude.

This is Allah’s test on you, and He is watching your every response. Say,

حَسْبِيَ اللَّهُ وَنِعْمَ الْوَكِيلُ

Allah is sufficient for me, and He is the Best Guardian,

and never complain. The One who afflicted you can bring you through it. And when you have borne it all with good cheer and patience, and without ever complaining, He grants you a slate as clean as the day you were born.

With that, you may then return to start a fresh lease of life.

HADĪTH NO 40

Martyrdom

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ: «الشُّهَدَاءُ خَمْسَةٌ: الْمَطْعُونُ، وَالْمَبْطُونُ، وَالْغَرِقُ، وَصَاحِبُ الْهَدْمِ، وَالشَّهِيدُ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ.» (رواه البخاري ٢٨٢٩)

Abū Hurayrah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ narrates that the Messenger of Allah صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ said: “The martyrs are five: he who died of the plague, he who died of a stomach ailment, he who drowned, he who died under a collapsed building, and he who was martyred in the path of Allah.” [BUKHĀRĪ 2829]

No matter what vicissitudes the paths of our lives may follow, the inescapable exit point for every life is death, the final curtain. Deep in the heart of each of us lies the fervent hope that when that moment comes, we will have a good death.

However, for those who Allah decides to remove from this world through the effects of a mass pandemic, there is wonderful news. Upon them Allah bestows the status of a *shahīd*, the martyr who gave his very life for His Rabb.

Ya Allah, accept each and every Muslim who left this world due to Covid in Your Court as a blessed and honoured martyr!