



Islam's Emphasis on Health and the COVID-19 Pandemic; A Review based on Islamic Teachings

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Abstract

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a contagious disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). Since December 2019, the disease has spread worldwide, leading to an ongoing pandemic. As no effective vaccine has been successfully developed globally so far, an important point in dealing with this disease can be the emphasis of experts on health measures in preventing the transmission and spread of this disease.

The Abrahamic faiths all have emphasized the importance of assisting others and saving lives in their teachings. Muslims constitute the world's second-largest religious group, making up about a quarter of the world population. One of the characteristics of Islam is to encourage people to observe purity in various aspects of life, such as ablution, which is washing of the hands and face five times a day before saying prayers. The prophet Mohammad (PBUH) has also emphasized cleanliness and purity as part of the faith and its necessity.

With the news of the global spread of the coronavirus, various health guidelines have been issued by experts to prevent the spread of the virus. However, it must be borne in mind that what is now recommended by doctors and health experts to prevent COVID-19 disease has been emphasized by Islam 1400 years ago. Human societies can achieve health and perfection by following Islamic precepts, and in this case, COVID-19 will not have a chance to emerge. As some individuals may be wary of following the preventative measures for COVID-19 by government and international organizations, followers of the religion should utilize religious teachings to reiterate the importance of these measures for the safety of the community.

Key Words: COVID-19, Health, Prevention, Islam.

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1- INTRODUCTION

Health is a fundamental concept in human life and has various dimensions, including physical, mental, social, and spiritual health. On the other hand, health is also a basic human need and a requirement for performing religious duties (1, 2). The subject of health has always been a matter of interest since the beginning of human life and has been defined in various forms. According to Ibn-Sīnā (Avicenna), health means the state and nature in which the body functions properly (3). The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or inability" (2).

Religious schools have always recommended observing health protocols. One of these religious schools is Islam. Muslims are the second-largest religious group in the world and make up about a quarter of the world's population. Islam, which is a reliable guide for humans in all aspects of life, also gives instructions to Muslims about the general principles of medicine and health. The Quran has considered some things as taboo and others as permissible, and all these are certainly explained according to wisdom and the condition of the human body and soul. Everything that is forbidden in the Quran is undoubtedly materially or spiritually harmful to people, and everything mentioned in the Quran as permissible affects the health of the body and soul (4, 5). On the other hand, the hadiths narrated from the Prophet (PBUH), and the Imams (AS) are full of medical recommendations and instructions on health, diseases, and personal, mental, and social health, the properties of some fruits and vegetables, and other topics related to medicine. Islam is advanced and all-encompassing in all dimensions and has a comprehensive view of the human and society and its teachings include all the necessities of life.

So, it pays special attention to health and disease prevention, which are of the greatest importance for human life. This study aimed to investigate the health and disease prevention in religious references and Islamic and Quranic teachings during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2- MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study is review research using library sources, Holly Quran, authentic texts and articles, and other interpretive and hadith sources. The importance of health and prevention before treatment has been studied from the perspective of the Holly Quran and Sunnah. The data were collected from the national and international databases, such as Hawzeh.net, Noormag, Jaame alHadith, Jaame alTafasir, Ahlebit library Science Direct, ProQuest, and Medline using the keywords, such as "Coronavirus Pandemic and Islam", "Islamic Jurisprudence (Fiqh) and Coronavirus", "Islamic Traditions", "Prevention and Islam", and "Disease" in English, Arabic or Persian up to August 2021. The criteria for the selection of sources was considering the discussion and introduction of Islamic strategies to prevent and improve health in the conditions of the diseases.

3- RESULTS

In several verses, God refers to individual and social health in various dimensions (6). In three surahs (Yunus, Isra, and Fussilat), God mentions the Quran for the believers to heal their hearts and souls. The Quran should be considered as a book of good news, hope, success, and health for the believers, and the rituals of "health" and the ways of maintaining health should be sought in it (7).

3-1. Emphasis on health and disease prevention by health experts

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19

as a pandemic as it spread to 110 countries (8). So far, various health orders have been issued by relevant experts to prevent the spread of the virus.

WHO and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend several guidelines and precautionary measures to adopt to avoid illness. These are summarized as follows.

1. Disinfecting and washing hands with soap and water or using rubbing alcohol and hygienic tissues to kill the virus
2. Patients must use masks.
3. Daily cleaning, sterilizing, and disinfecting the frequently used surfaces such as kitchens, light switches, bathrooms, gloves, aprons, shelves, face shields, goggles, and furniture.
4. Avoid contact with eyes, nose, and mouth with unclean hands (9).

3-2. Emphasis on health and disease prevention in Islam

It should be noted that what is recommended today for the prevention of disease by physicians and health experts, has been emphasized by Islam 1400 years ago, showing the transcendent position of Islam. Sanitary measures suggested by modern medical science seem to be part of the daily routine of Muslims. The results of the present study showed that Islam prioritizes cleanliness and disease prevention over treatment and has provided many instructions in this regard. The Quran and the recommendations of the Holy Prophet (PBUH), and the Imams in the form of Quranic verses and tradition emphasize the necessity and importance of health, cleanliness, and effects on the worldly and otherworldly life of humans. In the religious teachings, there are hundreds of guidelines on nutrition, sleep, cleanliness, and work and living places that emphasize personal health. In addition, there are many guidelines on

mental, mental, family, and social health, indicating the holistic view of Islam on the subject of health (10, 11). The contents of the Quran and tradition that refer to personal cleanliness in Islam are discussed in the following:

3-2-1. Holly Quran

The Quran calls on its followers to live in a clean and safe place and maintain personal and social health. In the Quran, the basic condition for worshiping God is to observe cleanliness; God accepts worship only from those who are adequately clean. After the revelation, God teaches the Holy Prophet (PBUH) وَثِيَابِكَ فَطَهِّرْ (12) in which it is clearly stated that the prophet should keep his clothes clean and accordingly, invite followers to his religion, and in praise of the pure, he says إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ التَّوَّابِينَ وَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَطَهِّرِينَ "God loves the repentant and the pure" (13).

It is also said in the Quran, "We have made pure things permissible for you and impure things forbidden" (14).

One of the characteristics of Islam is that it encourages observing purity in various aspects of life because the innate desire of every human is to stay away from physical and mental impurity. With cleanliness in the worship ritual of Muslims, Islam has provided the necessary motivation to observe cleanliness (4).

Washing hands with soap and water is the top priority of the WHO as it minimizes the spread of disease (9).

The Quran also refers to the role of water in purity and says: "We sent down water from the sky, which is pure and cleansing" (15).

The emphasis in Islam on ablution before any obligatory and recommended daytime and nighttime prayer and the obligatory and recommended bath (ghusl) is a strong indication of the importance of cleanliness in the teachings of Islam. During ablution and bath, water must reach the whole

surface of the skin, ensuring that the body is adequately clean.

In Surah *Al-Ma'idah*, verse six, God says: "God does not want to cause you trouble, but He wants to purify you and complete His blessings upon you, so that you may be thankful to Him".

In Surah *Al-Ma'idah*, verse 90, it is clearly stated that any impurity indicates the absence of salvation. On the other hand, observing personal cleanliness in Islam is a sign of a successful person (16). This verse shows how much attention should be paid to cleanliness.

Many important human health issues are obligatory or recommended. For example, the purity of the body and clothes is one of the conditions of prayer, and *wuḍū'* (ablution), and *ghusl* (bath) are considered as the obligations and preliminaries of prayer. Also, in ablution and bath, washing the inside of the nose and mouth and brushing are recommended (10, 11).

As explained earlier, the WHO recommends frequent washing and cleaning of hands to counter the problem of COVID-19 (9). Thus, it can be argued that *wuḍū'* and *ghusl* are Islamic alternatives which can prove helpful to deal with this deadly disease.

Sneezing and yawning are other factors that act as catalysts in the spread of COVID-19. An infected person can transmit the virus to a healthy person through droplets of secretions in the air. It should be taken into account that although Islam praised sneezing, it considered yawning as an act of Satan advising to control it as much as possible (17). Moreover, it also mentioned the necessary precautions to handle sneezing (18).

3-2-2. Sunnah

Sunnah, (Arabic: "habitual practice"), also spelled Sunna, is the body of traditional social and legal customs and practices of

the Islamic community. The Quran and hadith are the most important sources in Islam. The hadiths narrated from the Prophet (PBUH), and the Imams (AS) contain medical issues and instructions, such as health, diseases, and personal, mental, and social health and the properties of some fruits and vegetables and other topics related to medicine. Some hadiths referring to personal cleanliness and disease prevention are as follows:

Imam Ja'far Sadegh (AS) says: *اغسلوا أيديكم إغسلاً قبل الطعام وبعده*. "Wash your hands before and after the meal" (19).

Imam Hassan Al-Mujtaba (Pbuh) says: *غسل اليدين قبل الطعام ينجي الفقر، وبعده ينجي الهم...*. "Washing hands before the meal prevents poverty and after the meal prevents discomfort" (20).

Imam Reza (AS) says: *لو اقتصدت الناس في المأكل لكانت أبدانهم*. "If people consider moderation when eating, they will always have a healthy body" (21).

Imam Ali (AS) says: *العسل شفاء من كل داء وال*. "Honey is the cure for any disease, and there is no disease in it" (22).

One advice of Islam is that it is good to wash the nose before ablution (23). The water that flows in the sinuses is considered cleansing in Islam. In other words, health advice is according to the religious standards of Islam, and as Imam Ali (as) says, "Cleanliness is half of faith" (24). Elsewhere, the Prophet (PBUH) also says: "Cleanliness is part of faith" (25).

Imam Ja'far Sadegh says: "Whoever washes his hands before and after eating, the food will be blessed and refreshing for him from the beginning to the end, and as long as he is alive, he will have richness, and his body will be safe from diseases" (23).

Islam encourages observing purity in various aspects of life because the innate desire of every human is to stay away from

physical and mental impurity. Islam puts cleanliness in the worship ritual of Muslims to motivate them to observe cleanliness. Due to the importance of this, the followers of Islam should always prioritize cleanliness, and thus provide the ground for their physical and mental health. What physicians today recommend to prevent the spread of various viruses (9), i.e., what is recommended today, is what Islam emphasized 1400 years ago.

It is stated in the hadiths that the Prophet (PBUH) said: *الوضوء قبل الطعام ينفي الفقر، و بعده ينفي الهمَّ وَيُصَحِّحُ الْبَصَرَ*. "Washing hands before eating prevents poverty and after eating, relieves sorrow and gives health to the eyes" (26). Another emphasis of Islam is on fasting. The fasting person will be healthier and less ill. The Prophet (Pbuh) said: *صوموا تَصِحُّوا*. "Fast to be healthy" (27).

3-3. Comprehensiveness of the health system in Islam

In Islamic teachings, body health is highly emphasized as one of the fundamental human needs. A significant part of the Quran verses is related to observing body health and the prevention of physical diseases. The Islamic health system is a comprehensive program that begins with personal health in the physical (including the health of body organs and personal equipment) and mental dimensions and then, deals with the relationship between a person and others. Advice on family, social, professional, environmental, living, nutritional, and economic health can be found in Islam. The Quran and tradition refer to the importance and effect of health in this world and the hereafter. For example, *وَلَا تُلْفُوا بِأَيْدِيكُمْ إِلَى التَّهْلُكَةِ* (28) implies the necessity of observing health to prevent diseases. Since the prerequisite to obligatory is itself obligatory, it is obligatory to observe health and prevent diseases to save the life of Muslims, and it

will be a highly disgraceful and punishable act to fail to do so.

4- CONCLUSION

In Islam, the subject of cleanliness has been emphasized a lot with the simplest possible interpretation, and cleanliness is introduced as part of faith and its necessity. The Holy Quran and the words of the Prophet and the Imams in the form of verses and traditions contain advice on the necessity and importance of health, and its effect on this life and the hereafter. In the principles of Islamic health, observing and maintaining health is in the general interests of the social system and part of public responsibility. The Holy Quran considers some things as taboo and others as permissible. All these recommendations are certainly explained according to the divine wisdom and the condition of the human body and soul, and if the forbidden and permissible things are observed, many diseases can be prevented. This religion, pure and free from any distortion, has instructions for personal cleanliness and recommends social cleansing. It is necessary to follow these instructions, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Washing hands is the top priority of WHO as it is believed to minimize the spread of disease.

It is noteworthy that what is recommended today for the prevention of diseases by physicians and health experts has been emphasized by Islam 1400 years ago, indicating the transcendent position of Islam. Sanitary measures suggested by modern medical science seem to be part of the daily routine of Muslims. The COVID-19 global pandemic requires an immediate, society-wide approach to prevent the transmission of the virus. As some individuals may be wary of following the preventative measures for COVID-19 by government and international organizations, faith actors should utilize religious teachings to reiterate the

importance of these measures for the safety of the community. The Abrahamic faiths all have teachings that profess the importance of taking action to assist others and save lives. This virus does not discriminate based on religion, race, or gender. The spread of the virus will only be stopped when we as human beings practice social distancing while supporting communities, loving neighbors as ourselves.

5- AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Study conception or design: BZ, and AB; Data analyzing and draft manuscript preparation: RK, and KS; Critical revision of the paper: BZ, and AB; Supervision of the research: BZ and AB; Final approval of the version to be published: BZ, RK, KS, and AB.

6- CONFLICT OF INTEREST: None.

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