

# Principles Concerning “Infectious Disease” (al-‘Adwā)

By Abu ‘Iyāḍ



All praise is due to Allāh and prayers and salutations be upon His Prophet. To proceed.

**PART 1:** This series of articles will cover some broad principles by which you—as a Muslim—can gain a clearer perspective of this subject in general in the context of current issue of swine flu in particular.<sup>1</sup>The subject of al-‘adwā (contagion, infectious disease) can be somewhat confusing so this series aims to make it easier to understand.

**PRINCIPLE:** It is from the belief of the people of Jāhiliyyah and of the non-Muslims (Naturalists, Atheists) that al-‘adwā (contagion, "infectious disease") is infectious by its own inherent and intrinsic nature (bil-ṭab‘), and that it infects

---

<sup>1</sup> This article was written over ten years ago in May 2009 around the time of the Swine Flu scare. Today, we have another scare with the Coronavirus.

## outside of the domain of Allāh's Will (Mashī'ah), Permission (al-Idhn) and Decree (Qadr).<sup>2</sup>

We first draw upon a quote from Ibn Hajar al-Asqalānī (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) in his "Badhl al-Mā'ūn Fee Faḍl al-Ṭā'ūn" (Dar ul-Kutub al-Athariyyah, 1993CE) which is a book specifically dealing with the plague, as he lived during the time of outbreaks of plague in Egypt and covered the issues relating to contagion in the Sunnah (Prophetic Narrations). On page 212 of this book, after lengthy preceding discussions, he summarizes the various viewpoints on contagion (what is referred to as “infectious disease”). He says:

“ The first: that the disease is infectious by its intrinsic, inherent nature (bi ṭab'ihī), and this is the saying of the non-Muslims.

We will come back to this full quote in a later part in this series, at this point, we just want to document what is held in non-Muslim (and atheistic) societies in relation to contagion (“infectious disease”).

Next we have a statement from Shaykh al-Albānī (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ), who says in the course of discussing the issue of al-‘adwā (contagion) in al-Silsilah al-Ṣaḥīḥah (no. 971):

“ ...And know that there is no contradiction between these two hadīths and between the ḥadīths: “There is

---

<sup>2</sup> This is said by the naturalists, atheists, as they do not believe in a Creator. As for the Pagan Arabs, they were not deniers of al-Qadar, but affirmers. Their error was in relation to causality, giving disease a property it does not have and exaggerating in the affair of mixing and contact.

no contagion ('infectious disease')..." that have preceded (nos. 781-789), since what is intended by them is to affirm contagion. And the intent behind these ḥadīths is to negate the contagion that the people of Jaahiliyyah used to believe in, which is its transmission by itself, without looking at the (determination of the) Will of Allaah in that... How today resembles yesterday! For indeed the European doctors are in the most severe heedlessness away from Him, the Most High, due to their shirk (association of partners with Allāh) and their misguidance, and their belief in contagion ('infectious disease') upon the way of Jāhiliyyah...

We should note here that when you look at the speech of the scholars in this regard, you see that in some words they appear to be affirming contagion and in other's they are saying it is false. They are referring to two things. When they affirm, what they are referring to is the spread of disease due to Allāh's permission and will and the creational asbāb (ways, mechanisms, causes and effects) which are part and parcel of His decree. When they are negating, and declaring contagion to be false, they are referring to what is believed by the people of Jāhiliyyah, and the atheistic societies and their likes, that a disease is infectious in its own right, in its inherent intrinsic nature, outside of Allāh's control, will, permission and decree, and that it moves and spreads in a population, outside of Allāh's will, decree and permission, and also that the sole factor is the mere

transmission of the bacteria or virus, without regard for factors of individual susceptibility, which are also from the decree of Allāh.<sup>3</sup>

From Shaykh Ibn Bāz (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) in his treatise, “al-Qawādiḥ fil-‘Aqīdah wa Wasā’il as-Salāmah Minhā”:

“ And whoever claims that there is al-‘adwā (contagion, infectious disease), then this is falsehood (bāṭil), however Allāh has made mixing with some of the ill to sometimes be a means (ṣabab) of the disease being found in the healthy, however it does not infect (spread) by its inherent, intrinsic nature...

And Shaykh Ṣāliḥ Āl al-Shaykh says in his explanation of Kitāb al-Tawḥīd, on this subject:

“ And the people of Jāhiliyyah believe that the contagion transmits of its own accord (from person to person, or place to place) so Allāh—the Mighty and Majestic— falsified that, He falsified that belief, and he [the Messenger (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ)] said: “*There is no contagion (“infectious disease”)*”, meaning: that which is the effective, influencing element on its own.

Now we can bring more quotes from the Scholars, but here we just want to establish the principle here that the belief on the inherent,

---

<sup>3</sup> Meaning that the mere spread and transmission of the bacteria or virus is not the sole causative agent of disease and its spread. There also has to be individual susceptibility which varies from person to person, and that is also determined by other factors which are from the decree of Allāh.

intrinsic infectiousness of a disease, that it infects due to its inherent nature (al-ṭabʿ) exclusive to other factors from Allāh’s decree, is something held by the people of Jaahiliyyah and the disbelievers.

We can bring in some speech of Shaykh Ṣāliḥ al-Fawzān just to give us a slightly wider perspective before closing this article, and so as not to cause any confusion. He says in his “Iʿānat ul-Mustafidʿ (2/7-8):

“His (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) saying, “*There is no contagion (‘infectious disease’)*”: What is meant by contagion (al-ʿadwā) is: The spread of a disease from one person to another, or from an animal to another, or from one place to another. And disease can spread from one place to another and it can spread from the ill to the healthy and from the sick animal (scabies) to the healthy. This is something that exists.

But the Messenger (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) is not negating this, he is negating the contagion (‘infectious disease’) that the people of Jāhiliyyah used to believe in, that the disease spreads by itself without the decree of Allāh, the Sublime and Exalted.

So al-ʿadwā (contagion) is: The spread of disease from one place to another because of the nearness of the healthy to the diseased, and the one who decrees it is Allāh, the Most High.<sup>4</sup> For a healthy person can be close to an ill person and nothing will afflict him, and he may sometimes be close and he will be afflicted (with the illness). And so the cause is that it goes back to Allāh, if He wills, the Sublime and Exalted, the illness will spread (to the other person) and if He wills, then it

<sup>4</sup> That is, through a range of factors, of causes and effects.

will not spread.

So the mere nearness of the ill person to the healthy person, or going to a place where a disease has broken out, this is a **sabab (a means)**. As for the **effect (ta’aththur)**, then it is in the Hand of Allāh, the Sublime and Exalted. For a person can enter into a land where a disease has broken out, and he will not be afflicted, an ill person may pass by a healthy person and (the latter will) not be affected. An ill person may sleep next to the healthy person and he (the latter) will not be afflicted. Sometimes, he may. But what is the separating matter between the two situations?

**That this goes back to Allāh, the Most High's Will (Mashī’ah).**

As for the people of Jāhiliyyah, they don't differentiate, rather to them: Everyone who comes close to an illness, or everyone who comes close to an ill person—that he will be afflicted. And they don’t ascribe this to Allāh's ordainment (qaḍā) and decree (qadar), and nor do they place reliance upon Allāh, the Sublime and Exalted, and they exaggerate in omens (al-tashā’um and al-ṭiyarah) and in the spread of contagion (‘infectious disease’) and they do actions that are laughable.

So what we find here is that the phenomenon of disease spreading is something that is observable and witnessed.<sup>5</sup> So clearly this

---

<sup>5</sup> The “spread” of disease is a mental judgement and in the view that negates contagion, all that happens in the occurrence of disease in each person, or animal on account of its causes and factors which came together due to Allāh’s decree.

outwardly observable phenomenon is not being negated, it does take place. However, this is not because of the ‘infectiousness’ of the disease or this being inherent and intrinsic to it (bi tab’ihi), but rather due to a range of factors which are all from the decree of Allāh. Further, the mixing between people can **sometimes** be a sabab, a means. The decisive factor in the spread of the disease is actually Allāh’s will, His permission, His decree, to the collection of causes and effects that Allāh has decreed as it relates to each individual person. This is what the affair returns back to. From this understanding a range of other issues branch off which inshā’Allāh will be covered in later articles.

What we should note here is that there are a number of viewpoints amongst the Salaf

1. There are those who say that there is **no such thing as contagion** (‘infectious disease’) **at all**, and that any spread of disease is because Allaah creates that disease afresh in each individual. We will be documenting this view later inshā’Allāh. For now we’ll just mention what has been summarised by Ibn Hajar al-Asqalānī in the aforementioned book (p.213), and which in his view is the most correct view:

“ The fourth: That disease is not infectious by its inherent nature at all (aslan, fundamentally). Rather, to whichever person a disease occurs, then that is due to Allāh—the Sublime and Exalted—creating that in him afresh. For this reason, many who are afflicted with a disease about which it is said that it is ‘infectious’ are

observed where a healthy person mixes with them often and nothing afflicts him at all, and many who have not mixed at all with the one with the disease are observed, yet the disease (still) afflicts that person (nevertheless). And all of that occurs from the decree (taqdīr) of Allāh...

Al-Ṭabarī said:

“ That which is correct in our view is what the authentic report states, that there is no such thing as contagion, and that nothing afflicts a soul except what has been written for it. As for a sick person being close to a healthy person, then it does not necessitate the transfer of ailment to the healthy, except that it is not desirable for the one with health to be close to the person with the illness which is disliked by the people. Not because this is prohibited, but due to the fear that the healthy person may think—if he got this disease—that it was because of mixed with the sick person, thereby falling into what the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) falsified of [belief] in contagion.<sup>6</sup>

So here it is explained that because it is often observed that there are many who have never mixed with those with the disease, and who still catch the disease—this shows that the mixing on its own is not the sabab (means), rather it is purely from Allāh’s decree and will that other people get the disease, since whether a person mixes with an ill person

---

<sup>6</sup> As cited in Mughnī al-Murīd al-Jāmi’ li Shurūḥ Kitāb al-Tawḥīd (p. 1977).

or not, they still get the disease. This means the true factors of disease causation lie elsewhere, otherwise everybody would be falling ill through mixing.

And others from the Salaf say that Allaah has made the mixing between two people to **sometimes be a means (sabab)**, but that the actual effect is under the control of Allāh's will, permission and decree.

Ibn Ḥajar says in *Fatḥ al-Bārī* (10/170):

“ The fifth approach: That the intent behind the negation of contagion (in this ḥadīth) is that nothing is infectious by its own nature (bi ṭab‘ihī), thereby negating what the people of Jāhiliyyah used to believe that disease is infectious in its own right, without ascribing [its spread among people] to Allāh. So the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) falsified their belief and ate with a leper in order to explain to them that Allāh is the one who causes illness and cures. He prohibited them from getting close to [the leper] in order to explain to them that this is from the causes which Allāh has made to be the habitual means through which its effects are realised. So in him prohibiting them [with this] is an affirmation of the causes, and in his own action [of sitting with the leper] is an indication that such [causes] are not independent, rather if Allāh so wills He can remove the strengths of these causes such that they do not have any effect at all, and if He so wills, He can leave them to remain such that they lead to the effect.”

These views have arisen out of the necessity of providing an explanation for the apparent contradiction between the ḥadīths that negate contagion (such as ‘there is no contagion’) and those that appear to affirm it (such as ‘flee from the leper’). So you have different ways of reconciling. We will go into that in more detail inshā’Allāh in future articles.

## Summary

1. The people of Jaahiliyyah and atheistic societies believe that a disease is ‘infectious’ by its own inherent, intrinsic nature (bi tab‘ihi), and that the spread of disease is outside of Allāh’s will, permission and decree. When you read much of the language in the scientific documents, in the reporting and in the general coverage of ‘infectious disease’, and in many of the health leaflets on “infectious diseases” and especially when there is an outbreak of some disease (large or small) you come across an abundance of language indicating this.

Here is just one example from the Washington Post from 2nd May 2009:

**“ Mexican Officials Say Flu's Ability to Spread May Be Low.** Mexican health officials studying the new influenza virus said Friday they have found that its ability to spread from person to person may be fairly low, raising hopes that the extreme measures taken here—the shutting down of all nonessential commerce and government—can contain its spread... In an obscure government building in the south of this city, dozens of experts in public health gathered in a ‘war room’ to monitor on computer screens the spread of swine flu around

the country. While it is far too early to answer with any certitude the most pressing questions—how infectious and lethal is the virus?—they offered some preliminary assessments

And another example:

“...they’ve determined that the virus is capable of human-to-human transmission...

And another example from the LA Times, 30th April 2009:

“The swine virus does appear able to spread easily among humans, which persuaded the WHO to boost its influenza pandemic alert level to phase 5, indicating that a worldwide outbreak of infection is very likely.

The capability and ability in the transmission is attributed to the virus in this type of language being employed. However, the virus or bacteria itself has no inherent capability of transmission. Its transmission is due to factors outside of itself. In the language used in atheistic societies (and likewise in the educational and medical establishments), diseases are **noun-entities** that are ‘disease-causing’ in and of themselves, and they are then spoken of as having inherent and intrinsic properties and abilities, such as ‘infectiousness’, ‘capability of transmission’ and so on. And this language is widespread—and it affects the way people think and perceive of the situation, and it’s a reminder of what was said by Shaykh al-Albānī (رَحِمَهُ اللهُ):

“...How today resembles yesterday! For indeed the European doctors are in the most severe heedlessness away

from Him, the Most High, due to their shirk (association of partners to Allāh) and their misguidance, and their belief in contagion (‘infectious disease’) upon the way of Jāhiliyyah...

2. The spread of disease, however, is an observable phenomenon. The mixing between people can be **a means** (sabab), and the control and power over its **effect** lies only with Allāh, the Sublime and Exalted. Since Allāh is the Creator of the asbāb (ways and means) and the musabbabāt (the resulting effects). However, as Allāh is the Creator He can prevent the asbāb (means) from being tied to their musabbabāt (effects) or from causing them. Further, some of the ways and means are **strongly, or inextricably** tied to their effects, so the sabab (say drinking water) always leads to its effect (removing thirst), and other ways and means are **loosely** tied to their effects (say planting a seed may not always lead to the plant and its fruits, or a man having intercourse with this wife, may not always lead to a child)—since there may be additional asbāb (means) that are required, as well as the absence of preventative barriers for the musabbabāt (effects) to be seen. So ultimately, Allāh has power over everything.

The above is one explanation, namely the mixing between the people is a sabab (means) that is under the control of Allāh, and it can lead to the transmission of disease from one person to another, but this is purely by Allaah’s will and decree.

The other explanation from the Salaf is that there is no such thing as ‘infectious disease’ (al-‘adwā), at all, and that Allāh creates the disease in each individual afresh due to causes and factors unique to each individual. Just as the very first instance of the

disease occurred in one person, without transmission from another person, then this can be repeated with others in whom the disease originates afresh on account of similar factors that led to its occurrence in that first person. This will be documented in more detail in a later article inshā’Allāh.

3. It is permissible for a person to keep away from a person with a disease or from a land where a disease has broken out, out of the principle of not subjecting oneself to potential harm, and keeping away from the *asbāb* (ways, means) that can lead to harm. And in this regard there is the ḥadīth of ‘Umar not advancing to the place where plague had broken out—this will be covered on its own in more detail in a future article inshā’Allāh. Not subjecting oneself to harm is a general principle, so it applies to things like a person not climbing down a well that is deep, or climbing up a tree, or a building where there is a danger of falling, because this is subjecting oneself unnecessarily to potential harm, and so keeping away from a person with a disease that can spread (by Allāh’s will and decree, through His creational *asbāb*), or from a land where a disease has broken out, is permissible, since the mixing with such people, or going to such a land is from the creational *asbāb* (means) that can lead to potential harm. The Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) forbade going to a land where a disease has broken out and from fleeing from a land where a disease has broken out with the intent of fleeing from the disease. And some of the scholars have explained that the one who has strong faith and reliance upon Allāh can go to a land where a disease has broken out, but that those of weak faith should avoid this in case their ‘*aqīdah* becomes corrupt.

4. Shaykh Ṣāliḥ al-Fawzān said in *l’ānat al-Mustafīd* (2/8):

“ So his saying, “There is no contagion”, meaning, upon the manner that the people of Jāhiliyyah believed in it. As for contagion (the spread of disease) occurring by the permission of Allāh, then this is an affair that occurs, and for this reason the Prophet (ﷺ) prohibited from mixing with the leper, and he (ﷺ) prohibited from approaching a land where disease has broken out, and he he prohibited whoever was in the land in which the disease broke out from leaving that land, and the one who was outside was not to enter into it, because these are asbāb (ways and means) that lead to the spread of disease, and to prevent them is to adopt the protective ways and means, and proceeding towards (such a land) is throwing oneself to destruction. And Allāh prohibited from that, except for the one whose faith and his reliance upon Allāh, the Most High, is strong, for such a one can proceed to the affected land, and can mix with the diseased and he will not be afflicted, because he is relying upon Allāh, the Sublime and Exalted, however this is only for the people of strong faith. As for the people of weak faith, then they are to remain far from these places in case they are affected and then their ‘aqīdah becomes evil.

It is also permissible for a person to mix with a person with a disease out of reliance upon Allāh (tawakkul), upon the belief that Allāh is the one who controls everything. These two actions are both validated in the Sunnah and explained by the Scholars.

It is important to understand the lesson being imparted here. When a disease breaks out in a particular land, then a person who is outside of it should not travel to it out of precaution (unless he is a person of

strong faith) such that if he got the disease, he will not say, “Had I not travelled, I would not have got the disease”, as this would be finding fault with Allāh’s decree, and also he has no knowledge of that, he may have got the disease nevertheless. And likewise, a person who tries to flee from the land, does so out of fear of catching the disease, and if he did catch the disease, he might start saying, “If only I had fled, then I would not have got the disease”. And in this there are two things, first it is finding fault with Allāh’s decree, and secondly, even if he fled, then that would not prevent him from catching the disease either, since Allāh may have decreed that the disease originates afresh in an individual, without any modes of transmission. So this guidance in the Sunnah is so that a person’s creed is not corrupted as it relates to al-qaḍā wal-qadar.

On a closing note, in the Time Magazine from 27th April 2009:

“ How to Deal with Swine Flu: Heeding the Mistakes of 1976. In February 1976, an outbreak of swine flu struck Fort Dix Army base in New Jersey, killing a 19-year-old private and infecting hundreds of soldiers. Concerned that the U.S. was on the verge of a devastating epidemic, President Gerald Ford ordered a nationwide vaccination program at a cost of \$135 million (some \$500 million in today’s money). Within weeks, reports surfaced of people developing Guillain-Barré syndrome, a paralyzing nerve disease that can be caused by the vaccine. By April, more than 30 people had died of the condition. Facing protests, federal officials abruptly canceled the program on Dec. 16. The epidemic failed to materialize.

One should be aware that in situations like these, it is very easy to create mass fear, commotion and hysteria in people—especially in people who lack faith in Allāh or who are deficient therein. A Muslim’s strong faith in the pillar of al-qaḍā wal-qadar will make him or her resilient to excessive, unwarranted fear and guide him or her to tawakkul upon Allāh, the Exalted, which involves taking the ways and means.

Abu ‘Iyāḍ  
@abuiyaadsp | abuiyaad.com  
Originally written May 2009  
Updated February 2020  
v. 1.12