



THE PLAGUE NARRATIONS IN LIGHT OF 'BUKHĀRĪ: THE SUBLIME TRADITION'

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Outbreak of plague

- Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ [ra] narrates that the noble Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ said: "If you hear of a plague outbreak in a land, do not enter it; and if it breaks out in a place while you are in it, do not leave from there."¹
- 'Abdullāh ibn 'Āmir [ra] narrates that 'Umar [ra] set out heading for *al-Shām* (Syria); when he reached a place called *Sargh*, he received news that a plague had broken out in *al-Shām*. 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn 'Awf [ra] told him that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "If you hear of a plague in a land, do not travel to it; and if it breaks out in a land where you are, do not leave escaping from it."²

Plague, *ṭā'ūn* in Arabic, is a disease which causes many people to die. Although it was a torment and punishment for previous nations, but for a Muslim that dies from a plague, he or she will be granted the status of martyrdom in the hereafter.

The entering of a land that is plagued has been disallowed to ensure that Shayṭān (Satan) does not whisper death into people's minds causing them distress and increasing anxiety. Likewise, the people

already present in plagued lands are directed not to leave out of fear of death, since the time of death is fixed and death occurs even in the absence of any plague.

Just as Allah ﷻ states:

أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الَّذِينَ خَرَجُوا مِنْ دِيَارِهِمْ وَهُمْ أُلُوفٌ حَذَرَ الْمَوْتِ
فَقَالَ لَهُمْ اللَّهُ مُوتُوا ثُمَّ أَحْيَاهُمْ

"Did you not see those people who left their homes in thousands for fear of death? So Allāh said to them: 'Die.' Then He brought them back to life."³

The verse refers to a plague that had spread in the land of some people from previous nations who left their homes trying to flee from death. However, Allah ﷻ caused death to overcome them, and after a certain duration of time, He brought them back to life, thereby showing that no one can escape death.

Transmission of illness

- 'Amr [ra] narrates: "There was a man named Nawwās who had an unwell camel. Ibn 'Umar [ra] went to the partner of Nawwās and bought that particular camel from him. The partner of

¹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Book of *al-Ṭibb*, Chapter 30, Ḥadīth 5728.

² *Ibid*, Ḥadīth 5730.

³ *Qur'ān* 2:243.

Nawwās returned to Nawwās and informed him: ‘We have sold the camel.’ Nawwās asked him: ‘To whom have you sold it?’ He replied: ‘To an elderly man who had such-and-such physical appearance.’ Nawwās spoke out: ‘Pity on you! By Allāh! That was Ibn ‘Umar [ra].’ So, Nawwās then came to Ibn ‘Umar [ra] and said: ‘My partner has sold an ill camel to you, and he did not recognise you too.’ Ibn ‘Umar [ra] replied: ‘Take the camel back.’” The narrator reports that when Nawwās began to take the camel away, Ibn ‘Umar [ra] spoke out: “Leave that camel here. We remain pleased with the decision of the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ that no illness (by itself) can be transmitted.”⁴

In the days of ignorance, people held the belief that some diseases and illnesses are transmitted by themselves. Whether Allāh ﷻ wills it or not, when a healthy person approaches a diseased person, the disease enters the body of the healthy person by itself. In order to reject this false belief from the days of ignorance, the noble Prophet ﷺ stated that diseases do not transmit and multiply by themselves, for if that is the case, then how did the first person get the disease? Thus, Abū Hurayrah [ra] narrates that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said: “There is no transmission of disease, and no bad omen in the month of Ṣafar or of an owl.” A Bedouin then questioned: “What about my camels? They travel fast on sand like deer, but when a camel suffering from mange (a type of skin disease) mingles with them, they all get infected with mange too.” The Prophet ﷺ said: “Then from who did the first camel catch the disease?”⁵

Water in itself does not have the ability to quench thirst because the actual Doer and the One to cause all effects is indeed Allāh ﷻ, who created the ability to quench thirst within water, thereby making it a consequential means (*sabab*) for quenching thirst. Similarly, diseases do not transmit themselves on their own independent accord, rather just as Allāh ﷻ has made means (*asbab*) for many other things, He has also made transmission of certain diseases to be the means for additional disease and illness. In this regard, two narrations are presented here:

- Walīd ibn ‘Abdillāh [ra] narrates that the noble

Prophet ﷺ passed by an individual affected by leprosy, so he covered his blessed nose. He was questioned: “O Messenger of Allāh! Have you not said that there is no transmission of disease nor bad omen?” The noble Prophet ﷺ responded: “Why not.”⁶

- Abū Hurayrah [ra] narrates that the noble Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said: “There is no transmission of disease, no bad sign and no bad omen of an owl or in the month of Ṣafar. Flee from a person suffering from leprosy just like you flee from a lion.”⁷ In the commentary to this prophetic tradition (*ḥadīth*), al-‘Aynī writes that Allāh ﷻ has made the mingling of a healthy person with a sufferer of leprosy a highly likely cause for the transmission of this disease. Therefore, the Prophet ﷺ has warned of this danger, which may come about at the time of making contact with the sufferer of leprosy only by the will and command of Allāh ﷻ.⁸

Reward of martyrdom

- Ḥafṣah bint Sirīn states that Anas ibn Mālik [ra] asked her: “What caused the death of Yaḥyā (your brother)?” She replied: “(He died due to) The plague.” So Anas [ra] then informed her that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said: “Plague is martyrdom for every Muslim (who dies from it).”⁹
- Abū Hurayrah [ra] narrates that the noble Prophet ﷺ said: “The one who dies from an abdominal illness is a martyr, and the one who dies from a plague is a martyr.”¹⁰
- Sayyidah ‘Ā’ishah [ra] narrates that she asked the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ about plague and the noble Prophet of Allāh ﷺ said to her: “Plague is punishment which Allāh ﷻ sends down upon whoever He wishes, but Allāh ﷻ has made it a mercy for the believers. If a plague breaks out in someone’s land and he remains in his land with patience whilst being certain that the only difficulty that will befall him is the one ordained by Allāh ﷻ for him, then he will receive reward like the reward of a martyr.”¹¹

⁶ *Muṣannaf Ibn Abī Shaybah*, volume 6, page 622.

⁷ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Book of *al-Ṭibb*, Chapter 19, Ḥadīth 5707.

⁸ *‘Umdat al-Qārī*, volume 21, page 247.

⁹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Book of *al-Ṭibb*, Chapter 30, Ḥadīth 5732.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, Ḥadīth 5733.

¹¹ *Ibid*, Ḥadīth 5734.

⁴ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Book of *al-Buyū’*, Chapter 36, Ḥadīth 2099.

⁵ *Ibid*, Book of *al-Ṭibb*, Chapter 25, Ḥadīth 5717.

A martyr (*shahīd*) is someone who has been unjustly killed, be that someone who is killed in battle or is killed by a rebel, enemy of Islām or a robber.¹²

The ruling for a martyr is that his body is not to be washed and the very clothes that he was wearing at the time of martyrdom become his shroud. On the Day of Judgement, when the martyr is resurrected, his blood will be pouring out from his body. It will appear to be blood, but it will be emitting the fragrance of musk. Just as Abū Hurayrah [*ra*] narrates that the noble Prophet ﷺ said: “Every wound that a Muslim suffers in the way of Allāh ﷻ will be fresh on the Day of Judgement exactly as it was on the day that it occurred. The blood will be flowing from it; its colour will be that of blood, but its fragrance will be that of musk.”¹³

In the above prophetic traditions (*ahādīth*), two types of martyrs are mentioned. However, in another *ḥadīth*, five types of martyrs have been mentioned. Just as Abū Hurayrah [*ra*] narrates that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said: “There are five martyrs: The one who dies due to plague; the one who dies from an abdominal disease; the one who dies by way of drowning; the one who dies by being buried under something that has fallen; and the one who is martyred in the way of Allāh ﷻ.”¹⁴ A further four types of martyrs are mentioned in the following *ḥadīth*: Sa‘īd ibn Zayd [*ra*] narrates that the noble Prophet ﷺ said: “The one who is killed while protecting his property is a martyr. The one who is killed while protecting his family, and the one who is killed trying to protect himself, and the one who is killed while safeguarding his religion, all of them are martyrs.”¹⁵

Similarly, some *ahādīth* have mentioned three types and others have mentioned seven types according to the context and circumstances in which they were uttered by the noble Prophet ﷺ. In addition, individually many different types of death have also been given the status of martyrdom. Nonetheless, the real and actual martyr is the one stated in the definition above; the one who is neither given a ritual bath nor a shroud, but is buried in his own clothes that he had been wearing at the time of martyrdom.

¹² *Al-Aḥkām al-Fiqhiyyah*.

¹³ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Book of *al-Wuḍū’*, Chapter 71, Ḥadīth 237.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, Book of *al-Jihād*, Chapter 30, Ḥadīth 2829.

¹⁵ *Sunan Abi Dāwūd*, Book of *al-Sunnah*, Chapter 28, Ḥadīth 4772.

The other types of martyrs that have been stated in various *ahādīth* are martyrs in the figurative sense as opposed to being real martyrs. In other words, they are only classified as martyrs in the hereafter, but in this world, they are not treated as martyrs as regards religious rulings. So they will be given a ritual bath and a shroud just like other normal Muslims. Allāh ﷻ will grant them the lofty status and reward of martyrdom. There will, however, be a substantial difference in reward and status between real and figurative martyrs.¹⁶



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¹⁶ *Tafhīm al-Bukhārī*, volume 3, page 709.