

Coronavirus Lesson #4

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious and Most Merciful:

As mosques continue to be shutdown due to the pandemic of the coronavirus, a debated discussion between members of society and the scholars of faith came about regarding the shutdown of the mosques during such circumstances. From these discussions, a question comes to mind; what Islam's stance on the shutdown of mosques during such circumstances of a pandemic?

As stated in previous lessons, we learned that the greatness of Islam and its guidance has placed great emphasis on the safety of its members from all harm, danger, and/or calamities. Additionally, Islam also emphasizes the safety of one's logic and mental health from these types of dangers. This is simply because the human being is the greatest and most favored of creations of the Almighty Allah (swt). In Surat Al-Israa, Allah (swt) states ***"We have honored the children of Adam and carried them by land and sea; We have provided good sustenance for them and favored them specially above many of those We have created."***

We learn that Allah (swt) made it permissible for the believer to identify as a kafir or disbeliever ***only*** in the instance where the believer's life is in grave danger due to his faith in Allah. We learn this through the story of Amar Ibn Yasir (rda) when the disbelievers took him captive and tortured him so that may denounce his faith in Allah and His Messenger. Amar felt no choice but to denounce his belief so that the disbelievers would set him free. When he was let go, Amar went to the Prophet (saws) weeping as he explained to him what had just occurred. '

Ammar said: ***"O Prophet of Allah! I have brought a bad news and it is that the enemies did not spare me till I was compelled to praise their gods and to say unbecoming words about you"***. The Prophet (saws) asked: ***"What is the condition of your heart and what are you feeling?"*** Ammar replied: ***"My heart is abounding with faith and satisfaction."*** The Prophet (saws) said: ***"If they compel you to do so again repeat the same method."*** Thereafter, the following verse in surat Al-Nahl was revealed about 'Ammar: ***"With the exception of those who are forced to say they do not believe, although their hearts remain firm in faith, those who reject God after believing in Him and open their hearts to disbelief will have the wrath of God upon them and a grievous punishment awaiting them."***

Islam has also made it an exception for the sick and the traveler to not fast in order to safeguard them from potential harm. Allah (swt) states in Surat Al-Baqara ***"Fast for a specific number of days, but if one of you is ill or on a journey, then on other days later."*** From this, we learn that Islam has places certain exceptions that illustrate the ease of Islam's perspective when it comes to issues such as these. These exceptions are meant for all generations of believers, until the Allah inherits all of His creations on the Day of Judgement. Among these principles of Islam is to avoid harm and not be a cause for harm.

An additional principle of Islam can be found in the verse mentioned in Surat Al-Baqara where Allah (swt) states ***“God wants ease for you, not hardship.”*** Additionally, in Surat Al-Hajj, Allah (swt) states ***“He has chosen you and placed no hardship in your religion.”*** In Surat Al-Baqara, Allah (swt) says ***“Do not contribute to your destruction with your own hands,”*** and additionally in the same Sura, Allah (swt) says ***“God does not burden any soul with more than it can bear.”***

From this, we learn that the scholars of faith have come to a consensus in regard to closing the mosques for prayers during the coronavirus pandemic. We learn through the hadith narrated by Imam Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of Abu Huraryah (rda), that the Prophet (saws) said, ***“Do not mix the sick with the healthy.”*** First, today we learn from doctors, scientists, and healthcare professionals that the coronavirus has spread at an alarming rate to the point where it has now been labeled as a global pandemic. We also learn that it can take some time for the individual to realize he has been diagnosed with this virus. It is also possible for an individual to be asymptomatic (exhibiting no symptoms) and still be a cause of transmitting the virus to someone else. These are the exact precautions that are being taken by preventing the spread of this virus within the mosques during prayers; especially when people are within extreme close proximity of each other. We learn from this that the health of humans are among the most greatest of goals that Islam places emphasis on within its sharia or jurisprudence.

Secondly, the scholars of faith have come to a consensus that safeguarding one’s health, wealth, and family are all valid exceptions to not participate in congregational prayers of any kind. Imam Abu Dawood and Al-Nisa’ee both narrate on the authority of Abdullah Ibn Abbas (rda) that the Prophet (saws) said ***“Whoever hears the caller to prayer and does not have a valid excuse that withholds him from responding...”*** Someone then asked, ***“What is an excuse?”*** He (saws) said ***“fear or sickness, without this excuse, this individual will not have their prayer accepted.”***

Thirdly, Islam clearly illustrates some of the exceptions that does not require one to pray in congregation at the mosque aside from the pandemic. Among these exceptions are when it rains, especially when the rain can be a cause of harm. Imam Bukhari and Muslim both narrate on the authority of Abdullah Ibn Abbas (rda), who addressed a group of believers on an extremely rainy day and when the caller to prayer stood to announce the congregation prayer, Ibn ‘Abbas said, ***“When you say, ‘Ashhadu ana Muhammadan Rasūlallāh’ do not say, ‘Hayya al-Salah (come to Prayer)’ but rather say, ‘Pray in your homes.’”*** The people were confused upon hearing this and asked where this was derived from. Abdullah Ibn Abbas then said ***“This came from he who was more righteous than me, the Prophet (saws). The Friday prayer is a set ruling, but I dislike bringing you out while you walk in mud and rain.”*** There is no doubt that the pandemic of a virus is far more dangerous than walking in the mud and rain.

Fourthly, we learn that the Prophet (saws) prohibited those who contain a strong smell that would harm or distract others around him from praying in the mosques. Imam Bukhari narrates on the authority of Jabir Ibn Abdillah (rda), that the Prophet (saws) said, ***“He who eats garlic or onion should remain away from us or from our mosque and stay in his house.”*** If something as simple as the scent of garlic or onion can prevent one from going to the mosque, then surely the

pandemic of such a virus like the coronavirus will also suffice as a reason to prevent the congregational prayers in the mosque.

From this my dear brothers and sisters, it is illustrated to us that a certain fear lingers due to the pandemic of the coronavirus, especially that there is no cure or vaccine in place as of it. Therefore, the believer is granted an excuse from performing the prayers in the mosque until the Almighty Allah has relieved us from this pandemic and returns us to a state of normality. Indeed, there is no believer that would wish for Allah's houses to be shutdown; however, the importance of reality has its reasonings and wisdoms behind it.

We ask the Almighty Allah (swt) to grant us safety and to dissolve the spread of this global pandemic, and to prevent such viruses and illnesses from being transmitted, for indeed Allah knows best and has power of all things.