

Al-Qurṭubī (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) (d. 656H) on Contagion



This is another valuable contribution on the subject matter of contagion from Imām al-Qurṭubī (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) which provides some very helpful insights.

Regarding the ḥadīth: “*There is no contagion, no omen [in the overhead flight of birds]...*” al-Qurṭubī explained:¹

[The particle of negation] (لا) in this ḥadīth—even though it is a negation of what comes after it—then its meaning is the prohibition of turning towards those affairs and being concerned with them, because they are not sound, in and of themselves. Rather, they are simply from the presumptions of the ignoramuses of the Arabs.

Here, al-Qurṭubī indicates that this is both a **negation** and a **prohibition** at the same time. In other words, there is no contagion, and likewise, one should not give any concern to it in one’s thoughts and feelings.

The Pagan Arabs **confused association and coincidence with causation** and thereby **exaggerated in the matter of causality of mixing**.

¹ Al-Mufhim (Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1417) 5/621.

As for what happens in physical reality, it is **the fresh creation of disease instances in each entity (plant, animal or person) for whom it has been decreed at the appointed time and place.**²

No evidence has been established for any disease, neither leprosy, nor the plague, nor scabies (scabies), nor colds or flus, nor tuberculosis, nor pneumonia, nor anything else, that such routine, ordinary, casual contact leads to “disease transmission”. This is simply an assumption that has persisted throughout the ages upon which theories of disease have been developed, but which have never been scientifically proven and validated by the correct application of the scientific method.

Thus, in this view, the contagion that is negated and prohibited in the Prophetic texts is:

Exaggeration in the presumed causality of mixing for which no evidence exists that eliminates the workings of other primary causes in disease causation, confusing coincidence with causation, and the construction of ideas, thoughts, feelings, statements and behaviours on top of this ambiguity and exaggeration which enter into the realm of minor shirk.

Al-Qurṭubī continues:

² Notice the choice of words here. Disease does not “spread” as it has no inherent ability to spread. Rather, every single instance of disease is created afresh in each person through a combined set of factors which Allāh brought together for each person in a given population in a given time and place. Even when inoculation is one of those factors, it would not change this reality. This is because inoculation is an event external to any disease, and thus disease arose in another person due to something that is not an attribute or action of the disease itself. Hence, there can never be any such thing as an “infectious disease”— keeping in mind that disease is a state or a condition that is multicausal, multifactorial and not a mobile noun-entity like a dog, cat or squirrel.

And the explanation of that is: They used to believe that when the sick person mingled with the healthy, he would make them become sick and pass his disease to them. Likewise [did they believe] regarding camels. So the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) negated that and falsified it.

Then, when they presented to the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) the misconception that carried them to hold that [belief]—when they said: “But what about the camels which are like gazelles and then a camel with scabies enters among them and causes them to have scabies?”—He cut off their proof and ended their doubt with a single statement, and that is his statement:

“So who gave it to the first one?”

And the meaning of it is that camel with scabies which gave these healthy camels scabies—upon their claim—from where did the scabies come from [to afflict it]? From another camel? In that case, an endless chain (tasulsul) is necessary. Or is it from a cause other than the camel? And it is that cause which has brought scabies to the first and the second [and so on, to all the rest]. And that is Allāh the Exalted, the Creator of all things, the Powerful over all things.

The Pagans exaggerated in the causality of mixing and claimed that a sick person or a sick camel passes on disease. Their argument in this regard was that a camel with scabies mixes with healthy camels and they all get scabies.

Hence, the argument is: How can contagion be denied, when they see this phenomena with their own eyes. So the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) asked them to explain how the first camel got scabies. It was not through any other camel, so this means that it must have arisen through means other than mixing (contagion).

And if that is so, then Allāh can create scabies in the rest of them by the same set of circumstances and factors through which

the first one got scabies.³ And since camels are usually together, receive the same type of food and drink, and are subject to the same environmental conditions in a given geographical region, then they are enveloped and surrounded by the same set of health-producing or disease-causing factors.

Thus, if they all develop scabies over a given period of time, then mixing would have been coincidental to the true causes of disease. And it was Allāh (ﷺ) who brought all of those circumstances together for each and every camel, and all of it is from His decree and from His creational systems of cause and effect, nothing falls outside of His decree.

So this was the Prophet’s answer to those who invoked the doubt about contagion.

It should be noted here that many of the later scholars have provided a deficient explanation of this ḥadīth wherein they assert that the point of dispute was not about the spread of disease through mixing—something that the Prophet (ﷺ) was not denying but rather affirming as they claim, because he did not show rejection against what the bedouin said, as they assert—but

³ Scabies, or scabies is a **hygiene related parasitic disease** connected to poor nutrition coupled with inadequate hygiene. **The “immunological” condition of the host determines the ability of the mite to infest, and this itself returns to the vitality of the host that is determined by other factors from Allāh’s decree. The mite may routinely be found on the skin and scabies may never develop.** Mites burrow into the upper layer of the skin—where individual susceptibility allows that—and replicate. Cuts, wounds and abrasions will 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. Infestation occurs from the surroundings, through contaminated environmental materials, including feed.

that the bedouin was disputing that the spread of disease was through Allāh’s decree. In other words, when the bedouin pointed out to the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) what he observed of the spread of disease among camels, he was really saying: “Look, the fact that I can see the spread of disease when a sick camel mixes with healthy camels, means that it is not happening by Allāh’s will and power, it is happening by contagion.”

This is a deficient explanation and it opposes what is very clear, obvious and apparent from the ḥadīth.

As Imām al-Ṭaḥāwī explained⁴ the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) made a negation, the bedouin clearly understood from it that it is a negation of disease passing from a sick camel to a healthy camel, something that he and others appear to observe. So the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) answered with what ended his doubt. How did the first instance of scabies come about? It was without a sick camel. So if a sick camel is not needed for another camel to get scabies, and it occurred without “contagion”, then it is the same for other camels. Invoking “contagion” is not necessary to explain what you and other bedouins see in their camels, because they have all been subject to the same causative factors as the first camel.

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

“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

⁴ See our previous article, [tahawi-contagion.pdf](#) — 22 September 2020.

[the Pagans] used to consider [contagion] to be an independent efficient cause on its own [outside Allāh’s will and power].”⁵

Ibn al-Qayyim explains here that the true nature of the error of the Pagans was in relation to sababiyyah (causation) and its factors, and their exaggeration with respect to the created ways and means, in this case, mixing.⁶ He also explained that it is from deficiency in knowledge to claim that their error was because they believed contagion operates on its own as an independent efficient cause.

Knowing of this exaggeration and the tendency of people to confuse **coincidence** with **causation** and to resort to simplistic explanations of multicausal phenomena, the Prophet (ﷺ) said what he said in order to cut off such presumptions which bring corruption and harm to creed from the very outset.

⁵ 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 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. In any case, this explanation, that the Prophet (ﷺ) was only negating the contagion allegedly believed by the Pagan Arabis, that it occurs outside of Allāh’s, will, power and decree, is a weak and deficient explanation.

⁶ 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 to exaggeration in the asbāb (causes) and the many false claims which are built on top of such exaggeration.

He (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said: “*Let not the owner of sick camels pass them by the healthy camels of another.*”⁷

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.

Next, al-Qurṭubī (رَحِمَهُ اللهُ) explains that the exaggeration of the **Pagans** in causality was similar to that of the **Naturalists** and **Mu'tazilah** in that they confused association and coincidence with causation by exaggerating in association and wrongly believing it was causation.

As a result, properties, powers and abilities are placed in things which they do not actually possess, or which are exaggerated in.

It is from this angle that the Pagan Arabs exaggerated in contagion. It led them to exaggerate in causality wherein they treated the apparent “spread” of disease through mixing to be similar to water quenching thirst and food satiating hunger and fire burning and ice cooling.

Whereas Allāh certainly put that causality in water, food, fire and ice, this being the ṭabī'ah (inherent quality) of these things by

⁷ Upon the other interpretation, the other view, we would say that this is to avoid “inoculation”—avoiding the ambiguity of “mixing” and this has nothing to do with the contagion that the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) negated, as that is a separate category.

way of Allāh’s qadar (prior determination of things) He did not place that same level of causality in mixing for “disease spread” which the Pagan Arabs and others had exaggerated in and presumed, because of their ignorance of the complexity of the *asbāb* (ways) in disease causation.

He says:

And this doubt which befell them was the same one that befell the Naturalists firstly, and then the Muʿtazilah secondly. The Naturalists spoke of things having effects upon other things, and [things] bringing [such effects] into existence, and they labelled the influencing factor as “ṭabīʿah”. And the Muʿtazilah said something similar as it relates to the actions of living things and the indirect consequences [of those actions]. They said: Their latent powers are influential in bringing such [effects] into existence, and that they are creators of their own actions, independent in originating them.

All of those [groups] mentioned [above] depended on sensory perception [in their claims] and perhaps they ascribed rejection of elementary truth to the one who rejected [what they presumed to be the case through sensory perception].⁸

But this is a repugnant error.

The cause of this [error] is the confusion between the perception of the senses with the perception of intellect. For that which they observed is an effect taking place in the presence of something else [an **association** between two

⁸ This is what the contagionist does, when he hears negation of contagion, and this is was the angle from which the bedouin found it hard to accept the Prophet’s negation of contagion and that a thing passes what it has [of disease] to another. The contagionist thinks this is a denial of the what is apparent and obvious, whereas it is not a denial of what is observed and witness, but only a denial of the superficial explanation through the invocation of contagion. It is to do with the interpretation of the observed events, not the events themselves.

things], and this is the share of perception. But as for **causation** [itself], then this is not known through perception, but by way of intellectual reasoning. For sensory perception can only perceive the existence of something alongside something else, and its absence with the absence [of that other thing]. As for it being brought about through it, then sensory perception does not have any entry into that...

So the underlying mistake that led all of these groups to their exaggeration in causality →

— the **Naturalists** in what they call ‘ṭabī‘ah’,

— the **Mu‘tazilah** in their position on the actions of living things and the indirect effects they in turn produce (tawallud),

— and the **Pagan Arabs** (and others) in the matter of contagion]

→ is that they confused association (two things found in the presence of each other) with causation (one of those things being the cause of the other).

So the **Naturalists**, stripped the system of causes and effects (al-asbāb wal-musabbabāt) from He who placed them and connected them together (al-musabbib), which is Allāh. They claim it is the inherent properties of things that drive everything, because that is what they see. So when they saw effects arising in the presence of causes, they attributed independent, inherent causation to those causes, denying that they have been put there by a Creator and Maker, who is the true and ultimate cause.

Thus, everything is explained by “ṭabī‘ah” alone, the nature or property of a thing.

The **Mu‘tazilah** ascribed to man the creation of his own actions, while acknowledging that Allāh put this power and ability (qudrah, istiṭā‘ah) in him. They made an incorrect assumption about this prior ability (istiṭā‘ah), thinking that it alone provides

ultimate causation for actions. Hence, the good and evil actions he does are his own creations through the power and ability granted to him by Allāh, Allāh is not the creator of those actions.

So they exaggerated in causality, in the power and ability given to man, not realising that despite them having this prior ability, there must be *tawfīq*, the granting of success from Allāh by which Allāh allows them to perform actions at the moment He has decreed for them to do so. However, they negate this aspect because they exaggerated in the initial prior ability (*istiṭāʿah*), believing that through it alone, they perform and create their own actions. They confused the ability to act—which they acknowledge Allāh placed in them—with ultimate causation, through exaggeration.

They believed that the evil actions done by man cannot be attributed to Allāh, as Allāh does not do that which is repugnant (*qabīḥ*). They believed it would be unjust for Allāh to create man's actions and then reward or punish him for them, that man can only be rewarded and punished if he is in reality the creator of his own actions.⁹

The **Pagan Arabs** exaggerated in disease and in mixing as a cause and spoke of it in the same way as the thirst quenching causality of water, or of the burning quality of fire, or of the cooling nature of ice and so they made it to be from the *ṭabīʿah*,

⁹ They failed to distinguish between He who creates actions (Allāh) and those who do actions (the servants). Allāh creates the actions of men because He created their essences and gave them abilities and faculties. So He is the creator, not the doer, man is the doer of his own actions. So ultimate causation (creation) is from Allāh. They failed to distinguish between He who creates actions (Allāh) and those who do actions (the servants). Thus, it is the servant that prays or drinks alcohol and Allāh is the creator of those actions. So ultimate causation (creation) is from Allāh, and wisdom and justice lie in everything He creates and does.

the inherent nature, of disease and of mixing.¹⁰ They were led into this because they confused **coincidence and association** with **causation**, and this took them to their view regarding contagion in which they exaggerated. Thus, they attributed to the act of mixing such causality over and above what it contains and they gave disease an inherent quality it did not possess, similar to how the Muʿtazilah exaggerated in the qudrah (power) or istiṭāʿah (ability) granted to man by Allāh.¹¹

Once this is understood we can point out the deficiency in the view that the dispute of the bedouin with the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) was about the issue of prior decree, that the bedouin was somehow claiming that contagion takes place outside of Allāh’s decree. This does not capture the whole truth, because that was not the point of dispute.

The point of dispute was the causality of mixing and the bedouin’s confusion between **association** and **causation**, and his exaggeration in this matter, and him ignoring all the other asbāb, the causes, which are part and parcel of Allāh’s decree, through which He creates disease in whomever or whatever He wills, without requiring mixing.

¹⁰ Some of the Muʿtazilah, such as al-Jāhiz, were of the fringe opinion that man’s actions are similar to the property of burning in fire, or of cooling in ice, that they arise through ṭabīʿah—meaning that they are necessary, inescapable, and it is this inherent nature that is acting in reality, while actions are only ascribed to man metaphorically speaking and that the only thing that comes from man is his wish, desire, to do the actions. The actions are the workings of ṭabīʿah, which would be the prior ability placed in him by Allāh.

¹¹ The Muʿtazilah never denied that qudrah (power, ability) was given to them by Allāh. They denied that Allāh is the creator of their actions, they affirmed that Allāh gave them the power and ability to act and it is through this ability that they create their own actions.

Thus, the meaning is: “Just as the first camel got scabies through Allāh’s decree—meaning through the creational systems of cause and effect that led to disease-creation in that camel—then so did the second and third.”

And this is because all of those camels are enveloped and surrounded by the same set of causative factors that were brought to them through Allāh’s decree. Mixing is purely coincidental.

Thus, to claim that the only possible meaning of this hadīth is for it to be said : “Just as the first camel got scabies through Allāh’s decree without contagion, then the second and all subsequent ones also got it through Allāh’s decree, but by contagion.”

Then this is a very weak interpretation because that was not the point of contention. The point of contention was the causality of mixing itself which was presumed by the bedouin, upon the confusion between association and causation, to be the only explanation for the apparent “spread” of disease. However, in the knowledge of Allāh, the Creator of disease and all of its ways and means, the occurrence and apparent spread of disease is much more complex, is multifactorial, multicausal and cannot be reduced to a simplistic, superstitious explanation through the notion of “contagion”.

And Allāh (عَزَّوَجَلَّ), the Creator of man, knows his tendency, upon ignorance, to resort to simplistic, presumptive explanations, exaggerating thereby in certain presumed causes, while being ignorant of genuine causes, and thus we have this deeply-rooted profound guidance from the Messenger (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) which the Salaf grasped and understood.

They had a more profound understanding of the objectives of the legislation than those who came after them and who gave a deficient explanation of this ḥadīth.

This was based upon the incorrect assumption that the dispute was only about whether contagion occurs on its own, as an independent efficient cause, outside of Allāh’s will and power, or through Allāh’s decree. The reader is referred back to the statement of Ibn al-Qayyim cited earlier above.

Then, in the next chapter, al-Qurṭubī cites the ḥadīth of the camels: “*Let not the owner of sick camels pass them by the healthy camels of another*”, and comments:¹²

Al-Jawharī said: “Abū Hurayrah (رضي الله عنه) has, in this report, combined between his (صلى الله عليه وسلم) saying: ‘*There is no contagion*’ and his saying: ‘*Let not the owner of sick camels pass them by the healthy camels of another*’.” And this is an authentic combination, there is nothing remote about it, since both [of these statements] are reports about what is legislated, and not merely reports about existence.

Thus, his saying: “*There is no contagion*”, meaning, it is not permissible to believe in it.

And his saying: “*Let not the owner of sick camels pass them by the healthy camels of another*”, meaning, do not do that. So they are reports that comprise the prohibition from that.

In some reports that have been related from Abū Hurayrah (رضي الله عنه) he combined the two wordings in a single ḥadīth and so the meaning is:

“Do not believe in contagion, it is not permissible. And do not mix sick camels with healthy ones, because that is the route through which you will be led to believe in contagion, which you have been prohibited from.”

¹² Al-Mufhim (Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1417) 5/624.

So this is like: “Do not drink alcohol, and do not sit in a place where it is consumed, because that is a route through which you may be led to drink alcohol, which you have been prohibited from.” And: “Do not commit fornication, and do not be alone with a non-maḥram woman, because that is a route through which you may be led to fornication, which you have been prohibited from.”

In other words:

—“*There is no contagion (i.e. do not believe in it)*” is the prohibited thing,

—and: “*Let not the owner of sick camels pass them by the healthy camels of another*” is the prohibition of the means that lead to the prohibited thing, and

— “*Who passed it to the first one?*” is the answer to the doubt and misconception upon which the prohibited thing is based.

This last statement was to teach the bedouin, to make him realise 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, which was non-existent.

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 attributing causality to the wrong thing or set of things, and how this can lead them to corruption and harm in belief—the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) 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-Qurṭubī said:

For he [صلى الله عليه وسلم] prohibited from passing the sick by the healthy out of fear that what the people of jāhiliyyah fell into might occur, of believing in [contagion], or out of fear that the souls might be disturbed or that the [people's] imaginations might be affected.

I will give an illustration so that the wisdoms in the prohibition can be highlighted:

If we imagine a village or a region where due to the climate, soil depletion, and an unbalanced diet, the people are severely deficient in key nutrients. Let's say Niacin, which is Vitamin B3. This leads to a disease known as **Pellagra** whose symptoms are: **dermatitis, diarrhea, dementia, and death.**

Prior to the true cause being discovered, it is alleged that a new “infectious disease” has appeared caused by a microbe. In reality, an unbalanced diet where people consume mostly corn, such as in parts of South America, leads to severe Niacin deficiency, and that is the true cause of the illness and the various symptoms that follow.

But along come the misguided, narrow-minded, tunnel-vision **epidemiologists, microbiologists** and **virologists** who start generating their model of contagion—completely ignorant of the true causes—and blame everything on the germ, the microbe, the invisible virus, seeking to find it, because they think the germ is everything and that there is a one to one causal link between germ and disease. They might find the presence of certain

bacteria in the rash that appears on the skin or in the diarrhea and identify it as the cause, or they might claim a viral cause for the disease and its symptoms.

In reality, that bacteria simply came to the scene of disease, to recycle and process morbid material, dead cells, because of nutritional deficiency. It was not the cause of the disease. So they confuse **association** with **causation**, just like the presence of ashes and firemen at a fire leads a person to claim that the ashes and firemen caused the fire, whereas in reality, the fireman came to the scene because of the fire and the ashes were a product of the fire, not its cause, hence, the fire came first.

So a completely false picture can emerge of an alleged “contagious disease” caused by a microbe. Unnecessary restrictions and quarantines may be put in place and people will be made fearful from mixing with others.

They would wrongly think that mixing was the reason why they or their family members caught the disease, in complete ignorance of the true cause(s) of the disease.

So in this scenario, if the people are advised not to mix with others, then if they get ill, they will know that it could not have been due to mixing. Hence, the presumptions which might lead them to falsely believe in contagion are prevented and they are made to realise that it was other causes from Allāh’s decree, from creational systems of cause and effect, that led to the disease.

We can say the same thing for **Beriberi** which is a disease of Thiamine, Vitamin B1 deficiency, or **Scurvy**, which is a Vitamin C deficiency. All of these were once thought to be contagious until the truth became known.

Nutritional deficiency is a cause of disease which is often overlooked. Then we also have **toxicity** as a major cause of disease. Toxicity enters the body through the air, water and food supply. **Electromagnetic radiation** is another modern form of toxicity. Likewise, the **build up of waste, morbid materials** in the body due to lifestyle and dietary abuses.

Bacteria and what are wrongly labelled as “viruses” come to the scene of disease and are involved in the body’s attempt to return to normality. They are recyclers, communications messengers and have many other functions. When what are labelled as “viruses”—[which are a product of the cells themselves and not external “pathogens”]—have done their job, they are flushed out of the body.

They have been confused as primary causative agents of disease due to a faulty germ theory model of disease which we have discussed many times previously.

From the above discussion one can see how easy it is to generate an endless supply of “contagious” diseases out of common and seasonal patterns of disease symptoms—by looking for and developing tests for new “pathogenic viruses”—through which populations are made fearful and led to baseless beliefs in contagion when there is no such thing in reality.

It is ignorance of the true underlying causes of disease for which mixing or contagion (upon a flawed germ-theory model of disease) is an easy, cheap, cop-out, superstitious explanation. These explanations are made credible through the misuse of modern day laboratory techniques such as the RT-PCR and which amount to medical fraud.

Al-Qurṭubī then explains how people are naturally averse to sickness. Being in the presence of a sick person—in particular, where the sickness is visible, as occurs with leprosy and diseases of the skin—a person has to engage in **mental struggle** to manage the anxiety and aversion of the soul, and this itself can lead to harm, illness and the imagination running loose, leading to thoughts that can be harmful to faith and creed.

So to prevent all of this from happening, the Prophet (ﷺ) advised with what he advised with.

Al-Qurṭubī said:

So this is similar to his (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) command of fleeing from the leper. For we, even though we believe that leprosy is not contagious, we still find aversion in our souls and a dislike of that. To the extent that if a person was to force himself to be near to him [the leper] and to sit alongside him, his soul will feel pain and perhaps [his soul] may be harmed by that, and become ill. And a person—in doing this—would be in need of severe struggle and efforts [that exhaust him]. Yet alongside that, the temperament [of a person in wanting to keep away] is dominant.

Leprosy is not “contagious” in the ordinary meaning of the word and we have spoken about this at length in previous articles.¹³ A person would be put to trial by being close to a leper. The pain and struggle one would have to endure, and its effect upon the soul, and in turn upon his vitality, might itself cause him illness, not from the angle of contagion, but from the anxiety and fear that is generated and the suppression of his vitality. Thus, it is natural for a person to want to keep away and not subject his soul to such an unnecessary trial.

And if the affair is of this magnitude, then it is more befitting for a person not to approach anything that requires this [type of] exhausting struggle. He should not subject himself to this type of danger. The one who subjects himself to such harm, claiming that he will struggle against his soul until he [is able to] remove its aversion [towards disease], he is like the one who gets himself ill on purpose out of the desire to cure it, until he is able

¹³ We include the addendum on leprosy at the end of this article, as we have done in previous articles, for the sake of giving the reader full background knowledge on the subject with which to appreciate what is being explained.

to end it [completely]. There is no doubt about the deficient intellect of the one who is upon this way.

In other words, there is no reason to put yourself through an unnecessary mental struggle. Its a bit like a person who is fearful of being stabbed and so he decides to walk on the streets of troubled inner city areas known for muggings and stabbings just so that he can train himself to get rid of the fear of being stabbed.

As for the statement of al-Qurṭubī:

“There is no doubt about the deficient intellect of the one who is upon this way”—then this requires further elaboration:

There are people of strong *īmān* (faith), *irādah* (desire) and determination (*‘azm*) and who would not succumb to such presumptions, imaginations and fears when close to a leper or a sick person, or when entering a land of plague where there was a need to do that. Nor would such a one succumb to belief in contagion, even if he was to get ill, because he would know that this would be by Allāh’s decree, meaning through ways, means and causes other than mixing with the sick and he would not harbour the presumption and allow it to take hold.

Shaykh Zayn al-Dīn ‘Umar bin Muḏaffar ibn al-Wardī—in his tract called “*al-Naba’ ‘an il-Wabā’*”—described the tremendous death and destruction brought by the plague of 449H in which millions died, with 900,000 in the city of Cairo alone, in just two months. Despite this he remonstrated:

“If one was to say [to you]: ‘It infects [as contagion] and persists’ then say: ‘Rather, it is Allāh that initiates [the disease in a person] and repeats [its occurrence in others].’ If the liar continues to argue his claim of contagion and make interpretations, I say: The truthful and the believed (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said: ‘*So who passed it to*

the first one? And if we survived [the plague's] destruction of the people of the land, then it is through the wish of al-Fā'il al-Mukhtār (the One who does what He chooses)."¹⁴

So despite being surrounded by death and destruction through the plague, these people were strong and firm. They knew that they had been enveloped and surrounded by the multiple causes of disease and they did not succumb to exaggeration and belief in contagion. Anyone who resorted to that and argued for it was deemed a liar.

And in contrast, there are people of weak īmān, weak certainty (yaqīn) and weak determination. They would be riddled with fears, presumptions, imaginations. It is best for them to keep away from such situations as it would be harmful for them in their religion and their creed.

This is what the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) intended when he advised keeping away from the leper and the owner of sick camels not to make them graze or take water next to healthy camels, because it would cause harm to their owner. He would be put to trial, by way of presumptions, with his imagination running loose and it would make him prone to belief in contagion and bring harm to his creed.

Thus, the saying of al-Qurṭubī requires tafsīl. It is applied to this second category above, for it does not make sense for such people to try and overcome their fears by putting themselves through an unnecessary mental struggle. However, not all people are like that. Further, there are reports from the Companions:

It is related from 'Umar (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ) would deliberately drink from the same place of the same vessel that Mu'ayqib would drink from,

¹⁴ Badhl al-Mā'ūn, of Ibn Ḥajar, p. 235.

and he had leprosy. ‘Umar (رضي الله عنه) did that in order to ward off belief in contagion from himself, as is related from Maḥmūd bin ‘Ubayd (d. 96H), who relates from ‘Abd Allāh bin Ja‘far bin Abī Ṭālib that he said:

“For I have seen ‘Umar bin al-Khāṭṭāb call for a vessel in which there was water, and Mu‘ayqīb would drink from it—and this disease [of leprosy] had taken hold in him—then he [‘Umar] would drink from it, and would deliberately place his mouth on the same spot [of the vessel] where [Mu‘ayqīb had placed his] mouth, knowing he was doing so because he disliked that anything of [belief in] contagion should enter into his soul.”¹⁵

And as for other Companions, then al-Ṭabarī said:

“Ibn Bashār narrated to us, from ‘Abd al-Raḥmān: Sufyān narrated to us: From ‘Abd al-Raḥmān bin al-Qāsim from his father: “That the delegation of Thaḳīf came to Abu Bakr al-Ṣiddīq. Food was brought and one man stepped back. He said: ‘What is with you?’. He said: ‘A leper.’ So [Abu Bakr] called [the leper] and ate with him. From Salmān and Ibn ‘Umar that they both used to make food for the lepers and would eat with them. And from ‘Ikrimah that he stepped back from a leper and Ibn ‘Abbās said to him: ‘O you who goes away, perhaps he is better than me and you.’”¹⁶

Returning to the last part of al-Qurṭubī’s commentary:

That which befits the intelligent and suits the behaviour of the noble is that:

¹⁵ Al-Tamhīd (1/53-55) and also Ibn Sa‘d in al-Ṭabaqāt (4/109-111) relating from Muḥammad bin Ishāq, and see al-Siyar (2/491-492).

¹⁶ Refer to Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī of Ibn Baṭṭāl (Maktabat al-Rushd), 9/410.

—they keep away from the causes of harm (ālām), [and]
 —avoid the paths of presumptions (awhām)
 and to strive in avoiding that with everything that is possible.

And this should be alongside his knowledge that no precaution [taken] can save from [Allāh's] decree.

It is with both these affairs that legislations have come, and in which they are in agreement with the intellects and temperaments.

Thus, a person naturally keeps away from known and established causes of harm and also avoids putting himself in situations that lead him to presumptions, imaginations and unnecessary mental struggles.

The Sharī'ah has come with the avoidance of both of these affairs, and a person should strive in that respect.

However, a person should also keep in mind that whatever precautions he takes, he cannot escape Allāh's decree. If you did not enter a land of plague, Allāh can still create the disease in you and so one should not think that avoidance of the land would save him. Likewise, if one avoided the leper, Allāh can still create leprosy in you, without nearness to any leper. So don't think that you can escape His decree through precautions, for whatever Allāh has decreed for you will still come to you regardless.

The same with avoiding the sick. For you may avoid them, but Allāh can still envelope and surround you with the causes of sickness, the same ones through which He made the first person sick. So this points to the necessity of pure reliance upon Allāh, after taking precautionary measures, and the realisation that none can escape Allāh's decree.

This is a bit like a person who takes all the measures to ensure safety while driving. This includes making sure his car is in optimal condition (oil, lights, mirrors, tyres and so on) and strictly

adhering to all driving regulations. However, all of these measures will be of no avail if some neglectful truck driver falls asleep at the wheel and crashes into him. So what he tried to escape still came to him through other means and whatever Allāh had decreed for him came to him despite him taking all the means within his power.

So this points to, as al-Qurṭubī indicated, striving to avoid **harms** (that are physical in nature) and **presumptions** (that lead to mental struggle, anxiety) and thereafter, there is only tawakkul (reliance) upon Allāh, who is the Creator of all ways and means through which His decree is fulfilled.

So these types of understandings and explanations from al-Qurṭubī, and likewise before him, al-Baghawī and also al-Ṭaḥāwī,¹⁷ they provide excellent insights into this subject matter.

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25 Safar 1442 / 12 October 2020—v.1.05

¹⁷ We have provided translation and commentary on the statements of these scholars in past articles, which can be referred to for further reading.

ADDENDUM ON LEPROSY AND CONTAGION

According to the CDC:¹⁸

Leprosy was once feared as a highly contagious and devastating disease, but now we know it doesn't spread easily and treatment is very effective... ***It is not known exactly how Hansen's disease [leprosy] spreads between people. Scientists currently think it may happen...***

These statements indicate that there is no scientific proof for these claims, only mere conjectures. It has been established through extensive experience in all parts of the world that leprosy is not contagious in the ordinary and common sense of the word, which is routine, normal contact. As for **inoculation**, then leprosy can arise in a person through it, but inoculation is not contagion, it is a separate category.¹⁹

Scientists currently think it may happen when a person with Hansen's disease coughs or sneezes, and a healthy person breathes in the droplets containing the bacteria.

This statement has zero evidence because “**thinking**” that something happens in a certain way does not constitute actual scientific evidence. The same applies to influenza and other

¹⁸ Refer to the following page on the CDC website:

<https://www.cdc.gov/leprosy/index.html>.

¹⁹ For an explanation of this matter refer to our article, “**A Discussion of Imām al-Baghawī's Commentary on Omens and Contagion**” and refer to the introduction of this article.

illnesses for which similar claims are made. Further, this is undermined by what is stated next.

Prolonged, close contact with someone with untreated leprosy over many months is needed to catch the disease. **You cannot get leprosy from a casual contact with a person who has Hansen’s disease like:** Shaking hands or hugging, sitting next to each other on the bus, sitting together at a meal. **Hansen’s disease is also not passed on from a mother to her unborn baby during pregnancy and it is also not spread through sexual contact...** Overall, the risk of getting Hansen’s disease for any adult around the world is very low. **That’s because more than 95% of all people have natural immunity to the disease.”**

This is clear admission that bacteria are not the primary cause of this disease and that the vast majority of the world’s population already have that bacteria and never get leprosy. There must be more that is going on and other factors must be involved which give a more complete picture than the narrow-minded one presented by the *one-dimensional, one-germ, one-cause, one-illness* “germ theory” model of disease.

In reality, leprosy is a disease of toxicity coupled with nutritional deficiency in some aspect or another, it is not caused by bacteria. Unfortunately, modern medicine is poisoned by the flawed, inaccurate germ theory of disease which does not account for, at least not in clinical practice, the multifactorial nature of disease. Bacteria come to the scene of disease and multiply where there is toxicity and morbid materials and waste caused by environmental and dietary factors. They play a role in recycling

and cleaning up in the body. They are not the root cause of disease, but are on the scene of disease.

Leprosy disappeared from nations as soon as there were improvements in sanitation, diet, better housing and open spaces, clean water supply and so on, which shows that, like many other alleged contagious diseases, it is one of malnutrition and toxicity.

The above facts support the view of those scholars from the Salaf and beyond who say that the Prophetic command to “*Flee from the leper...*” is from the angle of preservation of creed, to prevent people from being prone to believing in contagion upon the way of the pagans and disbelievers, and not because of fear of disease upon the principle of contagion.²⁰ Otherwise, we risk making the Prophetic Sunnah to clash with what are empirically proven realities, such as leprosy not being contagious at all in the ordinary sense of the word.

To illustrate, someone might say that our Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) advised with fleeing a leper from the route of contagion, out of fear of it, holding that particular view.

And then a person from the enemies who wishes to bring a doubt, he can quite easily say:

That was understandable back then, as that was the erroneous notion held among nations which your Prophet accepted and followed, but now we know much better. It is not actually contagious as once thought, most people will never get it, they actually have the leprosy bacteria already, but never develop

²⁰ It is established throughout history that people have lived with lepers for decades, ate food with them, washed their clothes, and attended to their illness, without succumbing to the disease at all.

disease, and lepers live among healthy people for decades without the disease being “communicated”.

However, this doubt and criticism does not exist when we say the following in accordance with factual realities:

Our Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) brought the most complete and perfect guidance, so he:

—Advised with avoiding the leper to avoid the very rare event of **inoculation**, which is an can be a means of fresh disease creation in another person, subject to other factors and conditions.²¹

—Advised with avoiding the leper to avoid people being subjected to situations in which anxieties and fears can arise, because of exaggeration in particular causes (in this case, casual, routine mixing). This is the nature of mankind, they are naturally prone to omens and having thoughts based upon mere presumptions. And people being prone to such thoughts and feelings in these situations is more likely than getting leprosy from casual mixing with a leper, since empirical evidence and centuries of experience have shown that it does not happen. Thus, his advice is based on the stronger and dominant cause in the whole situation, which is prevention of unnecessary mental struggle and baseless or exaggerated thoughts and fears.

²¹ Inoculation is when there is a cut, an abrasion or a wound and some noxious material enters the bloodstream through it and leads to disease symptoms. This is not contagion, as this notion does not exist in Allāh’s creation, rather it is the fresh creation of a disease instance through the sum of its causes, and it does not happen in every person, as it is subject to numerous other conditions and factors and returns to individual vitality. Because of this, no disease, leprosy included, can never have the property of “infectiousness”. Alongside this, it should be pointed out that extensive experimental attempts were made in the early 20th century to “transmit” influenza from sick to healthy patients through inoculation of sputum and blood, and they were unsuccessful.

—Similarly, so that if a person did mix with a leper and then got leprosy, this having nothing to do with the mixing itself, but through other factors and causes from Allāh’s decree, then a person may start finding fault with the decree and start saying “if only this”, “if only that.

—And in addition to the above, he may confuse association with causation and be led to affirming contagion, when there was no such thing in reality, and so he ends up falling into exaggeration, leading to potential corruption in belief.

So this advice from the Prophet, it is not an obligation, but a recommendation. Within one command, he incorporated many wisdoms, all of which are based upon empirical, proven realities, whether about the nature of skin diseases or about the psychology and emotional states of people, and how they lead to belief-formation that is conjectural, and which in turn affect behaviours, making them irrational.

Hence, his guidance is the most perfect of guidance, and there is nothing in his guidance which opposes reason and wisdom and nor which clashes with factual realities.

However, the moment you claim that the advice of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) in these texts are to do with fear of disease and its spread, then you will have to deal with the inevitable internal contradictions and incoherence that arise due to this claim.