

# Imām al-Ṭahāwī (d. 321H) on Contagion



## INTRODUCTION

Imām al-Ṭahāwī (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) addressed the issue of the apparent **conflict** between the various ḥadīths that have been connected to contagion. The various views among the scholars in this subject matter have arisen due to the **different ways** that scholars have tried to reconcile the various ḥadīths with each other in order to refute the doubts of the Muʿtazilah and the Naturalists and their likes who claim that there is incoherence between them.

In what follows, al-Ṭahāwī explains **the meaning and wisdom** for which the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) commanded his nation with keeping the sick away from the healthy and not entering or leaving a land of the plague. It is connected to matters of belief, due to his fear that corruption and harm may enter their belief, from the fear of his nation falling into minor shirk in their emotions, statements and behaviours. As for the aspect of minor shirk, then the error of the Pagan Arabs was their **exaggeration in the asbāb** (ways and means), in the issue of mixing and this feeds into the issue of omens and baseless fear.

Al-Ṭahāwī (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) said in *Sharḥ Maʿānī al-Āthār*:<sup>1</sup>

**Chapter: Should a Man With a Disease Be Avoided or Not?**

<sup>1</sup> Sharḥ Maʿānī al-Āthār (Ālam al-Kutub, 1st edition, 1414H) 4/303-315.

Under this heading, al-Ṭaḥāwī brings various chains for the ḥadīth: *“Let not the owner of sick camels pass them by the healthy camels of another.”* And then says:

Some people have gone towards this [view], hence they disliked the owner of sick camels passing them by the healthy camels of another and they said: That is disliked out of fear of contagion, and so they ordered with avoidance of the one with an ailment, to flee from him. They also sought evidence through what is related about ‘Umar and the plague, when he returned with the people [from the land of the outbreak], fleeing from it.

He then brings many reports which provide details about the entire incident and relates the various ḥadīths pertaining to the land of plague: *“When it occurs in a land, then do not travel to it, and if it occurs in a land that you are in, do not leave it, desiring to flee from it.”* He then says:

They said: The Messenger of Allāh (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) ordered, in these narrations, that a person should not proceed to [a land of] plague, and that is due to fear of it.

So here, al-Ṭaḥāwī is outlining the arguments for the view that the statements of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) have been made upon **“fear of disease, contagion”**. He then provides a response to these arguments:

**It is said to them:** There is no evidence for you in this in the way that you have mentioned, because if he had commanded them to leave off approaching a land [of plague] due to fear of it, then the [command] would also be applied to the people of the location in which the

[plague] had occurred, that they should leave it. [This is because] his fear for them would be the same as his fear for the others [whom he prohibited from entering the land]. But since he prohibited the people in the location in which the plague occurs from leaving it, it becomes established that the meaning for which he prohibited them from approaching [that land] is other than the meaning which you have adopted.

It is here that the incoherence and inconsistency begins to appear in the view of those who assert that all of these texts are in relation to *fear of disease/contagion*.

The inconsistency is that the Prophet (ﷺ) made these statements and issued these commands and prohibitions because he feared contagion. If that is the case, then why would he command us to flee from the leper—who has a disease that a person can live with for an entire lifetime—but prohibit us from fleeing from the plague which kills in hours or days?<sup>2</sup> These are the types of doubts that can be brought by the Mu‘tazilah, Rationalists and the Orientalists.

However, al-Ṭaḥāwī provides an answer which is coherent and removes such doubts from ever being presented:

**So if someone says:** What is that meaning? It is said to

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<sup>2</sup> Some then claim that this prohibition was on the principle of **quarantine**, and this is clearly erroneous, without evidence. This is because the reason for the prohibition was clearly qualified and restricted in the ḥadīth itself, it is for those who flee **seeking to escape Allāh’s decree, seeking to escape disease and death**. It is not a general prohibition. **Further, the Prophet (ﷺ) himself framed the plague from the angle of jihād in the battlefield, as is apparent when we bring together all the texts regarding it.** It is a major sin to desert the battlefield out of fear of injury or death, despite the strong likelihood of that taking place. Likewise, it is prohibited to desert the land of plague.

him: It is—in our view, and Allāh knows best—with [the meaning] so that a man does not go to [the land of plague] and is afflicted with the plague by the decree of Allāh (عَزَّوَجَلَّ) and then says: “If only I had not come to this land, this illness would not have afflicted me.” And perhaps if he stayed in the place he had left [from where he went to the land of the plague], it would still have afflicted him. So he ordered him not to go to it, fearing [that he might speak] with this statement [that harms his belief].”

In other words, this relates to **exaggeration in the asbāb** (ways, means)—in particular, that of mixing—and of **finding fault with the Divine decree** (al-Qadar) or having **baseless presumptions about it**—such that a person does not speak with such statements which find fault with Allāh’s decree or which make presumptions about it, leading to aspects of minor shirk. A person may never go to the place of a disease outbreak and never mix with any person with a disease, and he will still get the disease if Allāh has willed it to occur through a combination of factors, because just like Allāh brought it to the first person, without mixing with another, then likewise, He can repeat that over and over for whomever He wills. Thus, speaking with this type of language, “*If I had not come to this land*” and “*If I had not left this land*” and so on, all of this enters into harmful speech which comprises exaggeration in the asbāb, and exaggeration in contagion and incorrect speech and presumption about Allāh’s decree. So we are in the realm of what occurs in a person’s heart, soul and mind, of thoughts, feelings and emotions which are baseless, and which can dispose a person to the ideas and behaviours of the Pagans and Disbelievers.

We have explained previously that often **an illusion of contagion** is presented when **population level factors**, such as climate, the water and food supply, the quality of the air, seasonal changes and similar things create the circumstances for disease outbreaks among the susceptible in a population in a given time and place. **All mixing would be purely incidental.** And this is how the nations of the past, the Pagans and Disbelievers would—upon their ignorance of the complexity of the *asbāb*—arrive at their simplistic explanation for the occurrence and apparent spread of disease through the notion of contagion.

It is impossible that Allāh (عَزَّوَجَلَّ), the Creator of all of the *asbāb* (ways and means), would send His Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) without such clarity of guidance that accommodates these realities that have just been described.

Meaning, Allāh knows the capacity of man to provide simplistic explanations for certain observed effects, without knowing the complexity of His creation and the various *asbāb* (causes) that are at play in occurrences of disease and death. For that reason, guidance was provided to place barriers to potential corruption in belief and from going in the direction of the Pagans and Disbelievers, in resembling them in their thoughts, statements and behaviours in relation to this matter.

Al-Ṭaḥāwī continues:

Likewise, he commanded that [a man] should not leave the land in which the plague has occurred, so that when he is safe, he does not say: “If I had remained in that land, what afflicted its people would have afflicted me”, and if he had remained in that land, nothing of that [plague] would have afflicted him at all. Thus, he ordered the abandonment of going to the [land] of plague for the

meaning we have described, and to abandon leaving it for the meaning which we have mentioned.

So here, there is **coherence** in the meaning, in the two prohibitions of not entering and not leaving. No door or avenue exists for the Mu‘tazilī or ‘Aqlānī or Orientalist to find fault with the Prophetic Sunnah. This approach provides coherence at all levels, both between texts, and also with factual reality.

The plague is a disease of the lymphatic system, the drainage system of the body, its signs manifest under the armpits, in the groin region, and also behind the ears.<sup>3</sup> The

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<sup>3</sup> So this returns to issues of malnutrition—the absence of crucial nutrients—and heavy toxicity. This can come from a poisonous water supply, contaminated with heavy metals, which societies and whole populations may have been consuming, or environmental toxins through dirty, noxious air, the use of coal fires for cooking and indoor heating, and the use of cooking pots made from toxic metals such as lead, or the use of mercury as medicine and so on. So these factors can affect populations, and then after months, or years, a climatic trigger can lead to the eruption of the plague. This could be a very cold period where the sun is cooler than usual and temperatures generally decline, or the decline in Vitamin D levels due to sustained periods of smog, blocking the sun, through the settling of smog in valleys and regions over autumn and winter periods, or even longer timescales. So this will lead to a situation where the body goes into crisis management because the liver, kidneys and lymphatic system have been overloaded. The easiest route for the body is to expel the toxicity and morbid material through the skin and lungs. And this will manifest from the major lymph areas, where there is accumulation and blockage and if it is through the lungs, the a person may cough up toxic blood that the body needs to expel in order protect other vital organs from severe damage. The symptoms will often be so sudden, strong and harsh that most people who succumb to it will die. These multiple causative factors envelope entire populations, and thus when the plague does occur in a city or land, it is pointless trying to escape, because you have already been subjected to its causes in the weeks, months or years prior. So in whomever Allāh has willed for the

Sunnah has also informed us of the element of the Jinn and the role they play in symptoms, in the sharp, piercing pain that is felt. This is from the affairs of the unseen that we have been informed about in the Prophetic Sunnah.

Al-Ṭaḥāwī continues:

Likewise what we have related at the beginning of this chapter of his statement: “*Let not the owner of sick camels pass them by the healthy camels of another*”, in case that ailment afflicts the healthy camels, and the owner of the sick camels may not say: “If I had not passed them by [the healthy camels of that person], nothing of this disease would have passed to them. And if he had not passed them by the [healthy camels], then perhaps the [ailment] would have afflicted them, just as it afflicted them when he did pass them by.

Thus, he ordered the abandonment of passing the healthy by the sick for this reason, [this reason] from which people are not safe from that it should occur in their hearts and [not safe from that such] statements should occur in their speech along [the lines of] what we have mentioned.

**Thus, the considerations are:**

- exaggeration in the asbāb,**
- confusing coincidence with causation,**
- false presumptions about Allāh’s decree,**
- being discontent with the decree,**
- and raising the “if” statement.**

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plague to occur, it will occur and whoever Allāh willed to be saved, will be saved. Fleeing or not fleeing will make no difference. All of this has nothing to do with contagion.

After this al-Ṭaḥāwī brings many reports, this time about the bedouin and the camels with scabies, in which the bedouin, after hearing the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) negate contagion, retorted that when a camel with scabies mixes with the healthy camels, they all get scabies. So the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) answered: “*So who passed it [the illness] to the first one?*” Al-Ṭaḥāwī said:

Allāh’s Messenger (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) negated contagion in these narrations that we have mentioned, and he had also said: “*So who passed it to the first one?*” Meaning, if the second one had been afflicted due to the first one passing [the disease] to it, then the first one would not have been afflicted with anything because there was no [other camel] besides it to pass [the disease] to it. **However, since the first one was afflicted [by disease] through the decree of Allāh (عَزَّوَجَلَّ), then what afflicted the second was likewise.**

There are numerous crucial points here:

**The first** is a discussion of scabies. **This is a hygiene related parasitic disease connected to poor nutrition. The immunological condition of the host determines the ability of the mite to infest the skin. The mite may routinely be found on the skin and scabies may never develop.**

Mites burrow into the upper layer of the skin where that skin has not been efficiently regenerated due to lack of vitality, especially in areas where skin is naturally sensitive.. Cuts, wounds and abrasions can facilitate that. Scabies is not an *infection*, but an **infestation**. Infestation leads to itching due to the sensitivity of the skin to the proteins and feces of the mites. The skin reacts causing rashes, pimples and blisters.

**The second** is what relates to contagion in light of the above. Animals live in the same location, in the same conditions, where mites exist in the surroundings or in contaminated materials. Over time, given the right climatic conditions and poor nutrition, a herd may develop scabies but not because it passed from one animal to the other. Just as the first one got scabies, then likewise, the others can get scabies in the same way, without requiring “transmission”. The herd has simply been subject to the same environmental circumstances and multifactorial causes of the appearance of the disease, during a particular period of time. However, this can create **the illusion of contagion**.<sup>4</sup> For this reason, given the fact that Allāh creates disease in a herd or a population through such complex sets of factors—**which may not be apparent to people, rather they may be obscured and hidden, or not discoverable at that point in time**—people are naturally prone to invoking “contagion” as the most simple explanation.

This is falling into error in the matter of the *asbāb* (created ways and means) and knowing this, the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said what he said, in order to cut off such presumptions which bring corruption and harm to creed.

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<sup>4</sup> This has indeed been the case with diseases such as pellagra, considered to be contagious through microbes and germs, but later discovered to be caused by chronic vitamin deficiency. The same with leprosy, thought to be contagious in the ordinary common sense of the word but now known not to be contagious, 95% of people are not susceptible to it. It is in reality a disease of toxic overload and malnutrition and is not fundamentally caused by a bacterium as is claimed by the germ theorists who only have a one-track, narrow-minded, mono-causal, cop-out explanation for so-called “infectious disease”. Bacterial activity occurs in response to tissue and cell death, it is not the primary cause of illness, but is secondary to it

He (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said: “*Let not the owner of sick camels pass them by the healthy camels of another.*”<sup>5</sup> And this can be viewed from the same angle from which he prohibited sitting at a table where alcohol is consumed, or free-mixing between sexes or a man being alone with a non-maḥram female, because these are stepping stones to harm and corruption.

So he cut off the avenues to such vices and in the same manner, he cut off all the avenues that lead to minor shirk, and from them is what relates to this subject matter, indicating the perfection of his guidance and his perfection of the affair of Tawḥīd.

Al-Ṭaḥāwī continues:

If someone says: So [shall] we make this [negation of contagion] contradictory, due to what is related from the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ): “*Let not the owner of sick camels pass them by the healthy camels of another*”, as was done by Abū Hurayrah.

I say: No, however, his saying: “*There is no contagion*”, as the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said it, is considered a negation of there ever being contagion and his saying: “*Let not the owner of sick camels pass them by the healthy camels of another*” is treated as fear on his behalf that [a sick camel] is passed by [the healthy one], and it is afflicted, by the decree of Allāh<sup>6</sup>, with what afflicted the first one, and the

<sup>5</sup> And upon the other interpretation, the other view, we would say that this is to avoid “inoculation”, but that this has nothing to do with contagion that the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) negated, as that is a separate category.

<sup>6</sup> Meaning: Through the combination of factors which Allāh brought together, through His creative power, which is from His decree, for that animal or other animals to get sick, just as He did for the first one, while

people then begin to say: “The first passed [the disease] to it.” Thus he disliked that the healthy camel should be passed by the sick, out of fear of this saying [that it might be said].

This is the insight from an Imām from the era of the Salaf of the first three centuries, and it is shared by **Imām Mālik** in what is related from him, **Abū ‘Ubayd al-Qāsim bin Sallām, al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Khuzaymah** and others—all of whom came before Ibn Ḥazm and none of them were “Zāhiriīs”. Rather, they extracted from these texts what relates to the rights of Allāh and the perfection of Tawḥīd.

As for the interpretation that by saying “*There is no contagion*”, the Prophet (ﷺ) intended the contagion believed by the Pagans, **that contagion moves independently, outside of Allāh’s will and power, outside of His decree**, as has been said by numerous scholars, then this does not explain the true nature of the error of those Pagans. Rather, those Pagans **exaggerated in the asbāb** (causes, ways and means) and they exaggerated in the issue of mixing. They did not accept that other causes in the scheme of Allāh’s creation can hinder, prevent and divert the effect of that cause, or that such a cause (mixing) is not even necessary for disease to arise, as it has other established

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mixing was purely coincidental. And because Allāh, being the Creator of all the complex interconnected systems of asbāb and musabbabāt (causes and effects), brings disease to individuals and populations through such factors, and because mankind’s knowledge is very limited, they will be prone to invoking “contagion”, thereby falling into exaggeration with respect to one presumed, unverified cause (sabab) over others. This is the case with the common cold and flu and flu-like illnesses which are seasonal in nature and are not “contagious” at all. Their true biological meanings have been misunderstood by the disbelievers and are framed from an evolutionary perspective through the flawed germ theory model of disease.

causes, and thus they exaggerated in that particular cause of mixing.<sup>7</sup> This is very easy to understand because even in the other view, the scholars have to use very specific words, they say “**mixing may sometimes be a means**” for the spread of disease. But this means that most often than not, it is not actually the means for spread of disease, it was purely coincidental to the occurrence of disease in a person or animal. And hence, there is a large potential for exaggeration to be made, and thus, the thoughts, statements and behaviours that comprise minor shirk can arise quite easily when errors and exaggerations are made.

**Ibn al-Qayyim** explained this issue of exaggeration in the causes, explaining the nature of the error of the Pagan Arabs, when he said about the ḥadīth, “*There is no contagion*”:

This negates what the Pagans used to affirm of a recurring type of causation [through mixing] that follows a single course, it not being possible for it to be invalidated, nor diverted from its place, nor for it to be opposed by [means] that are stronger than it. It is not as the one whose knowledge is deficient says that they [the Pagans] used to consider [contagion] to be an independent efficient cause on its own [outside Allāh’s will and power].<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> So this returns to what we have explained frequently, about the **multifactorial** nature of disease and that disease is not a noun-entity that moves on its own when people are next to each other, and that Allāh creates the population and individual level factors for disease to arise in whomever He wills to arise, and aside from the issue of inoculation, an illusion of contagion can be created when disease occurs in a population in a given location during a given time. This makes people prone to being led to behaviours which are the behaviours of the Pagans and Disbelievers, in their exaggeration in this matter.

<sup>8</sup> I’lām al-Muwaqqi’īn (Dār Ibn al-Jawzī, 1423H) 4/65. We should also keep in mind however, that atheists, materialists and naturalists who reject a Creator will obviously say that contagion exists without a Creator. Hence

Ibn al-Qayyim explains here that the true nature of the error of the Pagans was in relation to sababiyah (causation) and its factors, and their exaggeration with respect to the created ways and means. This is similar to what we find amongst the Pagans and Disbelievers today, though it is underpinned by false, inaccurate theories of disease and pseudoscience, such as what can be found in virology, which leads them exaggeration in the asbāb (causes) and many false claims.

He also explained that it is from deficiency in knowledge to claim that their error was because they said contagion operates on its own as an independent efficient cause. Thus, to claim that the meaning of the ḥadīth—“*So who passed it to the first one?*”—and the only meaning of this ḥadīth is that:

“The Prophet did not negate what the bedouin was describing—that all camels in a herd get scabies after mixing with the first camel who got it—rather, that he actually affirmed what the bedouin was saying and explained that just as Allāh made the first one ill through His decree, then He also made the second one ill through His decree, but through contagion, and that contagion does not move outside of Allāh’s decree, meaning His will and power.” Then this interpretation of the ḥadīth opposes what the earlier scholars explained, those who were more deeply grounded such as Abu ‘Ubayd and those after him.

In light of the above, some points follow:

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to them, it occurs outside the domain of the Creator’s will and power, because they do not accept a Creator to begin with. As such they strip the causes (asbāb) and effects (musabbabāt) of their Creator (musabbib). And as for those Pagans, then they exaggerate in the causes which Allāh has created. Further, the Pagans were not all of the same type, they were of categories with various beliefs regarding creation, resurrection and the likes.

**First**, as has been explained earlier, that the nature of the error of the Pagans was **that they exaggerated in the asbāb (causes)**, in this case, the effect of mixing in the issue of disease. It was not that they simply claimed contagion moves outside of Allāh’s will and power, and that the Messenger was teaching the bedouin that contagion only occurs by Allāh’s decree, not outside of it. For the Pagan Arabs affirmed Allāh’s rubūbiyyah, they affirmed that He controls life and death and that all things are under His dominion, and they affirmed Allāh’s decree, because they argued, as occurs in the Qur’ān, that:

لَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ مَا أَشْرَكْنَا وَلَا آبَاؤُنَا

“... if Allāh had so willed, we and our forefathers would

So how can they argue that it is Allāh who misguided them through His decree—and thus do not deserve blame and punishment—and then believe that contagion moves outside of Allāh’s decree? So this shows that their error was from a different angle, from exaggeration in a sabab (cause) among the asbāb (causes).

**Second**, the context and sequence of the ḥadith falsifies such an interpretation. The Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) negated contagion, so the bedouin was surprised as to how this can be, and he was surprised to hear how scabies “passing” from one camel to another can be denied, because that is his explanation for what he observes of the apparent spread of disease among a herd of camels. **There is no issue or question here about Allāh’s decree and whether it is involved or not.** Thus, he retorted with what he apparently observes of a herd of camels getting scabies after one of them gets it. He is replying with the sababiyyah (causation) of mixing as his explanation of what he observes.

However this is an exaggeration in this sababiyyah, as if it is the only thing, the only factor in the occurrence of disease,

that can explain why all the camels get scabies. So the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) responded to the bedouin by saying:

*“So who passed it to the first one?”*

And this is to teach the bedouin, to make him leave such exaggeration in this matter, by realising that if the first camel got scabies without mixing with another, then the other camels likewise can get scabies on account of factors other than mixing itself. And thus, he directed the bedouin to the fact that Allāh creates disease through factors other than what might be presumed of mixing, which then leads to the presumption of contagion.

Then, **knowing that this is the tendency of people**, to presume things—to exaggerate in a sabab (cause) while being ignorant of other asbāb (causes) and how this can lead them to corruption and harm in belief—the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) ordered the owner of sick camels not to make them graze or drink water next to the healthy camels of another owner. This is in order to cut off the avenue, to put a barrier in front of such presumptions arising which open the door for people to be led to the statements and behaviours which are those of the Pagans and Disbelievers in this subject matter, of exaggeration, in a cause amongst the causes, whilst ignoring or discounting, the true causes, which are from His decree.

Then al-Ṭaḥāwī speaks about the ḥadīth of the plague:

In what has preceded in this chapter, I mentioned the meaning of what is related from the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) about the plague, in his prohibition of going to [the land in which it has occurred] and in his prohibition of leaving [the land in which it has occurred]. [Which is]: That his prohibition of going to [the land] was out of fear that it was in the prior knowledge of Allāh (عز وجل) that when they go to

it, they will be afflicted with it, so they go to it and are afflicted with it, and they say: “We were afflicted with it because we came to [this place] and had we not come, it would not have afflicted us.”

And his prohibition of leaving it was so that he does not leave and remain safe [from affliction] and then say: “I was safe because I left, and had I not left, I would not have been safe.” So when the prohibition of leaving the land of plague and the prohibition of entering it **is with a single meaning**, which is [the fear of people] harbouring omens (ṭiyarah), and not [for fear of] contagion, then it was likewise in his saying: “*Let not the owner of sick camels pass them by the healthy camels of another.*” It is [due to the issue of] harbouring omens and not [for fear of] contagion. Thus, in all of this, Allāh’s Messenger (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) prohibited them from the ways and means through which they would harbour omens.

So this provides a single coherent meaning across all the various texts, without any clash or contradiction. The underlying meaning is **exaggeration in a sabab among the asbāb** (cause among the causes). All the asbāb are part and parcel of Allāh’s qadar (created systems of cause and effect and the precise manner in which a cause or causes are tied to an effect or effects). So a person thinks he got the plague because he went to the land of the plague, but in reality, had he never stepped foot in it and had never been close to it, not even by hundreds of miles, let alone dozens, he would still get the plague if Allāh had brought together the various causes and factors for that to occur in him.

This is what is meant in the earlier speech of al-Ṭaḥāwī as it relates to camels and scabies:

**However, since the first one was afflicted [by disease]**

**through the decree of Allāh (ﷺ), then what afflicted the second was likewise.**

Then he spoke about the permissibility of leaving the land of the plague with what provides further evidence that the prohibition of entering or leaving it has no connection to the issue of contagion, for fear of it, but rather, for other considerations. He said:

And in the ḥadīth of Usāmah which we have related from Allāh’s Messenger (ﷺ):—“*And when it occurs in a land in which you are in, do not leave it, intending to flee from it [the plague]*”—is evidence that there is no harm in leaving when it is not out of [the desire] to flee from [the plague].

**Note:** There are higher wisdoms in the prohibition of leaving a land of plague and they are discussed in a more detailed article: “**Higher Wisdoms in The Ḥadīth Regarding the Land of Plague**” [hadith-plague-land.pdf](#)—25 April 2020.

In this article it is made clear that the various Prophetic traditions on the plague combined indicate that **this prohibition is framed in exactly the same way as the prohibition of fleeing the battlefield upon the outbreak of war**, and that it has nothing to do with contagion. As a result, there is no argument left for the Muṭazilah and Orientalists who find fault with the Sunnah, and who may say: Why is there an order to flee from the leper, or to keep the healthy away from the sick, but a prohibition from leaving a land of plague, which is most deadly. This is because each of these three scenarios—land of plague, the leper and camels with scabies—has its own context and the Prophet (ﷺ) spoke in each context for a specific objective. It is not the case that contagion is the the unique underlying premise in

all these scenarios. The incoherence of the texts only arises if this is presumed, and this presumption is what gives rise to shubuhāt (doubts).

As for the claim that this prohibition is from the angle of **quarantine**, then this does not hold, because the ḥadīth qualifies the prohibition: **It relates only to those who intend to flee from the plague, intending to flee from Allāh’s decree after it has enveloped them.**

**Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymīn** (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ), discussing the ḥadīth of ‘Umar (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ) travelling to Shām and turning back due to the plague that broke out there, stated:

“The Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said: ‘Do not leave it—meaning, from the land in which it has occurred—[intending to] flee from it.’ So the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) qualified the prohibition from leaving [a land of the plague] when it is done [with the intent] of fleeing [from it]. As for when a person has come to this land for a purpose, or for trade and it is ended, and he desires to return to his land, then we do not say: ‘This is unlawful for you.’ Rather we say: ‘You may go.’”<sup>9</sup>

The Shaykh also said in his explanation of Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī:

And in his saying: “[intending to] flee from [the plague]” is evidence that if he was to leave for a reason besides this, then it is permissible. If a man desired to travel from his land in which the plague has occurred to Mecca for example, so that he can perform Ḥajj and ‘Umrah, or to some other land in order to trade, then that is permissible, because he qualified this with his saying: “[intending to] flee

<sup>9</sup> Sharḥ al-Mumtī‘ (11/110-111).

from [the plague]”. **Upon this, the saying of the one who said: “This is from the angle of quarantine” should not be turned to.**<sup>10</sup> Some of the latecomers have turned this ḥadīth into a foundation for [the measure of] quarantine [al-ḥajr al-ṣiḥḥī].<sup>11</sup>

Hence, all other movements out of the land or city, such as for trade, travel, visiting relatives and so on, all of that is perfectly permissible.<sup>12</sup>

Then al-Ṭaḥāwī provides further evidence for this by citing the narrations about those bedouins who came to the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) while they were ill with pleurisy.<sup>13</sup> This was during a time when an epidemic had broken out in Madīnah. So these bedouins sought permission to leave the city and move to another area where they could take treatment through the milk and urine of camels.<sup>14</sup> The Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) permitted that and told them to go.

#### Al-Ṭāḥāwī comments:

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<sup>10</sup> And this is not because Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymīn said so, but because this is what the evidence clearly and without ambiguity shows to be the truth.

<sup>11</sup> Commentary on “Chapter on the Repentance of the Apostates and Renegades and Fighting Against Them”, audio file.

<sup>12</sup> However, authorities, based upon the view they hold in relation to contagion, may apply restrictive measures such as quarantine, and that is from their ijtihād. The subjects of such a nation should comply with the measures.

<sup>13</sup> Pleurisy is a condition in which the pleura — two large, sheet-like thin layers of tissue that separate your lungs from your chest wall — becomes inflamed. Also called pleuritis, pleurisy causes sharp chest pain (pleuritic pain) that worsens during breathing. The pain can also extend to the shoulder.

<sup>14</sup> This incident is in relation to a general epidemic, in relation to a disease which is other than the plague, because the plague is a very specific disease.

So that in our view—and Allāh knows best—is upon the basis that them leaving [Madīnah] was for treatment, not fleeing [from the epidemic]. So it is established through that [report] that leaving the land in which the plague has occurred is disliked when it is with [the desire] to flee from it, but permissible for other than the reason of fleeing. And it is upon this [same] meaning—and Allāh knows best—that ‘Umar returned from Saragh [a place in Shām] with the people, and it was not that he fled from what had descended upon them [of the occurrence of plague in that land].

Consider the view of those who say that this prohibition is for fear of spreading disease. Given that it is only a restricted, qualified prohibition, relating only to the one who desires to flee the plague, to flee the decree of Allāh, to flee death and disease, as the evidence in the ḥadīth clearly shows, then the Mu‘tazilah and Orientalists, enemies of the Sunnah or enemies of Islām will say to such people:

“That’s a great public health measure. Your religion prohibited leaving a land **when the intention is to flee the plague**, but if it is for any other intention or reason, then it is permissible to leave. So how exactly is the disease spread going to be curbed if the prohibition of leaving is based **purely on intention alone? What type of quarantine is this in your religion?**”

And this is the answer that we anticipate from those who hold this view. Provide us a coherent answer that does not open avenues for the enemies of the Sunnah, whether Ahl al-Bid‘ah such as the Mu‘tazilah, or the people of disbelief, the Missionaries and the Orientalists. And then also reconcile this with: “*Flee from the leper as you would flee from a lion*”, so why is fleeing the plague prohibited, which brings certain

death, while fleeing the leper is enjoined, despite leprosy being a disease one can live with for a lifetime?

But as for what is being explained here, from the likes of al-Ṭaḥāwī and before him, Imām Mālik and Abu ‘Ubayd and others, then there is perfect coherence and the doubt does not have any basis to surface at all. There can never, ever be incoherence in the Prophetic guidance. There is no “literalism” here, rather there is deep, profound wisdom.

Then al-Ṭaḥāwī provides further evidence for this by mentioning some details about the incident regarding ‘Umar (رضي الله عنه) and the outbreak of plague in Shām, in the region in which he had travelled to. He says:

And the evidence for that is what has been related with respect to it: Ibn Abī Dāwūd narrated to us—[he then mentions his isnād]—that ‘Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb said: “O Allāh, the people accused me of three things and I declare my innocence to You: They claimed that I fled from the plague, and I declare my innocent to You from that...”

This is ‘Umar informing that he frees himself in front of Allāh that he fled from the plague. This means his turning back [from the land in which plague had occurred] was for a reason other than fleeing.

Then al-Ṭaḥāwī provides further evidence through the letter ‘Umar (رضي الله عنه) sent to Abū ‘Ubaydah (رضي الله عنه) who was chief of the army in Shām, asking him to leave the area they were stationed in—during the epidemic—because it was unhealthy for them, and because he needed Abu ‘Ubaydah for an important matter.

And what supports this is what ‘Umar desired through his letter to Abū ‘Ubaydah, that he and the Muslim soldiers

with him should leave [the land where plague had broken out] for the reason that al-Jābiyyah was a cleaner place [due its higher elevation] than low-lying Jordan [making it an unhealthy place].<sup>15</sup>

In other words, despite that land being a place where the plague was taking place in Shām, ‘Umar commanded his army chief to take the Muslim soldiers with him to a healthier location, and this had nothing to do with fleeing the plague but for a reason of health and well-being and for a need. This is evidence that the prohibition of leaving a land of plague is not for fear of spreading contagion.

Then he mentions the explanation of Abū Mūsā (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ) as to what specifically is the thing that is disliked with respect to the plague, *the meaning* for which the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) prohibited leaving the land of the plague:

And Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī permitted that [meaning, leaving the land], as occurs in the ḥadīth of Shu‘bah with respect to the thing that is disliked with respect to the plague, as to what it is [precisely]. It is that a person leaves it and remains safe [not falling ill] and so he says: “I was safe because I left”. And another comes to [that land] and he is afflicted, and so he says: “I was afflicted because I came [to this land].” And Abū Mūsā permitted the people to move away from [that land] if they wanted to. Hence, what we have mentioned is evidence for the explanation that we have described. This is the meaning of these narrations in our view and Allāh knows best.

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<sup>15</sup> Note: Those who try to claim that the prohibition of leaving the land of plague is from the angle of “quarantine” are incorrect because the evidence does not support such an interpretation.

It becomes clear from this discussion of al-Ṭaḥāwī and from the Companion Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī (رضي الله عنه) that the commands and prohibitions in this subject matter are from the angle of creed and with respect to affairs that harm a person’s Tawḥīd, and the issue of finding fault with the decree, or making presumptions about it, speaking about the unknown, raising the word “if”, saying “If I had done that” or “If I had not done that”, and likewise of exaggeration in the asbāb (causes), in presumed unverified causes. All of these enter into the realm of minor shirk which make Tawḥīd deficient.

After this, al-Ṭaḥāwī discusses the issue of omens (ṭiyarah) and after citing many reports regarding it he says:

So when Allāh’s Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) prohibited from omens and informed that they are from shirk, **he prohibited people from the means through which omens can arise**, from what has been mentioned in this chapter.

So this includes the issue of contagion because people can harbour omens in the issue of contagion. This is something observed and widespread among the disbelievers through their exaggeration in the matter of contagion, through exaggeration in the asbāb, the ways and means, upon their false, inaccurate theories of disease.

This is what we see intensely these days when we see behaviours that even the Pagan Arabs of Jāhiliyyah would mock and ridicule, because they had enough intelligence—alongside their kufr, shirk and misguidance and alongside their exaggeration in the matter of contagion—**to know that**

**disease cannot spread from a person who doesn't actually have it.**<sup>16</sup>

However, this is the extent of the ghuluww (exaggeration) and extremism that the modern day disbelievers have entered into and have drawn others into, leading millions into treating **perfectly healthy people** who have been fraudulently described, on the basis of fraudulent tests, as “asymptomatic carriers” and “infected”—upon a false theory of disease—**as omens**. In fact, not just those accused with being “infected”, **but also anyone and everyone in the population**, because they might be carrying “**the invisible enemy**”, wherein a “virus” has become as if a technical replacement for the “disease demon” of the ancient Babylonians in their rendition of contagion, or the “ghoul” of the Pagan Arabs which made them fearful of travel.

**It is simply not possible that the guidance of the Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) in this subject matter came without having any relation to what we are observing and that his guidance came without having any applicability to what we witness in these times, and that his guidance failed to address such realities, the harms of which are multiple times more serious to an individual, in this life and the next, than the harm from disease itself.**

This highlights the great insight of the earlier scholars in this particular issue. Al-Ṭaḥāwī was preceded in this by Abu ‘Ubayd al-Qāsim bin Sallām (d. 224H).

Al-Baghawī said:

“And **Abū ‘Ubayd** mentioned this meaning and said:

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<sup>16</sup> As for all of these terms, “infected”, “asymptomatic carrier” and what is similar, all of this is based upon the flawed germ theory model of disease which distorts and misrepresents the underlying realities and provides a basis for the revival and promotion of the notion of contagion with the Pagans and Disbelievers of the past.

‘And some people have carried [the ḥadīth] to mean that [the prohibition] is due to fear for the healthy on account of the one with the disease, **and this the most evil of what the ḥadīth has been carried to mean, because it facilitates the way for believing in omens.** And how can the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) not prohibit from this belief in omens [as it relates to contagion] while he [also] says: ‘[Belief in] omens is shirk.’ However, its angle in my view, and Allāh knows best, is that there comes to these healthy [camels] through Allāh’s decree what came to those [sick] ones [of disease], and so the owner of the healthy camels thinks that the sick ones passed the disease to them, and thus falls into sin.’”<sup>17</sup>

**First**, what do you think would be the saying of Abu ‘Ubayd and others if they knew that this ḥadīth was being carried to justify “**fear of the healthy on account the healthy who do not have any disease whatsoever**” and he saw what healthy people were doing of “social distancing” in all their day to day activities in which everyone is effectively considered an omen?

**This is not “literalism”. It is deeply-rooted profound wisdom, representing the perfection of the guidance of Allāh’s Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) in cutting of all avenues to minor shirk and irrational behaviours.**

**Second**, what is meant here by “Allāh’s decree” in Abu ‘Ubayd’s speech, when he says:

“...there comes to these healthy [camels] **through Allāh’s decree** what came to those [sick] ones and so the owner of the healthy camels thinks that the sick ones passed the disease to them...”?

<sup>17</sup> Sharh al-Sunnah (al-Maktab al-Islāmī, Beirut: 1403H), 12/168.

It means that disease causation is complex and has many factors, all under the will and power of Allāh, He combines them for whomever He wills to get disease in a given location at a given time and any mixing would be incidental. Thus, to exaggerate in the issue of mixing was the way of the Pagans and it led them to harbour omens, upon baseless fear. And the realm of minor shirk is vast, it occurs:

- in intentions and motivations,
- in baseless thoughts and fears,
- in the behaviours based upon them,
- in exaggeration in the asbāb (causes), and
- in speech about the decree, in regret and so on.

So, as al-Ṭaḥāwī concluded, the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) bought guidance in this regard to protect his nation from what they are prone to, because everyone is subject to presumptions and fears which can lead to false beliefs and irrational behaviours. A bit like what we are seeing across the world today.

**Third**, it must be clarified so that there is no room for any confusion, that the known and established methods in epidemics which have been adopted by nations are:

— **to isolate the sick, keeping them away from the healthy** and

— **to quarantine** those:

- with **established contact with the sick** or
- who have arrived **from the location of the**

**epidemic**, and

— **to restrict travel to the location of the epidemic.**

These are the means and they are part and parcel of reliance for those who affirm contagion. All measures must return to verified, established means, and have empirical evidence. Where we start to wander away from this and enter

into dubious methods based on pure conjecture and suspicion, then this is where we move towards danger areas.

And it is here that scholars such as Shaykh al-Albānī (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) and Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymīn (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) laid down general principles with respect to verifying causes and having scientifically valid justifications for measures, and that has been discussed elsewhere.<sup>18</sup>

Abu ‘Iyaaḍ

5 Ṣafar 1442 / 22 September 2020—v.1.04

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<sup>18</sup> Refer to the article: “**Isolation, Quarantine and “Lockdown”:**  
**Between Science and Astrology.**” [pk-lockdown.pdf](#)—8 June 2020.