COVID-19 FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ISLAMIC THEOLOGY AND SPIRITUALITY

MOHAMMED FARID ALI AL-FIJAWI

IIUM

IAIS Malaysia Online Discussion Series

09 July 2020

Holistic Management of Covid-19

- We are not in the starting stage of Covid-19, but in the management stage.
- A pandemic like Covid-19 requires a holistic management approach.
- Prevention, treatment, social support and emotional management all have to come into play.
- The Qur'an and the Hadith provides excellent guidance for the holistic management of pandemics.
- The last three months of covid-19 saw scholars presenting verses of the Qur'an, Prophet's hadiths, Islamic rulings, and moral teachings.
- All these deliberations provide an outline for the management of covid-19 from various perspectives.
- Are these deliberations in line with the Islamic Spirituality concept?

What is Islamic Spirituality?

- Islamic spirituality is the presence of a relationship with Allah that affects the individual's self-worth, sense of meaning, and connectedness with others and nature.

- This is the core theme of Islam that comprises beliefs, rituals, daily-living behaviours, and knowledge.

- Belief in Allah and His Prophets, judgment day etc. are lived out daily in spirituality, ways of relating to Allah, others, nature, and the self.

- In following the set of rituals and codes of Islamic religion, an individual is striving to become closer to Allah and find personal worth and actualization.

ATG (Attachment to God)

- Almighty Allah is the attachment Figure in Islamic Spirituality
- Almighty Allah functions as the supportive attachment figure, the safe haven wherein the individual is soothed and comforted in times of threat.
- The attachment figure becomes the individual's secure base. From there he/she explores and finds courage to engage with the challenges of life.
- Studies such as of Kirkpatrict et al. (1998) found that close relation with God was associated with reduced loneliness, depression, anxiety, and physical illness.

Cont'd

- Studies show that people who have secured attachment with God, have better coping abilities.

- Insecure attachment to God is associated with negative mental health outcomes.

Iman (Faith) and Attachment Qualities

- Islamic faith (Iman) is the starting point of the attachment bond for the believers' relationships with Almighty Allah. The derivatives of the Arabic word "Iman" convey meanings such as: safety (Qur'an 2:125), peace (Qur'an 24:55), security (Qur'an 6:81), certainty (Qur'an 2:260), and amin trustworthiness (Qur'an 26:107). Those who have faith experience security with Allah (Qur'an 6:82), and with believers who trust in Allah and His messenger (Qur'an 24:62).

- Pondering on the Arabic root of 'Iman' (faith) in Islamic theology reveals that "to be secure", trust, entrust, and the state of safety are included in the meaning of faith. Each of these terms supports the importance of Allah as an attachment figure providing security in Islamic theology.

The Divine Attributes of Allah

- Some Divine attributes of Allah reflect the qualities of an ideal attachment figure.

- Each name from the 99 names of Allah has a specific effect in regulating Divine relations with people.

- Key among the attachment salient Divine attributes is *Al-Mu'min – The Preserver and bestower of security.* The provision of security lies at the heart of the attachment bond, wherein a threatened individual turns to a stronger other in search of safety. This divine name denotes Allah as the only one who provides security for individuals in the context of either external threats and/or inward temptations (Qur'an 113: 1-5; 114: 1-6).

Cont'd

- Another key attribute of an attachment figure is his/her willingness to respond when protection is sought. The divine name *Al-Mujib -The Responsive* affirms to the Muslim believer that Allah is indeed available and willing to respond when His protection is required, Qur'anic stories revealing Allah's commitment to respond:

- when my servants question you about Me, I am near to answer the call of the caller when they call Me (Qur'an 2:186).

'Safe Haven' and Secure Base'

- Key roles of an attachment figure include (i) provision of safety, wherein the attachment figure acts as a haven and a place of refuge when protection is sought during times of threat and (ii) a secure base from which the protected one can confidently explore, assured of a reliable response from the attachment figure should threat be re-experienced:

"And Jonah departed in anger and thought that We had no power over him; he ended up imploring from the darkness (of the big fish's belly): There is no god other than You. Be You glorified. I have been one of the wrong-doers. So We responded to him and delivered him from his grief. Thus We deliver the believers" (Qur'an. 21: 87-88).

This theme is found in other stories of the Quran.

Omnipresence and *Omniscient*

- One of the divine characters attributed to Allah is His *omnipresence. Revelation indicates that "To Allah belongs the east and the west, wherever you go, there will be the presence of Allah. Allah is Omnipresent, Omniscient* (Qur'an 2: 115).

- Believing that Allah is Omnipresent assures individuals of His availability without limiting Him in "space" or "time" boundaries.

- The closeness of Allah is further revealed in the Qur'an:

He is with us whenever we are (57:4); *He is also closer to us than our jugular vein* (50:16);

He is closer to us than we all are, yet we all do not see (56:85)

"Wherever you turn, there is the face of Allah" (2:115).

Holistic Management of Covid-19 and Spirituality

- Is there any inconsistency between the holistic management of covid-19 guided by Islam and the spirituality concept of Islam?

- The basic misconception in logic and reasoning is that people when ignorant of a logic start assume that the logic does not exist.

- In dealing with Covid-19, many do not know the special guidelines Islam has in storage. These guidelines are meant to be applied whenever people are faced by a pandemic.

- People are comfortable with their routine rituals and common moral teachings. They see these as means to secure attachment to Almighty Allah.

Cont'd

- But what happens, when the special circumstances like Covid-19 disrupt the routine rituals?

- People start to feel insecure because they can longer uphold those routine meajns to secure their ATG. When they are asked not to pray in Masjids, in congregation, not to shake and hug, not to meet family and friends, etc. they start to assume they are no longer living according to their belief, rituals, moral teachings hence they become insecure in ATG and start to experience loneliness, depression, and deterioration of mental wellbeing. All these has an effect on the coping abilities of individuals.

- So it is not the non-existence of Islamic or religious guidance to manage Covid-19 but people's awareness.

Way Forward

- 1. Awareness
- 2. Re-emphasis of Azimah and Rukhsah, and Fiqh Awwaliyat.