

Abu 'Ubayd al-Qāsim bin Sallām al-Harawī (d. 224H) On Contagion and Omens



Imām al-Baghawī (رَحِمَهُ اللهُ) said, with respect to the ḥadīth about not passing sick camels by healthy ones:

And **Abū 'Ubayd** mentioned this meaning and said:

“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 (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) 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.**”¹

¹ Sharh al-Sunnah (al-Maktab al-Islāmī, Beirut: 1403H), 12/167 onwards and it is also cited by Ibn Ḥajar in al-Fath.

NOTES:

1. A doubt has been spread that this view of the Salaf with respect to contagion is somehow a *Zāhirī* (literalist) interpretation of the ḥadīth of the Messenger (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ): “There is no *‘adwā* (contagion), and no *ṭiyarah* (bad omen in the overhead flight of birds)...”² and that this view has been taken from Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456H). Some speech of Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymīn (رَحِمَهُ اللهُ) was spread in this regard in which there was confusion between Ibn Ḥazm and Ibn Ḥajar, and due to which the label of “*Zāhirī*” was incorrectly mentioned, out of place.³

The Imāms of the Sunnah who came centuries before Ibn Ḥazm and spoke on this matter were certainly not *Zāhirīs* (literalists). Rather, they were Imāms who had deep and profound insight into the affairs of Tawḥīd and what clashes with it of minor shirk. They pointed out wisdoms with respect to such ḥadīths which can be appreciated today when the speculations, theories and exaggerations of the disbelievers—masked with the cloak of science—have revived thoughts and behaviours which are the

² Related by al-Bukhārī (no. 5316) and Muslim (no. 2222).

³ As for what can be found of the view of Ibn Ḥazm at cursory glance in this matter, it is that whether you flee or don’t flee from the leper [or land of plague], what is going to come to you from Allāh’s decree is going to come to you. You will still get leprosy if Allāh wills it for you, even if you never mixed with a leper in your life. This meaning does not appear to be a departure from the sum of what the Salaf said in general. Thus, to belittle the view held by the Salaf and those upon their way, by tarnishing it with the label of *Zāhiriyah* (literalism), by relying on slips of certain scholars, without conducting a proper investigation in the subject, this is a sign of hastiness and bigotry to a view. A person should not enter into subjects they do not grasp, especially when these subjects are inseparable from worldly sciences (also riddled with controversy and falsehood) that are crucial to having a thorough grasp of the topic as a whole.

thoughts and behaviours of the pagans and disbelievers with respect to contagion. This behaviour is very apparent to see, rather, it even exceeds the behaviour of the Pagan Arabs in some respects. Had the Imāms of the Salaf witnessed what we are witnessing today—of disease-free healthy people fearing disease-free healthy people and keeping distant from them by two metres in their homes, streets and markets—they would not hesitate to denounce such behaviour, declare it foolish and enter it into the ranks of minor shirk.⁴

2. Abū ‘Ubayd has explained the wisdom in these texts that relate to contagion which is that the natural tendency of people—in the absence of full knowledge of the complexity of Allāh’s

⁴ These measures of “social distancing” of two metres between disease-free healthy people and nationwide lockdown of all economic and social activity—[which are additional to the well known measures of isolation of the sick and quarantine of those with established contact with the sick or who are arriving from a location of an outbreak and the healthy avoiding the sick]—they are medical heresies and have no basis, not in the Sharī‘ah, not in medical science and not in reason.

Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī (رحمته الله) said: “And that which is legislated is the avoidance of what is apparent [of these harms] and to take caution to the extent that is related in the Sharī‘ah, such as taking caution from the leper, the sick person, and from going to a place of the plague. As for when the [harm] is hidden [obscure, not apparent], then it is not legislated to take caution and to [seek to] avoid it, because that is from the prohibited omen, and harbouring omens is from the actions of the people of shirk and kufr.” *Laṭā‘if al-Ma‘ārif* (Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1420H) p. 142.

Shaykh Sulaymān bin Ḥamdān (رحمته الله) (d. 1397H) said:

The servant is ordered to take caution against the apparent causes of evil and to avoid them to the extent that is related in the Sharī‘ah, such as taking caution from the leper and the sick person and from going to a place of the plague. But as for what is hidden [obscure, not apparent], then taking caution against it and avoiding it is not legislated. Rather, it is from the prohibited omen, and indeed, it is having an evil opinion of Allāh the Exalted, without any verified cause. Hence, it is not permissible.” *Al-Durar al-Saniyyah* (10/345-347).

creational systems of cause and effect—is to confuse **association** with **causation** and thus resort to a simplistic explanation of contagion which provides fertile ground for the harbouring of omens.

Consider the six things mentioned in the ḥadīth: “*There is no 'adwā (contagion)...*”:

—**No omen in the flight of birds.** This is when people hear or see something, such as the overhead flight of a bird and what is similar, such as a black cat or dog and so on and then tie some sort of evil outcome to it, this causative relationship being something that exists only in their minds as a presumption.

—**No omen in the month of Ṣafar (or contagion in diseases of the stomach).** There is no causal connection between the month of Ṣafar and the bad events that take place during it. And there is no contagion in diseases of the stomach caused by parasites as the Pagans used to believe with respect to their animals. These are presumptions of the mind. All that happened is that the animals in the herd consumed from the same contaminated source and fell ill around the same time, similar to cholera in humans.

—**No omen from constellations.** There is no causal relationship between the location of the moon-phase in the background of the stars and worldly events that comprise harm and evil or otherwise, such as rain, victory, birth and the likes. This is simply a presumption of the mind.

—**No omen in the night owl.** The Arabs used to think that an owl would emerge out of the grave of the one who was killed, and seek vengeance. So if it came and made its sound (hoot, screech)

over the house of anyone, it was an omen for that person's death. There is no reality to this and it is a presumption of the mind only.⁵

—**No omen in the ghoul.** The Arabs used to believe that ghouls, a category of Jinn, would watch them on their travels, and then appear in various appearances, such as birds, animals and people to misdirect them and cause them to be lost and harmed in their journey. However, this was mere presumption on their behalf, with no reality to it. If they came across a bird, or animal or a person, they would presume or suspect it was a ghoul and that whatever interaction took place between them, if any, was the cause of harm that they subsequently suffered in the journey.

—**No omen in the person with illness.** The Arabs would consider the sick person an omen, exaggerating in contagion, after having confused association with causation through mere observation of the senses. In reality, healthy people becoming ill after mixing with sick people, or healthy camels becoming ill after mixing with sick camels, this was by the decree of Allāh in that the healthy were exposed to the same root factors of disease causation as the sick, due to being in the same location and environment, and subject to the same causes coming from polluted water, food, atmosphere and weather and contamination of surroundings with ticks, pests and the likes.

⁵ And the reason why this superstition arose is that perhaps on occasions, someone coincidentally died after an owl was seen on or over their home at some point in the near past, and so the people confused association with causation—which is the underlying theme in all of these cases, including the issue of contagion. Thereafter, they treated the night-owl as an omen, falling into superstition which is a belief or practice resulting from ignorance, fear of the unknown or a false conception of causation.

So the presumption of contagion was made and this was a mistake in causation.⁶ This mistake drives the harbouring of omens and exaggeration in fear, leading to baseless actions.

So if we consider all of the things mentioned in this ḥadīth, we see that the underlying central theme is **confusing association with causation** and how this affects thoughts, feelings, emotions, statements and behaviours. This theme has been developed more fully by **al-Qurtubī, al-Khaṭṭābī, Ibn Khuzaymah, Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, al-Jaṣṣās** and others as discussed in previous articles.

And this is also the underlying principle in what constitutes minor shirk:

- Making something to be a cause which is not a cause, or
- exaggerating in the causality of one thing over others, or
- in terms of speech, giving equal consideration to the **musabbib**, [the one who placed and tied causes and effects (Allāh)], and the **sabab** as it relates to events, and failing to prioritise and elevate the musabbib over His created asbāb,⁷ or failing to credit the musabbib at all for the outcomes, effects of the asbāb He created and placed.⁸

3. Multiple factors of disease causation envelope and affect a population or herd and some of them (or most or all of them in the

⁶ There is a related discussion and some tafṣīl (detail) with respect to **inoculation**. We have spoke of that frequently in previous articles to make it clear that there can be the fresh creation of a disease instance in an animal or person, through the route of inoculation, but this is other than the contagion which the Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) spoke of.

⁷ Thus, one says: “Whatever Allāh willed **and** what you willed” instead of “Whatever Allāh willed, **then** what you willed.”

⁸ Such as when one says: “Had it not been for the guard dog, the thief would have looted the house.” While this is technically correct it downplays the fact that this outcome was through Allāh’s decree, by failing to make any mention of that, when the situation required that, by way of praise and gratitude.

case of herds) may become ill around the same time period, due to the same shared general causes. The specific time of onset of disease will vary from person to person due to varying levels of individual susceptibility and vitality.

This difference in the timing of onset of disease in each person or animal allows for the presumption of contagion to arise, wherein it is presumed that this one got it first, then that one, then that one, and it was all via transmission.

As it relates to populations, in the case of cholera, for example, the cause would be drinking fecally-contaminated water, and in the case of a city with heavy industrial pollution and leakages from industrial plants, you will find outbreaks of respiratory illnesses, especially in colder weather. In the case of leprosy, it would be lack of sanitation, contaminated surroundings, unclean food and water supply that has toxic elements, heavy metals and the likes that strip the blood and organs of vitality, leading to tissue wastage and putrefaction in severe cases, while the skin, **the largest organ of the body**, is used as the emergency route for expulsion of toxicity or morbid materials.⁹ In the case of herds, it is being subjected to the factors of disease causation from their surroundings, the environment, the climate, and from what they consume.

Contagion might be invoked and exaggeration in while the true causes of disease through Allāh's decree are ignored.¹⁰

⁹ Bacteria are secondary, they are not the cause of disease, but come to the scene of disease, where there is morbidity, cell or tissue death. So they consume, recycle, repackage the material (for reuse or elimination) as a means of maintaining bodily integrity and keeping the person alive.

¹⁰ This is keeping in mind that the disbelievers have erred in the germ theory model of disease in which they initially misunderstood the true roles of bacteria and what they called "viruses" but, over time, realised nevertheless that an extremely profitable medical model could be built upon such an

This leads to mistakes in the issue of causation, providing a fertile ground for superstitious thoughts, beliefs, statements and behaviours, and this is what the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) intended to prevent in his guidance on this matter as has been explained by the Salaf.

He intended to cut off the problem from its roots and thus advised, **by way of recommendation**, not obligation, with the avoidance of mixing with the leper or going to a land of plague, for those who are weak in their īmān and yaqīn—those who may become victims to their wild and loose imaginations which can drive them to anxiety and fear, suppressing vitality and promoting disease states—should they enter that land or mix with the leper and then be consumed by their suspicions and fears about becoming ill.

4. Coming to the speech of Abu ‘Ubayd (رَحِمَهُ اللهُ):

“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.**

If the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) was intending to make the owner of healthy camels fearful of the sick camels—in affirmation of contagion and embedding the concept firmly into the mind of the owner—then this would entail promoting the very thing that he

understanding, even if it was not true or accurate. And it is this flawed germ theory model, in particular what relates to “viruses” that has revived the exaggeration in contagion and the thoughts, ideas, statements and behaviours of the disbelievers and pagans in this subject matter.

prohibited, which is harbouring of omens, something that people are naturally prone to. This is because of the powerful workings of the imagination and because of the ease by which presumptions are made and by which confusion can arise in the matter of causation in the absence of full and complete knowledge regarding the true cause(s) of disease.

“And how can the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) not prohibit from this belief in omens [as it relates to contagion] while he [also] says: ‘[Belief in] omens is *shirk*.’”

So he (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) did not intend this meaning. Rather, he intended the cutting off of routes and the closing of doors, so that situations do not arise where ambiguity in causation exists, making people prone to exaggerated belief in contagion and harbouring of omens, just as they do in the case of overhead flight of birds, the night-owl, the month of Şafar, the constellations, in the matter of births, deaths and eclipses and so on.

“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.”¹¹

So here is the mistake of confusing **association** with **causation** in the scheme of complexity in Allāh’s creation, and this was the very thing that the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) was teaching the bedouin, when he said to him: (فمن أعدى الأول), “*Who passed it to the first one?*”,

¹¹ Sharh al-Sunnah (al-Maktab al-Islāmī, Beirut: 1403H), 12/167 onwards and it is also cited by Ibn Ḥajar in al-Fath.

in relation to the skin disease of mange or scabies which affects a whole herd of camels.

This is because just as the first camel was subject to the causes that led to the disease, then the other camels, because they are in the same environment, have been subject to the same causes and also develop the disease. It had nothing to do with the mixing between camels. That was incidental and remains a presumption and something unproven.

As for the claim that the bedouin was contesting as to whether the contagion which he presumed to have taken place on the basis of his observation was by Allāh's decree or not, then that is incorrect. It is a deficient explanation and is an unsound interpretation of this interaction between the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) and the bedouin.

We have discussed this in detail in the articles on the statements of **al-Ṭahāwī**, **Ibn Khuzaymah**, **al-Khaṭṭābī**, **al-Jaṣṣāṣ**, **Ibn 'Abd al-Barr**, **al-Ṭabarī**, **al-Baghawī** and others.

The Pagan Arabs affirmed al-Qadar and used it as an argument to justify their shirk and their innovations in religion and their niggardliness in feeding the poor and needy as occurs in the Qur'ān.¹² Upon that, it was not the issue of al-Qadar that was being contested by the bedouin, this is a deficient explanation which was offered by al-Bayḥaqī and whoever followed him in that to this day, and the Salaf had a better grasp than him on this subject matter.

The statement...

¹² See the Qur'ān: (6:148) and also (16:35, 43:20, 36:47). Al-Sa'dī commented on (6:148): "Allāh has informed that the Pagans will justify their shirk and declaring unlawful what Allāh made lawful through the argument of al-Qaḍā and al-Qadar, and that they will make Allāh's will which encompasses everything of good and evil a proof for themselves in repelling blame from themselves."

“Just like the first one got scabies through Allāh’s decree, then likewise the rest also got scabies through Allāh’s decree, but by contagion”—then this is affirming what the ḥadīth is negating and nullifying the speech of the Messenger (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ). Its adding to the ḥadīth what is not even in it. Rather, what should be said is:

“Just like the first one got scabies through Allāh’s decree, then likewise the rest got scabies through Allāh’s decree, without contagion”—as is apparent from the ḥadīth and as has been explained by the scholars from the era of the Salaf.

This is because of what we explained earlier, that all the camels are in the same location, same environment, they have all picked up mites on their skin, and ordinarily, these mites are not able to penetrate the skin if the camels are healthy, having been watered and fed well, with good pasture.

The immunological condition of the host determines the ability of the mite to infest.¹³ The mite may routinely be found on the skin and scabies may never develop.

So when the nutritional status and host defence is compromised through other factors or there is a graze or cut, the mites are able to penetrate the skin more easily. The scabies mite is unable to jump or fly and prolonged, direct, skin to skin contact is needed for a mite embedded in the skin of one camel to move to another. The immunological status of the host is key factor for the mites to penetrate the skin.

¹³ This is explained in scientific papers that discuss scabies. There is a biochemical pathway for the ticks to be able to penetrate the skin, and if the immunological status of the host is strong, this is prevented. Thus, the true underlying cause of the disease is actually the nutritional, immunological and vitality status of the host, and not the mixing itself. However, ultimately, the affair belongs to Allāh and He creates disease wherever He wills.

Thus, contagion, or “transmission”, is merely a presumption. Mites could have been picked up from the environment by the herd of camels as a whole, for just as the first one acquired mites on its skin without any prior camel, then what is to say the others did not pick them up in the same way from the surroundings. These mites are ordinarily found on the skin. Then, over a period of time, due to individual variation in health and vitality in each camel, when their immunological condition deteriorates due to various causes, they may gradually develop scabies, and thus the illusion is created that this happened because of contagion.

The whole context of this ḥadīth is the Prophet’s negation of the presumption of contagion and the bedouin contesting this because of what he sees taking place, confusing association with causation. Then the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) retorted by asking him how the first camel got scabies. It got scabies without any prior instance of disease in a camel, so if the first camel got it like that from Allāh’s decree, meaning from causes that do not require a prior sick camel, then so can the second, third, fourth and the rest of the camels in the herd.

Thus contagion is merely a presumption which leads to baseless thoughts and harbouring of omens. There was no contest or dispute about al-Qadar here. Rather, the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) was informing the bedouin that just as the first camel can get scabies through causative mechanism from Allāh’s decree without contagion, then so can the others. And this is what we find in the speech of the scholars from the Salaf and beyond that we mentioned earlier.

Since this is something that people are naturally prone to—**confusing association with causation and acting upon ambiguity in causation**—then to cut this off and close the door to

it, the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) advised that sick camels should not be watered and grazed next to healthy camels.

5. From another angle, what is happening in outbreaks of disease is that **each disease instance** is in fact **a freshly created instance** in each entity, every time. It is not that any instance of disease is transmitted from one entity to another, rather each instance is freshly created through its causative factors in relation to each person. This is because diseases are states, conditions, they are not noun-entities. A body does not transmit its *ṣifāt* (attributes) or *a’rāḍ* (accidents, incidental attributes) to others, this was something the Pagans believed in and the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) negated this as explained by Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr.

This issue of the fresh creation of a disease instance applies **even in the contagionist view** where mixing is said to be a cause, sometimes.¹⁴

Of all of those who spoke on this issue, in the contagionist view, Ibn al-Qayyim was granted *tawfīq* in using the most precise words when he said:

قد يكون سببا يخلق الله تعالى فيه المرض

[Mixing] can sometimes be a cause **through which Allāh creates the disease** [in the healthy].¹⁵

This means that the disease instance in an entity has not been “transmitted” or “passed on” **but created afresh** on account of factors that Allāh subjects that animal or person to.

¹⁴ We have spoken previously about the ambiguity in this view and how it leaves the door open for exaggeration and confusion in the issue of causation, and we distinguish between the specific event of inoculation and the vague, ambiguous notion of mixing.

¹⁵ Ḥāshiyah Tahdhīb Sunan Abī Dāwūd (10/290).

This is true, even if we accept mixing as a cause, or more specifically, the event of inoculation, conditioned by individual susceptibility.

The notion of disease “spreading” is the conception of the mind only, it is a mental judgement. In physical reality, no **disease instance** spreads from one entity to another, they are two separate disease instances, created separately.

For example, one person has a flu, and then another person who spent an hour with that person also develops the flu a day or two later. If we presume contagion took place for the sake of argument, then the sum of what comprises the illness, the fever, runny nose, lack of sense of smell and taste and so on, the sum whole of that was not “transmitted” or “passed on”.

Rather, the illness was created afresh in the second person.

Thus, in physical reality, there is no disease instance that moves and spreads from person to person as such, this is a mental conception and mental judgement. The universal meaning of “disease”, devoid of particulars, is what the mind conceives of and considers to have spread. As for the actual instance in external physical reality, then no disease instance is passed on at all.

However, in this example of the flu, and as occurs in real life, contagion is just a presumption in any case, because both of these people may have been separately subjected to the combined causes of the illness during a particular season and their mixing would have been coincidental to the occurrence of disease in the second person.

This point about instances of disease creation and the mental conception of “spread” has been discussed in more detail, with examples, in our article: “**Cholera and Contagion**”: [cholera-contagion.pdf](#)—26 November 2020.

6. From the above discussion we see that from the many wisdoms behind the statement of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) is:

The removal of ambiguity in ones's thoughts and behaviours and the promotion of certainty.

So for example, if the owners of camels followed this advice and did not mix their sick camels with the healthy camels of others, and then the healthy camels got sick, then the owner of the healthy camels would know with certainty that this was from Allāh's decree and did not arise through contagion.

But if his camels had mixed with sick camels, then the ambiguity in causation arises, because his camels may have gotten sick, as al-Khaṭṭābī explained, for the same reason that the other bedouin's camels got sick, because they were in the same general locality, subject to the same environmental factors, grazing from the same deficient or tainted pasture, drinking from the same contaminated water in which there are parasites, or having picked up mites from the shared surroundings and so on.

So he will wrongly presume that his camels got sick due to contagion and this will give rise to the harbouring of omens and the unnecessary mental struggle that goes with it, as well as baseless thoughts that a person will be subjected to, after having confused association with causation.

7. As for the view in which it is said that...

“Allāh may **sometimes** make mixing to be a means for the transmission of disease”¹⁶

... then it leaves the door open for presumption and ambiguity in causation. It cannot be proven, not for cholera, or leprosy or

¹⁶ And we make the distinction between inoculation as specific event which can lead to the fresh creation (not “transmission”) of disease instance and between the vague, ambiguous term of “mixing”.

tuberculosis, or the cold, or the flu, or smallpox or any other disease that mixing was the cause of the alleged transmission between people rather than or exclusive to the people concerned having been subjected to the same combined set of causative factors for the illness, due to being in the same location during the same period of time.¹⁷

In addition, “mixing” is a vague, ambiguous term that allows plenty of room for the confusion between association and causation to arise. In our view, we speak of a very specific event, **inoculation**, on the basis of what some of the scholars have said, and this is more specific, it removes the ambiguity. This has been discussed frequently in previous articles.

In addition to that, in this view, disease is often spoken of as being “transmitted” and “passed on” and likewise, it is spoken of as “spreading”—especially when we enter into the pseudoscience of virology and the viral causation theory of disease in which the disbelievers are grossly misguided and in which they often speak of the virus as a living, conscious, intelligent agent. So we return to dubious language which becomes a stepping stone to the notion that the quality of transmission belongs to the disease itself or to the sick person, and this is frequently found in the language of the disbelievers.

Further, saying: “There is contagion, but by Allāh’s will” does not solve the issue, because adding “by Allāh’s will” does not

¹⁷ In fact, this observation underlies one of the wisdoms explained behind the prohibition of fleeing a land of plague, when one intends to flee from it, trying to flee from death. It is because whoever was in that place has already been subjected to its combined causes in the weeks or months prior, and thus it is pointless fleeing. If you have been sufficiently exposed to its causes and you have reduced vitality and individual susceptibility, all through Allāh’s decree, then you will get it, and if not, then you won’t. So it is pointless fleeing from Allāh’s decree.

constitute proof that multiple disease instances in an outbreak took place through contagion. The issue of Allāh's will is not even under dispute, and it was not in dispute by the bedouin who contested with the Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) on this issue with respect to his camels.

Since the underlying issue is that of confusing association with causation, then it would be similar to saying: “There is an omen in the black cat, but it is by Allāh's will.” Adding the remark that it is by Allāh's will is not proof for the link of causation between seeing a black cat and whatever evil or harm is presumably tied to it. Similarly, saying: “I believe in contagion, but it takes place through Allāh's will”, then making mention of Allāh's will does not constitute proof that multiple instances of disease in an outbreak of disease actually took place through contagion, through casual interactions between people, it remains a mere assumption. The issue of Allāh's decree is not even in dispute. It is about the alleged causality of mixing, which is mere assumption.

You cannot prove that the instances of disease in an outbreak were caused by contagion exclusive to the set of causes that led to the first instance of disease and which could equally have enveloped all the people who fell ill. It is precisely as al-Khaṭṭābī mentioned, who makes it clear:

And it is plausible that the [disease] came from the direction of the water and pasture. The camels would have found it to be unhealthy for them [making them sick] (فتستوبله الماشية). And then when [other camels] take from the same water, they would also be afflicted by a similar disease. Then the people—**on account of their ignorance**—would call this “contagion” whereas it was the action of Allāh (تبارك وتعالى) through the mediating influence of [the disease causing mechanisms He created] in nature, and Allāh knows best.

I will illustrate further:

In a hotel, four people take the same room. The cooling system is infested with dust, fungi and mold, and as they are in a really hot country, they keep it on most of the time. Within days, one of them develops flu-like symptoms. A day later, the second one gets the same symptoms. And later in the evening so does the third one. The fourth one does not manifest any outwardly noticeable symptoms, due to a high level of vitality. His body's latent, background programs were sufficiently able to handle the challenge from the dust, mold and fungi particles. A foreground, rapid-response program (flu-like symptoms) was not needed in order to return his body to normality. So he never experienced "disease".

So if a person said here:

"This illness spread among them by contagion, but I affirm it is by Allāh's will, by His decree, unlike what the disbelievers and pagans say."

Adding the statement "by Allāh's will" is not proof for the claim of contagion, and it is missing the point entirely. That's because the issue of Allāh's will is not even under dispute, and the bedouin was not disputing that with the Messenger (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) as we have explained. This person still has not escaped from the mistake that the Messenger (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) was clarifying to the bedouin, which is **the presumption of contagion by confusing association with causation**. This is the starting point of:

- making something to be a cause when it isn't or
- exaggerating in the causality of something above and beyond what it really is,

and this lays the foundation of minor shirk, just as exaggerating in the status of the righteous lays the foundation for major shirk.

So the disease here did not “spread” between these people in the hotel room, it was not passed on from the first person to the second and third. Likewise, if other rooms in the hotel were equally affected by the unclean piping of the cooling system, the people in those rooms may also succumb to a bout of illness. There is no contagion here.

8. Once again, the very notion of disease spread is a mental conception, a judgement of the mind. In external reality, what takes place is the fresh creation of new disease instance—as we indicated through the speech of Ibn al-Qayyim earlier—and as such there is no such thing as “the spread of disease” except in the mind. There is only the fresh creation of disease instances in each and every person in a population for whom Allāh has willed disease to occur, through His decree, through factors He brings to each person at the appointed time and place that is in His prior knowledge.

No disease instance jumped or transferred, transmitted or passed on from one person to the next.¹⁸

So those who hold this view, should stick to this sentence of Ibn al-Qayyim, as it is precise. They should say, in light of it:

“Allāh creates disease afresh in each person, with mixing sometimes being a [presumed] cause¹⁹ among the combined set of causes required for disease creation [not transmission].”

And if they do so, they are not far off from realising that **there is no such thing as contagion in principle**, because in reality, there

¹⁸ We discussed this in more detail in the article on cholera and contagion, so refer to it.

¹⁹ And we say that inoculation in particular, is a known cause, conditioned by individual susceptibility and sufficient lack of vitality.

is no such thing as disease “spreading” from one person or animal to another, because that notion exists only in the mind.

As Ibn 'Abd al-Barr said:

As for his saying: “*There is no contagion*”, then it is a prohibition from that anyone should say: “A thing passes [what it has] to another thing” and it is [him (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ)] informing that a thing does not pass [what it has] to another thing. So it is as if he is saying: Nothing infects anything else [with what it has]. He says: No one afflicts anyone else with anything of:

- a physical constitution (khalq),
- action (fi'l),
- disease (dā')
- or ailment (marad) [that he has].

The Arabs used to say the likes of this in their Jāhiliyyah, that when something of these affairs connect with another thing, it passes on to it. So Allāh's Messenger (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) informed them that their saying and belief in this regard, it is not like that and he prohibited from that statement.

In external reality, there is only **the fresh creation of disease instance in each entity** and not the transmission of any disease instance, as that is not possible, because a'rād (incidental attributes of entities) are not passed on or transmitted,²⁰ they have to arise afresh in each entity, on account of the factors that cause them.

The factors, or causes of a disease, are not the disease itself.

The causes of disease can be spread and transmitted, whereas disease itself, which is an 'arad in the body, is not “spread” or “transmitted”, by its very nature, it can't be.

²⁰ This is covered in more detail in the article on Ibn 'Abd al-Barr who discussed this issue.

So we say disease instances are created among members of a population on account of shared factors, common to them all, and specific factors, unique to each person, such as lack of vitality, dietary and lifestyle violations and so on. And even if we affirm mixing, or more specifically, inoculation as a cause, even then, it is still the case that a new instance of disease was **created afresh**, it was not “spread” or “transmitted” or “passed on”.

So appropriately, we do not say that **the disease instance** of Zayd was “passed” or “transmitted” to Khālid, but we say that a disease instance was created in Zayd and another disease instance was created in Khālid, even if mixing between the two of them was one of the numerous causes required for its creation, within the contagionist view.

Allāh creates instances of disease in whomever He wills, through the various causes He has decreed, in a given population, location and time, and what people observe and judge mentally as “the spread of disease” and label as “contagion” is not “spread” or “transmission” as such. Rather, it is freshly created instances of disease occurring in succession and in proximity to each other, thereby giving the illusion of “spread”. No person’s disease instance jumped or spread to anyone else. In every person, the disease generation process was created afresh and his disease instance remained with him as it is his ‘araḍ (incidental attribute), this is necessarily so, even within the contagionist view.

It is for this reason that Ibn Ḥajar, after mentioning all the various views in this subject matter, around six in total, supported the view of the Salaf. He said:

That disease is not contagious by its inherent nature at all (aslan, fundamentally). Rather, to whichever person a disease occurs, then that is due to Allāh (سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى) creating that in him

afresh. For this reason, many who are afflicted with a disease about which it is said that it is ‘contagious’ 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, the Exalted... and that which is preferred [as the superior view] in the subject of contagion is [this] last one, upon the generality of his (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) saying: ‘*Nothing transmits [what it has] to anything else*’ and his (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) saying to the one who affirmed contagion: ‘*So who passed it to the first one?*’, whose corroboration has already preceded.”²¹

9. The contagionists who have a problem with this have not really thought about these things and have not fully grasped the view outlined from the Salaf and nor have they moved beyond a surface level understanding of worldly realities, or beyond the claims, theories and pseudosciences of the disbelievers.

When they hear “*There is no contagion*” and “*Nothing transmits [what it has] to anything else*”—just as the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said—they are bewildered and think how can you possibly deny the “spread of disease”. They are no different to very bedouin whom the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) was teaching.

The fact of the matter is that what we observe, perceive and describe as...

“Allāh **creating fresh instances of disease** in a given set of members in a population or a herd, in a given time period and

²¹ Badhl al-Mā'ūn Fī Faḍl al-Ṭā'ūn, pp. 212-213.

location, through common factors enveloping all of them and specific factors unique to each of them as individuals”²²

... is what you are calling “contagion” and “spread of disease”.

We are not differing about any externally observed realities and there is no denial of any physical reality, such as the apparent “spread of disease”—conceptually speaking—except to the contagionist who may be uncomfortable with this view being outlined and presented.

All that is happening is that we are explaining the same observed phenomenon upon the views of the Imāms of the Salaf, and the aṣl of all of that is the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) himself.

10. In essence what is happening in this matter is that we are stood with the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) so to speak and these Imāms of the Salaf while the contagionists are just repeating the same doubt of the bedouin—“How can you deny contagion when we observe it with our eyes?” and we are trying to explain to them what the Messenger (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) explained to the bedouin about association and causation, and the ambiguity therein that provides fertile ground for baseless thoughts and behaviours. However, they keep raising the issue of Allāh’s decree, when it is not even a point of contention, it is pointless for the contagionist to even raise that, as that is a diversion from the real issue. And some of the scholars, such as Ibn al-Qayyim, were granted success by Allāh (عَزَّوَجَلَّ) in using very precise, accurate language about *disease creation* that allows for realities to be made clear.

Once again, refer to: “**Cholera and Contagion**”: [cholera-contagion.pdf](#)—26 November 2020, for an elaboration on this notion of “spread of disease”.

²² And we include the event of inoculation as a specific even that leads to a fresh instance of *disease creation* as one of those means, conditioned by individual susceptibility and sufficient lack of vitality.

11. All of the above issues have been discussed in greater detail and are elaborated upon through the speech of other scholars that have been mentioned earlier, and all of that can be found in the article list that is provided below.

Abu 'Iyaad

16 Jumādā al-Ulā 1442 / 31 December 2020—v.1.08

Updated.

NOTE:

Footnote No. 4 in this article, was originally as follows:

And as for what is being implemented in the Muslim nations of “social distancing” and national lockdown then that is through prior international treaty agreements that have been made with the World Health Organisation and over 170 other nations. This organisation and those who own and control it are directing the national health agencies of each participant nation in the treaty. The scholars have—from the angle of the principles of the Sunnah—enjoined obedience, and that is what we call to also, from the angle of the Sunnah. All of this is a matter of ijtihād from the rulers.

As for the science, then these measures of “social distancing” between disease-free healthy people and nationwide lockdown of all economic and social activity—which are additional to the well known measures of isolation of the sick and quarantine of those with established contact with the sick or who are arriving from a location of an outbreak—then they are medical heresies and have no basis, not in the Sharīah, not in 'aql and not in medical science. These are 21st century medical heresies which have never been implemented in history, not even for the plague, let alone what is much less than it.

Some people—and it appears they are Madeenah students with connections to the Maldives, and Allāh knows best—made some

complaints and claimed that in this note, I am accusing the rulers and scholars of promoting minor shirk. This is from their faulty understanding. The answer to this is:

1. I am in the process of defending a view regarding contagion against those who dismiss it as a Ḍhāhīrī viewpoing, and claim there is an alleged contemporary consensus among the scholars regarding its affirmation.

2. I explained the view of Abu 'Ubayd al-Qāsim bin Sallām, which is that to interpret this ḥadīth as an affirmation of contagion and fear of alleged disease spread is the most evil interpretation and promotion of omens (minor shirk).

3. If that is the case, then what do you think Abu 'Ubayd would say, if he saw what he say today, of people doing baseless things, fabricated by the disbelievers, in gross exaggeration in the matter of contagion.

4. This was to show that if there are people who hold this view, and in their countries, they choose not to social distance, then you cannot accuse them of disobeying the authorities in Saudi Arabia, or disobeying the scholars, and that this is a legitimate viewpoint because it has a basis in the speech fo the Salaf.

5. Then, knowing that someone is going to make the very accusation they made, I put the above footnote on purpose to explain why this measure is being implemented in all the countries, including Muslim nations. It is because they are part of international agreements, and they are taking guidance from the WHO with respect to the health policies. So they may implement additional measures, above the ones that have come in the Sunnah, from this angle, as part of international cooperation. And as for the scholars, they are calling for obedience to the rulers, from the angle of the Sunnah, that you obey the ruler in his ijtihād

(even if you may not agree with him), and I made it clear that this is what we call to as well.

6. I then made it clear that social distancing of six-feet between disease-free healthy people has no basis in medicine, or science, rather, it is made up by the people of disbelief and has not been known before the 21st century.

7. The end result of this is that we can hold views on contagion, even strong ones, due to statements from the Salaf and the Scholars, but alongside that, no matter what our personal views from a knowledge point of view, we have to obey the authorities in these matters. And whoever does so, then there is nothing upon him, in terms of blame.

8. Sadly, the very misunderstanding for which I wrote the footnote in question, was the very misunderstanding these people fell into.

9. Though my words are very clear and easy to understand, I wrote a small clarification to explain the reality of my intent.