

## AIDS: A MORAL PERSPECTIVE

*Is AIDS a Punishment of Allāh?*

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While AIDS could be contracted for a variety of reason, not necessarily relative to promiscuity. However this fact cannot be decided that the most common cause is indeed a promiscuity/immoral behaviour. Thus it is a moral/ethical as much, if not, more than a Health problem. Accordingly, preventative measures encouraging morality and righteousness will serve the fight against AIDS far better than flawed solutions to the problem.

In this regard Islām offers a wide range of measures.

a) **Self-Purification**

(This is to equip ourselves spiritually through the means of Salāt, sadaqah, etc. so that the inclination towards sin is minimal)

b) **Punitive Steps**

(Islāmīc Law of Hudūd) which regulates a person external behaviour for the benefit of the society.

c) **Preventative Measures**

(Blocking all avenues leading to immorality)

- i. Tell the believing men to lower their gaze (from looking at forbidden things), and protect their private parts (from illegal sexual acts,) etc.) That is purer for them. Verily, Allāh is All-Aware of what they do. (An-Nur (24), Ayah 30)
- ii. And tell the believing women to lower their gaze (from looking at forbidden things), and protect their private parts (from illegal sexual acts, etc.) (An-Nur (24), Ayah 31)
- iii. And come not near to the adultery [zina]. "For it is a shameful deed and an evil, opening the road to other evils." (Al-Isra (17), Ayah 32)
- iv. It is related by Omar that the Apostle of God said: "It can never be that a man met a strange woman (Naa-Mahram) when they were alone, and a third, (the Devil), was not present (at the time or place)". (Tirmidhi)

### Is AIDS a Punishment of Allāh?

Muslim unlike their Western counterparts have a firm belief in divine retribution. In spite of the obvious disciplinary message of the AIDS pandemic, Western modernity strongly refuses to accept is retributive attribute and responds to any form of ethical and religious moralisation with repulsive protesting and sarcasm. Very few Western thinkers can see the moral message in the AIDS pandemic.

### Islāmīc Message of Divine Retribution

Islām portrays a very optimistic, merciful and rational conception of divine retribution. The Holy Qur'ān clearly states that God's punishment in this world is meant to ward off more serious future pains and agonies and to coerce the sinful to repent and secure God's forgiveness:

*"And indeed We will make them taste the penalty (and pain) of this life prior to supreme penalty, in order that they may repent and return"* (Al-Sajdah (32) 21).

Also, human anguish is a Divine test to wipe out sins and to elevate the spiritual position of the suffering person. As the Prophet Muhammad *Sallallāhu 'alayhi wasallam* said, *"There is always a reward to the Muslim from Allāh for even the slightest pain he incurs, even if it is the prick of a thorn."* (Al-Bukhari).

These Islāmīc teachings about Allāh's retribution within the Divine conceptualisation of His mercy give Muslims a deep belief that any misfortune befalling an individual is God's work for some sins he has committed or because Allāh wants to test and reward him. This is further ratified and explained in the most accurate and detailed exposition by a famous saying of the Prophet Muhammad *Sallallāhu 'alayhi wasallam* in which he speaks as though he miraculously describes the contemporary dilemma of the AIDS pandemic. The famous hadith quoted and authenticated by 'Ibn Majah and other ancient hadith scholars is translated as follows:

*"If fahishah or fornication and all kinds of sinful sexual intercourse become rampant and openly practised without inhibition in any group or nation, Allāh will punish them with new epidemics [ta'un] and new diseases which were not known to their forefathers and earlier generations."*

Muslims however should make a difference between:



- a) A collective general approach on this issue
- b) A specific individual approach.

On a collective general level, Muslims should not be apologetic in speaking against immorality and its resultant consequences. However, if an individual/specific person contracts AIDS, we should have a different approach.

This attitude we learn from none other than the beloved Nabî *Sallallâhu 'alayhi wasallam*. Whenever He, *Sallallâhu 'alayhi wasallam* found someone commit a wrong that needed to be corrected in public for the education of others, He, *Sallallâhu 'alayhi wasallam*, would mention it in general terms, not naming the person –a practice that shows the two extremes in this regard that must be avoided. On the one hand, is the temptation to compromise on the issue of right and wrong in order to avoid hurting any feelings. On the other, is the temptation to correct the wrong with total disregard to the fact that one might be insulting or injuring the other person.

There are also other reasons for this approach.

- 1) AIDS is not always contracted through promiscuity. Allâh in the Qur'ân says: "Why did not the believers, when they heard of the scandal (Hadhrat Ayesha *RadiAllâhu anha* incident) formulate a good opinion of their own people. Why then, did not the believers, men and women, when you heard it (the slander) think good of their own people and say: "This (charge) is an obvious lie?" (An-Nur (24), Ayah 12) Mufti Shafi Saheb *Rahmatullâh 'alayhi*, writes that according to this verse, it is compulsory to formulate a good opinion about your Muslim brother/sister and avoid suspicion.
- 2) Islam aims at a society which is based on clarity of conscience, mutual trust and not on doubt, suspicion and accusation. It is a sin to ascribe evil to a person merely on speculation. The Qur'ân says: "O you who believe, avoid suspicion. (Al-Hujurât, (49), Ayah 12).

Adverse opinion can only be formed, if one has tangible evidence. Our Dîn further teaches that even if suspicion is aroused, dismiss rather than delve into it. Nabî *Sallallâhu 'alayhi wasallam* has said: "When suspicion is aroused, do not pursue it." (Tibrani)

- 3) Even if perceived that an individual has contracted HIV/AIDS due to a liberated lifestyle we are not allowed in Sharî'ah to be judgmental on the fortunes of the individual concerned. One needs to draw a distinction between an evil act and the perpetrator. Hate the act and not the perpetrator. Examples abound from the life of Nabî *Sallallâhu 'alayhi wasallam* including the example of the woman from Ghamidiyya. Examples abound from the life of Nabî *Sallallâhu 'alayhi wasallam* including the example of the woman from Ghamidiyya. Who insisted on being sanctified after committing an evil act. Upon her purification, Nabi *Sallallâhu 'alayhi wasallam* expressed his high appreciation of her by saying "She has offered such repentance that if it is spread over Madina, it will suffice for the entire city."
- 4) Door of tawbah is open until death. We in such a situation need to help a person towards repentance. "Allâh accepts a person's repentance until he reaches the throes of death." (Hadith)
- 5) Great emphasis has been placed in Islam on sympathy for a sick person. "Whoever visits a sick person, 70,000 Angels pray for his forgiveness." (Hadith)
- 6) The worst things that can happen is to leave a person without hope in the Mercy of Allâh On the authority of Abu Huraira *RadiAllâhu anhu* who reported that a man who had drunk wine was brought to the Holy Prophet *Sallallâhu 'alayhi wasallam* and he told us to beat him, and some struck him with their hands, some with their sandals and some with their garments. When he (the drunkard) came back, some of the people said: "May Allâh disgrace you!" He (the Holy Prophet) *Sallallâhu 'alayhi wasallam* said: "Do not say so. Do not help Satan against him." (Bukhari).  
Hadhrat Alî *RadiAllâhu anhu* saw a person despondent after committing a sin and told him: "Your despondency is worse than the act committed."
- 7) Compassion should be overriding factor in dealing with people living with HIV/AIDS. "He who does not show mercy to others will not be shown mercy by the Almighty." (Hadith)

