

Cleanliness in Islamic Perspective: A Response to covid19 Pandemic

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Abstract: Qur'an is the seal of revelations of Allah, it has revealed on prophet Muhammed peace be upon him in the period of twenty three years, as such, it contains and deals with all aspects of human life from cradle to death. Though, the Qur'an is neither a book of medicine nor a book of healthcare, but in it there are hints which lead to guidelines in health and diseases. Prophet Mohammed (peace and blessings be upon him) has been sent as an example to mankind so his traditions in matters of health and personal hygiene are also a guide for his followers. Being healthy is vital in that, it enables us to undergo our daily life with ease and also to carry out our responsibility as a vicegerent (*khalifah*) of Allah. Surely, a happy and healthy Muslim can do a much better job compared to that done by a sickly one. Hence, being healthy is not only beneficial to our own selves but also to others as well. Likewise, COVID-19 is an infection caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. It emerged in early 2019, and continue to threat human life altogether. Based on the above fact, this article by adopting Quranic approach aims to explore the importance of cleanliness and good hygiene in Islamic worldview as a remedy for current deadly disease of covid19 pandemic. As a matter of fact, the covid19 Pandemic continues to jeopardize people's life nowadays, and in response to this fact various medical solutions have emerged to serve as remedy to this dangerous ailment. Interestingly, one of the remedy of covid 19 that suggested by many doctors and by WHO is physical cleanliness which is an essential part of Islamic value, and indeed the meaning and spirit behind the concept of cleanliness in Islamic perspective is much beyond the superficial concept of the conventional cleanliness. Therefore, in this juncture and for the sake of academic paper, this article will apply Qur'anic approach in demonstrating the importance of cleanliness in Islamic perspective and the scope of this article is restricted on the importance of cleanliness in Islam, Quranic worldview on cleanliness, then the finding will demonstrate how much importance Islam and the Qur'an give to cleanliness; and the result will provide *raison d'être* and justification of the Qur'an as a seal of revelation of God. Finally, the paper will suggest some recommendations that if well implemented, will make our world and surrounding better place to live.

Key words: Healthcare, Integration, Quran, science, Cleanliness, Sunnah al- Nabawiyyah

I. INTRODUCTION

Islamic religion is always focusing on the well-being of the individual and society. To be a good Muslim means to be careful about one's health. Islam is considered to provide proper guidance for the individual in reaching the best level of mental and personal health through worship and faith; as such, cleanliness or purification is one of the great privileges of Islam. Indeed, Islam places great emphasis on cleanliness, in

both physical and spiritual terms. The attention to hygiene is the aspect which is unknown in other religions or philosophies before Islam. While people generally consider cleanliness a desirable attribute, Islam insists on it, making it an indispensable fundamental of faith. Cleanliness is an essential part of Islamic life and in fact the meaning and spirit behind the concept of cleanliness is much beyond the superficial concept of the conventional cleanliness. Thus, in the holy Qur'an, there are a number of verses which shed light at the importance of cleanliness, as purity has been emphasized by various means in hundreds of Hadith of the Prophet (peace be upon him). Hence, the Qur'an advises Muslims to uphold high standards of physical and spiritual hygiene and to be cleaned whenever possible. As long as the health instructions of Islam are clearly communicated to the people through the unique revelation of Islam (Qur'an), and the scientific basis for such instructions seem to be clear, particularly on ongoing global pandemic of covid19, it is worthwhile to say that the remedy for the deadly covid 19 pandemic is undoubtedly hygiene and cleanliness. This fact is also proven by contemporary reliable medical doctors and WHO alike. In the most serious note, the issue of hygiene has been discussed by revelation of Islam since fourteen centuries ago. Thus, this article by applying Quranic approach will attempt to explore vis-a-vis importance of cleanliness in Islamic perspective and how the cleanliness can be a huge prevention from the covid 19 infection. Then, the conclusion will demonstrate the correlation between the cleanliness called by the holy Qur'an and conventional physical cleanliness. Finally, the paper will provide some suggestions and some recommendations.

II. DEFINITION OF THE TERMS

1. Healthcare

Encyclopedia of Britannica (2002) defines healthcare as the maintenance or improvement of health via the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of disease, illness, injury, and other physical and mental impairments in human beings. It means the act of taking preventative or necessary medical procedures to improve a person's well-being. This may be done with surgery, the administering of medicine, or other alterations in a person's lifestyle.

2. Cleanliness.

According to Active Study Dictionary (2001) Cleanliness means that there is no dirt, no dust, no stains, and no bad smells. i.e. the goals of cleanliness are health, beauty, absence

of offensive odor and to avoid the spreading of dirt and contaminants to oneself and others. Cleanliness has been defined by Oxford Dictionary (2001) as the state of being free from dirt or unwanted matters. Whereas, Cambridge English dictionary (2015) describes cleanliness as the state of being clean, or the act of keeping things clean. In short, cleanliness refers to the habitual acts of keeping the dirt away, to maintain good health, following both personal and environmental hygiene practices. In simple words, it refers to the state of being clean.

Covid 19 Pandemic

According to Wikipedia the free Encyclopedia¹, COVID-19 pandemic, also known as the coronavirus pandemic, is an ongoing global pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARCoV-2). The novel virus was first identified from an outbreak in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. Attempts to contain it there failed, allowing the virus to spread worldwide. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30 January 2020 and a pandemic on 11 March 2020. As of 5 April 2022, the pandemic had caused more than 493 million cases and 6.15 million deaths, making it one of the deadliest in history.

Types of Cleanliness

In Islam, there are two types of cleanliness namely physical cleanliness and internal/ spiritual cleanliness. Although, physical cleanliness and spiritual purity are two different sides of cleanliness, however, both are bound up with each other, and this article will focus more on physical cleanliness.

Firstly, physical cleanliness means external cleanliness, it keeps us clean from outside and gives us feeling of wellbeing with confidence, such as keeping our surrounding areas very clean, so that we can live in a healthy and clean environment and in turn, that will keep us away from the epidemic diseases and give us the feeling of social wellbeing. It also deals with cleanliness of our bodies, ranging from face, mouth, cloth and even our skin etc. Coincidentally, one of the remedy for the ongoing pandemic of covid 19 is strongly related to this kind of cleanliness. According to WHO (2020) “on the ways to protect yourself and prevent the spread of covid19”

it urges people to keep good hygiene by following good respiratory hygiene, you protect the people around you from viruses that cause colds, flu and COVID-19. Hence; good hygiene is highly recommended and the following steps are necessary in this regard:

1. Regularly and thoroughly clean your hands with either an alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water. This eliminates germs that may be on your hands, including viruses.
2. Cover your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Dispose of the used tissue immediately into a closed bin and wash your hands.
3. Clean and disinfect surfaces frequently, especially those which are regularly touched, such as door handles, faucets and phone screens.

In fact, this kind of cleanliness (physical cleanliness) and this instruction given by WHO as prevention from covid 19 is more or less the same purification recommended by Islam. This shows the comprehensiveness of Islam as a religion that concerns about the cleanliness as one of its own value and in the most serious note, cleanliness is part of Iman in Islamic worldview, it might even be prerequisite for spiritual and internal cleanliness.

Secondly, internal cleanliness or spiritual cleanliness keeps us mentally peaceful and away from anxiety. Internal cleanliness means a mind absence of dirty, bad and negative thinking. Keeping the heart, body and mind clean and peaceful is the complete cleanliness. In this juncture, we ought to examine the Islamic insight of cleanliness and western perspective of cleanliness. In another word, what is the Islamic perspective of cleanliness and what is the western worldview on cleanliness?

Cleanliness from the western perspective

Although, this humble article is highly concerned about the cleanliness in Islamic perspective, however, it is worthwhile to evaluate the concept of cleanliness in the western worldview, which might help us to understand the subject clearly and concisely. In fact, the terms cleanliness or cleaning and hygiene in western perspective are often used interchangeably. As a matter of fact, hygiene according to the World Health Organization (2009) refers to conditions and practices that help to maintain health and prevent the spread of disease. Medical hygiene therefore includes a specific set of practices associated with this prevention of health, for example environmental cleaning, hand hygiene, water and sanitation and safe disposal of medical waste are such examples of hygiene and the cleaning processes (e.g., hand washing) remove infectious microbes as well as dirt and soil, said Elizabeth (2003) are often the means to achieve hygiene. Whereas, hygiene according to Encyclopedia of Britannica (2002) is a concept related to cleanliness, health and medicine, as well as to personal and professional care practices related to most aspects of living.

In general, hygiene mostly means practices that prevent spread of disease-causing organisms. In this regard, William Shakespeare the renowned English poet, is quoted by Schoenbaum, Samuel (1991) “I’ll purge and leave sack and live cleanly”. It means cleanliness is more essential to Shakespeare than anything else, perhaps, to him the benefit of

¹ Wikipedia is a multilingual open online encyclopedia written and maintained by a community of volunteers through a model of open collaboration, using a wiki-based editing system. Individual contributors, also called editors, are known as Wikipedians. Wikipedia is the largest and most-read reference work in history. It is consistently one of the 15 most popular websites ranked by Alexa; as of 2021, Wikipedia was ranked the 13th most popular site. It is hosted by the Wikimedia Foundation, an American non-profit organization funded mainly through donations

cleanliness is unlimited. Meanwhile, Francis Bacon the father of empiricism is quoted as followed “For cleanliness of body was ever esteemed to proceed from a due reverence to God, to society, and to ourselves” it denotes that physical cleanliness is prerequisite of spiritual one. i.e before you can approach God, someone needs to purify his physical appearance and he should avoid any sort of dirt . Perhaps, this is similar to what stated by John Wesley (2003), when he said that, “Certainly this is a duty, not a sin. Cleanliness is indeed next to godliness.” Thus, it is clear from the views of these gigantic western scholars that cleanliness is not only religious duty, but it is also part of universal ethics and morality.

Cleanliness in Islamic perspective

It is undeniable fact that, Islam which is the seal of revealed religion has paid a huge attention to personal hygiene, either internal or external cleanliness. Therefore, it urges Muslims throughout the world to have extremely high standards of personal hygiene, while mankind in general usually considers cleanliness to be a pleasing attribute, Islam insists on it. Therefore, Muslims are required to take care of their personal hygiene by assuring that they are well groomed, and that their bodies, clothing, and surroundings are clean. The Arabic word for cleanliness according to *al- Muwatta* of Imam Malik (2004) is “*Tahaara*” which denotes to purify or to clean. It means *tahhrah* is opposite of *najasah* which denotes all physical substances which Islam considers impure and commands us to remove them before engaging in an act of worship. This *najasah* argued Azeem (2007) also refers to everything that is repulsive to people of sound nature. As such, they protect themselves from such things and they wash their garments whenever such things fall upon them. Those things include filth, urine and so forth. (al-Rawdah an-Nadiyah, vol 1, p.12).

Cleanliness in the Holy Qur’an

As a matter of fact, the holy Quran is a source of authentic knowledge in Islam, because it is a seal of all revelations of Allah. Therefore, the Qur’an as the final revelation declares that it is an exposition for all things (*Tibyan li kulli shay*) as guidance and mercy, in which nothing is neglected (Al-Nahl 16:89). As such, it includes every aspect of human life from cradle to death. Based on this fact, the issue of cleanliness has repeatedly mentioned in various chapters of the holy Qur’an, for example, in surah *al- Baqarah* the Almighty Allah said that “Truly, God loves those who turn unto Him in repentance and loves those who purify themselves.” (Quran 2:222).

Obviously, the above Ayyah is concerned with two types of cleanliness namely; spiritual cleanliness (repentance) that followed by righteousness and other good deeds. Secondly, physical cleanliness (Purification and cleanliness) such as; cleanliness of our bodies, clothing, and surroundings. Meanwhile, in *Surah al- Maidah*, the physical aspect of purification with particular reference to ablution is elaborated, when Almighty Allah says that: “O you who believe! When you intend to offer the prayer, wash your faces and your hands (forearms) up to the elbows, wipe your heads, and (wash)

your feet up to the ankles. If you are in a state of *Janaba* (i.e. had a sexual discharge) purify yourself.”(Qur’an 5:6). In this regard, Al Gawabi(1967) argues that ablution (*Wudu*) which is needed before performing the prayer (*salat*) is a kind of physical cleanliness and personal purification within the context of religion; he therefore, referred to cleanliness as an obligatory preparation for the prayer. Al- Gawabi further linked between modern sciences (especially medicine) and benefit of ablution that required before establishing regular prayer, he stated that: “ as we talked about the advantage of the prayer, so let start talking about the advantage of ablution as there is no prayer without it. As a matter of fact, the infection could be through the hands mouth, nose or skin. And ablution is a way to purify all these areas. By rinsing the mouth several times as a preparation for prayer is cleaning the mouth and protection for the teeth and the gum at the same time”. Washing our hands during ablution is in line with one of remedy and prevention from infection of covid19, as it is proven today by many doctors that the covid 19 is able to be transmitted through the infected hands.

Meanwhile, by cleaning the nose by putting water through it then blow it out as was prove recently is a prevention from repeated nose infection and also prevention from covid 19 infection. Al- Ghawabi later linked the importance of washing the face, ears and hands during ablution to scientific fact, which is hygienic protection for skin diseases. Evidently, Ablution (*wud’u*) purifies those who perform it.

Cleanliness in the prophetic Sunnah

The Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) says: “Cleanliness is an act of righteousness.”²

“Allah is Beautiful, and He loves beauty.”³

In another hadith, the Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) said: “Allah is good; He is clean and loves cleanliness; He is kind and loves kindness; He is generous and loves generosity. So, clean your yards”⁴

These and other numerous hadith indicate the importance of cleanliness and hygiene in Islamic worldview

III. FACTORS BEHIND THE IMPORTANCE OF CLEANLINESS IN ISLAM

As far as the main source of knowledge about cleanliness in Islam is concerned, the importance of cleanliness has been well demonstrated by the primary source of Islam (revelation) due to the following factors. First, cleanliness is one of the qualities which Allah, the Exalted, loves. He says: "Surely God loves those who repent and He loves those who are always pure." (2:222) He also praised the people of Qiba' and

² Cited by Al-Haythami in his *Majma al-Zawa'id*, Book of Cleanliness; Chapter on thorough washing of fingers 1/236 citing Al-Tabarani.

³ Narrated by Muslim in his *Sunan*, Book of Belief; Chapter on the Prohibition of Hubris 1/93 Hadith No. 91 citing Abdullah bin Mas'oud.

⁴ Narrated by Al-Tirmidhi in his *Sunan*, Book of Urbanity; Chapter on Cleanliness 5/111 - 112 Hadith No. 2799 citing Sa'aid bin al-Musayeb. Abu Issa said this is a strange Hadith.

their love of cleanliness, saying, "A mosque which was founded upon piety from the very first day is more worthy be stood in, in it are men who love to purify themselves, and God loves those who purify themselves."(9:108). Secondly, Purification or cleanliness is considered an inseparable part of faith to the extent that some Muslims mistook the saying: "Cleanliness is a sign of faith"⁵ as a hadith. The actual authentic hadith in this respect says: "Purification is half of faith" (Narrated by Muslim, Ahmad and Al-Tirmidhi).

Thirdly, cleanliness is the pathway to health and strength. That means Islam always inspires the health and strength of Muslims, preparing them to confront and overcome different circumstances and as ammunition for the Muslim group. The menace and the threat of current covid 19 pandemic is such an example that demands continuous cleanliness and hygiene for the purpose of strong health. Indeed, there is no doubt that strong believer is better, and Allah loves him more than the weak believer. Therefore, the Muslim is entrusted with his body must not neglect it until it becomes plagued with disease. According to authentic saying of the Prophet (p.b.u.h) said: "Your body has a right on you." [Agreed upon on the authority of `Abdullah Ibn `Amr, Al-Lu `lu' Wal Marjan (No.715)]

Lastly, cleanliness and pleasant appearance are the characteristics that allow relationships to strengthen amongst people. The sane human being will try to avoid people who are unkempt and untidy. Perhaps, that is the reason why the Prophet emphasized the importance of *Ghusl* or bathing on Friday. Due to these and other eminent factors, cleanliness is not less important in the view of Islam, and the above factors are undoubtedly in compatible with modern sciences.

IV. CONCLUSION

With the arrival of Islam, the concern regarding public health has been tremendously skyrocketed, as Rasulullah SAW himself revealed that prevention is better than cure. With full accordance of the two divine sources which are Al-Quran and As-Sunnah, Islam also emphasizes on practicing a healthy lifestyle together with a healthy climate, conducting activities with low risk of infection, maintaining a clean and safe environment, and accepting any possible constraint while focusing on minimizing any chance of getting detrimental consequences when there is no cure available. In today's world following the Covid-19 outbreak, it is each individual's responsibility to practice social distancing, getting vaccinated, having physical cleanliness and performing self-isolation when necessary as a way to flatten the curve in order to curb the spread of the virus. Furthermore, there is no doubt that human health is a primary concern in Islam and the cleanliness is regarded as an important value that obviously proven by the revelation of Islam, as such; Islam demands cleanliness physically and spiritually; because it can ensure a healthy mind and sound body, and it also improves the quality

of our life. Indeed, cleanliness etymologically, means keeping our body, mind and everything around us clean, this is undoubtedly a good habit which should be cultivated from early life. In the most serious note, good hygiene and good cleanliness (such as washing our hand, proper shower applying hand sanitizers etc..) are able to serve as big prevention from current global covid 19 pandemic. Considering the importance of cleanliness, it has been considered as part of iman by the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) and compared with godliness in Christianity and Judaism. Likewise, the modern science has also proved the importance of cleanliness though; most of the argument of science is based on physical cleanliness. However, the fact remains that cleanliness generally has been proven to be preventive measure for various illness. More interestingly, clean person enjoys his life completely. Perhaps, this is equal to English proverb that said "health is wealth" meaning that, by health we do not mean the absence of physical troubles only, but it is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being. The loss of health is a loss of all happiness. In fact, according to many scientific evidences, dirty environment is always the source of dangerous diseases. Hence, it is obvious that the view of Islam and its revelation about cleanliness is totally in line with human reason and the cleanliness in Islamic worldview is no doubt a good remedy and better cure for ongoing covid 19 outbreak.

V. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Obviously, there's no doubt that cleanliness is a very important value in Islamic worldview, and the revelation of Islam (Qur'an and Sunnah) paid a very huge attention to such value, which shows the necessity of cleanliness as preemptive measure for any possible disease and epidemic. Based on this fact, this humble article, proposes some recommendations that might be a good prevention from covid 19 infection and that might enhance the quality of human life on earth.

1. Revelation with particular reference to the Qur'an and prophetic *sunnah* are compatible and relevant to the study of healthcare with special reference to the subject of cleanliness and hygiene.
2. There is a room for integration between revelation and modern sciences. Because many claims made by the holy Qur'an and the prophetic *sunnah* in the field of health are also justifiable in the physical world. The factors behind the importance of cleanliness in Islam are such examples, which also confirmed by natural sciences and health care sciences.
3. Spiritually, we should clean our heart from various diseases, such as jealousy, hatred brutality, and nurture it with good values and virtues, such as piety (*taqwallah*) Iman justice and righteousness.
4. Physically, we should clean our physical body ranging from hands, nose, mouth and application of hand sanitizers as preemptive measure from covid 19 infections.
5. Lastly, we should remember that our environment and nature are precious gift from Allah to man, they are

⁵ Muhyideen Abi Zakariya, (1991) Riyadh al-Salihin, Baab al Taharah, Darul Khair, Damascus

created purposely as subservience to serve human beings, therefore, man should never do such things that pollute or contaminate the environment in any way.

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