

The Divine Wisdom behind Disease – Medical and Islamic Philosophy of Pain and Suffering

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No doctor or a pharmacist, nor any person (whoever they may be) is immune from disease, suffering, and calamities. Everyone has a share of it; no one is spared from the disease. Many doctors suffer from allergic diseases, many leaders suffer from cancer, many great people suffer from back pain, and many children are deformed, disabled, or handicapped. Furthermore, the doctor may even die from a disease that he used to treat himself, and the sick person may live contrary to all medical indications for his impending death!

No plant, nor an animal, not even inanimate matter is excluded from disease (!); many barren lands and wastelands are infested with plague, many pools of water spread cholera, and many houses are contaminated with deadly bacteria, and many stones are home to fungi.

The important puzzling question

So, why did God create disease? A question that is not answered by most (if not all) medical colleges in the world; they do not even teach, despite the fact that the question is at the heart of the medical profession, and it is a question that has serious consequences in human thought and in peoples' culture.

Many atheists rejected the existence of God because they could not reconcile God the Almighty, the All-Knowing, the Merciful, with the creation of disease, evil, and suffering in life. Not answering this question prompted sceptics such as the famous Cambridge cosmologist and black hole professor Stephen Hawking, author of 'Short History of Time', and the Four Philosophers of Atheism: Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and Daniel Dennett for declaring that there is no God (God). Indeed, Stephen Hawking (before his death in March 2018 at age of 76) became daring in criticizing the belief of Isaac Newton and Einstein in God, for example: "So Einstein was wrong when he said: "God does not

play dice." Looking at black holes suggests, not only that God plays dice, but sometimes He confuses us by scattering black holes where we can't look for them." (See: Does God Play Dice? 1996). It is a wonder that such atheists persisted in their belief despite their imperfect knowledge. The burden of the disease casted a heavy shadow on Hawking, who was diagnosed with Motor Neuron Disease, at age of 21 years old, when doctors have announced that he will not live more than two years, yet he struggled with the disease with determination and composure until he exceeded the age of 76, which is longer than what the doctors expected. Hawking should have thanked God for giving him a long life, giving him the opportunity in theoretical physics instead of his atheism and denial of God's existence (!). After a while, the disease made him paralyzed, but he was nevertheless able to match and even surpass his peers in physicists, although their bodies were healthy and they could write complex equations and do their long calculations on paper, while Hawking was doing the calculations in his mind. Proud to have had the same title and professorial chair as Sir Isaac Newton, Hawking became an icon in the will to challenge disability and disease that lasted nearly 55 years. With the progression of his illness, and because of his tracheostomy due to bronchitis, Hawking became unable to speak or move his arm or foot, that is, he became completely unable to move, so the American company Intel Corporation for processors and digital systems in Santa Clara, California (in the Silicon Valley), has developed a special computer system connected to his chair, through which Hawking can control the movement of his chair, communicate using an electronic generator voice, and issue commands through the movement of his eyes and head, as he outputs data previously stored in the device representing words and commands.

Although the church was never a part of Hawking's life, and although his first Catholic wife left him because of

his atheism, the family decided to hold a burial ceremony in the church to avoid criticism and curse after his death. There were 500 invited guests to Hawking's funeral (held March 31, 2018) at St Mary's Great Church in Cambridge (England). Despite Hawking's atheism, his children Lucy, Robert, and Tim chose this prestigious church to bid him farewell. His children issued a statement justifying this: "Our father's life and work mean many things to many people, religious and non-religious alike. Therefore, the service will be both inclusive and traditional, reflecting the breadth and diversity of his life."

The Great Wisdom behind Diseases

Such great wisdom can be classified under two major headings: medical wisdom and religious (Islamic) wisdom.

A. Medical wisdom (Pure):

Perhaps starting with medical reasons is appropriate here to satisfy the cross-section of sceptics and atheists in God as a material evidence and concrete proof (before tackling religious wisdom, although both are linked to the divine will):

1. **For the advancement of medicine, surgery, midwifery, medical laboratory analyses and pharmacology for diseases** that were previously unknown to be treated, such as diabetes and the discovery of insulin for its treatment, treatment of fevers and infectious diseases by the discovery of penicillin, and for advanced treatment against viruses, microbes and various parasites: And God Almighty has spoken the truth by saying: (And He creates what you do not know)(ويخلق ما لا تعلمون). Now, syphilis, tuberculosis, smallpox, cholera, plague, and polio have all become diseases of the ancient past due to the discovery of vaccines and antibiotics. The same will be applied to COVID-19 vaccination.
2. **To show the weakness and insignificance of arrogant Man, since the simplest organisms such as viruses, bacteria and parasites can cause him diseases that can exhaust him and weaken him, as a deterrent to keep him humble.** How sweet are the words of the international actor Clint Eastwood at the end of the movie (Magnum Force 1973) in his famous saying: (A man got to know his limitations).
3. **In order to know locations of the epidemic, as no one goes to the places of infection for the sake of 'Quarantine Principle', which is a great Islamic principle engineered by the Prophetic hadith: [if an epidemic (plague) befalls a land, do not enter it, or leave it, in order to escape from it (i.e., from the epidemic or the plague)].**
4. **For the livelihood, livelihood of medical professional earnings of doctors, surgeons, laboratory analysts, pharmacists, nurses, and midwives.**
5. **To balance the numbers of human beings, birth versus death,** as deadly diseases and fatal accidents put the scales back in line in balance with the new-borns.
6. **To activate and strengthen the immune system against diseases by forming antibodies.**
7. **To regenerate tissues** in the affected organ by the process of wound healing in order to replace the dead and the old tissues with new active one.
8. **Human life has become longer than in the past due to advances in treating diseases and food sciences.** Perhaps the average lifespan of the Japanese is the longest in the world (80 years) due to their fondness for eating raw and cooked fish, while the average lifespan of Africans is the shortest in the world due to the spread of infectious diseases and the rampant violence.
9. **For self-education and prophylaxis and how to treat diseases by self-education,** you only know pain, indigestion, diarrhoea, dyspepsia, cough only by living through it and learning how to treat it and to prevent it. The flu remains unknown, no matter how much we talk about it, until you are being infected by it, so the lesson is taken by staying away from infected people and by immunization. For instance, food poisoning due to mayonnaise (raw eggs) in hot climate is better to be avoided in summer and in tropical areas. Food poisoning due to contamination during cooking as in Delhi belly and in Baghdad belly.
10. **To adapt to the new food (dieting or *Behriz*) (the wisdom of the ancients: the stomach is the home of disease and dieting is half the medicine, and in the Arabic advice: We are a people who do not eat until we are hungry, and if we eat, we do not fill-**

up). Eat what is suitable for the stomach. Refraining from spices, pepper, pickles, citrus, and fried food; and by eating dairy products (such as non-sour buttermilk, cheese, custard, and ice cream) and fresh natural food in its season instead of canned food preserved with artificial and harmful preservatives is preferable.

11. To control genetic and family diseases when genetic conditions appear in consanguineous marriages. And here comes the prophetic wisdom in the miraculous hadith: “get married to non-relatives, so that you are not weakened” (اغتربوا حتى لا تضووا) That is, marrying strangers to prevent offspring weakness.

12. To consult a doctor early. Pain, lack of appetite, nausea and vomiting may be an incentive to discover a disease earlier as in cancer and treat it in its early stages before it eventually spreads and becomes an incurable disease. It is noticeable that Western patients go to the doctor at the beginning of the disease because of health education and the philosophical vision that the worldly life is everything there, while the Eastern people sought medical advice late, not afraid of death, contrary to the wonderful prophetic advice:

(O’ servants of God, seek medical treatment, for God has not sent down a disease without a remedy, except for death) (يا عباد الله تداووا فإن الله ما أنزل داءً إلا له دواء إلا (السام – أي الموت).

13. Economically, sickness is a blessing in disguise, it is a reason for job-rest by taking extended and renewable sick leave with full salary. If the disease causes functional disability, disability benefit will be given, especially in the West, and the disabled person qualifies for early retirement (Early retirement on ill basis).

14. Illness is a station for contemplation, and self-review and audit before death, and the patient becomes wise after illness before death, so he begins to take matters seriously making dangerous decisions in distributing his possessions and properties, while alive. An incurable disease, especially cancer, is an opportunity to contemplate ‘**Bucket list**’ or **wish list** of the dying patients, mobilizing his energy to fulfil them before death is too late. There are rich people with incurable and fatal stomach or colon diseases who made their **wills** before death by donating their property and money to hospitals and charities.

15. Illness is an opportunity for the patient to contemplate on his deathbed to reconsider the priorities in life. Many Westerners have converted to Islam, as in the case of the international singer ‘**Cat Stevens**’ after his tuberculosis and drowning while swimming in Malibu when he almost died. In his near-death experience, he sworn If God saves his life and heals him, he will embrace Islam, so he did and changed his name to ‘**Yusuf Islam**’. The patient may write a will to transfer his property to charitable organizations. For example, the Superman character, represented by ‘**Christopher Reeve**’, after suffering from Tetraplegia, after falling from a horse, began to feel the pain of others with spinal cord injuries. He subsequently donated his money to fund research on the growth and repair of nerve tissue in the spinal cord; Perhaps research on stem cells was one of the fruits of this effort.

16. Patients with incurable diseases such as cancers, colon diseases and heart failure, for example, constitute a good sample for a fertile field of research on drug experiments and other therapeutic interventions in order to find an ideal treatment to help others.

17. The dying patient in the West is encouraged to donate his organs after death for the purpose of organ transplantation in neighbourhoods such as donation of the cornea of the eye, kidney, heart, liver, lungs and, more recently, face transplantation, provided that the death of the patient is not due to septicaemia or cancer (except for brain cancer that It is allowed because it does not usually spread outside the skull). Also, fatal viral diseases induce blood withdrawal and transfusion, especially the extraction of blood serum, for example, from patients with deadly viral infections to save others.

18. Just as illness is a source of livelihood for doctors, pharmacists, and laboratory analysts, death after illness is also a source of livelihood for “mortician”, “funeral director”, and “undertaker, “to bury the dead, in addition to purchasing lands and burial grounds for the dead, and in the West, there are places for crematorium.

B. The Religious (Islamic) wisdom of the disease:

1. To know the grace of God upon us with health by its loss (by disease) and to appreciate the blessing of wellness by its existence (things are known by their

contrasts). Ibn Taymiyah says in the Minhaj of the Prophetic Sunnah: (The creation of one of the opposites contradicts the creation of the other opposite, for the creation of the disease that brings about the servant's humiliation to his Lord, his supplication, his repentance from his sins, and his atonement for his sins, and softening his heart, and removing his pride, grandeur, and aggression, is against the creation health, with which these interests do not occur).

2. **Then to thank God and praise Him when patient has recovered from what have afflicted others**, as in the famous saying (Praise be to God who saved us from what afflicted others),
(الحمد لله الذي عافنا مما ابتلى به غيرنا)
(Health is a crown on the heads of the healthy), so Man is filled with peace of mind
3. **He learns from illness to be content with God's decree and predestination:** يقنع بقضاء الله وقدره
The companions of the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, gave us the most wonderful examples in this regard, and they achieved the highest ranks in that, realizing in that his saying, peace and blessings be upon him: (And to believe in destiny, its good and its evil). God creates everything as much. So, he knows that the disease that is destined for him is only a test, (Perhaps a harmful event is beneficial) (رُبَّ ضَارَةٍ نَافِعَةٍ) (It may be that you hate a thing and God will make in it a lot of good) An-Nisa: 19.

Sickness is a divine gift that comes in the form of an ordeal. "If God wants good for a servant, He tests him,". The Prophet, may God's prayers and peace be upon him, says: (If God wants good for His servant, He hastens the punishment for him in this world, and if He intends evil for His servant, He withholds from him his sin until He recompenses him for it on the Day of Resurrection) Narrated by Al-Tirmidhi and authenticated. Al-Hassan Al-Basri said: (Do not hate the calamities that occur and the curses that occur, because in what you hate is your salvation, and in a matter, you like, is your destruction). Illness is the permanent law of life, so that a person learns that his worldly life is a permanent test, and his faith in God's decree and destiny increases, whether it is good or evil (apparently evil, as it seems to us).

The Almighty said: (We shall test you with something of fear, hunger, lack of money and lives and fruits, and glad tidings to the patients) Cow: 155. The acts of God are all full of wisdom.

Ibn al-Qayyim says in 'igathat al-lahfan' or healing the sick: (The Lord, Glory be to Him, never does evil, but rather His actions are all good, good, and wise, as the Almighty said: (In Your hand is the good) (بِيَدِكَ الْخَيْرُ) (Al Imran: 26). He does not create pure evil from all aspects).

Ibn Uthaymeen said: (God created everything good and evil, but evil is not attributed to Him, because He created evil for wisdom, thus it is converted to good in His wisdom. Things created can be one of 3 types:

- **Pure evil**, such as fire and Satan, considering their selves; but considering the wisdom for which God created them, it is good.
- **Pure good**, such as heaven, messengers, and angels.
- **There is good and evil in it**, such as humans, jinn, and animals. (Fatwas of Ibn Uthaymeen).

4. **With sickness, a person shows all kinds of devotion to God, such as fear and humility. Illness inflicts upon a Muslim a lot of harm and adversity, which leads him to fears, until it leads him to monotheism, and his heart become attracted to his Lord alone, so he calls Him sincerely to heal him.** It is narrated that when Urwa bin Al-Zubayr was afflicted by gangrene of the leg (likely to be diabetic), he said: "Oh God, I had seven sons, so You took one and kept six, and I had four limbs, so You took one limb and kept three, and if I was afflicted, I recovered." And if you took something, you kept something. Then he looked at his leg in the basin after it had been cut off and said: God knows that I have never led you to sin, and I know.

Al-Fadl bin Sahl, the minister of al-Ma'mun became ill one day, and when he recovered, he sat down to the people, so they congratulated him and said: "In the ills, there are blessings that sane people should know. A scrutiny of guilt and exposure to the reward of patience, awakening from negligence, a remembrance of grace in a state of health, a summons to repentance, an exhortation to charity, and faith in God's decree and destiny after given the choice".

5. **Encouragement and Incitement to supplication:** Imam Ahmad and Ibn Majah narrated on the

authority of Thawban, that the Messenger of God, may God's prayers and peace be upon him, said:

(Nothing will turn back fate except supplication, and nothing will increase life except righteousness).

(لا يرد القدر إلا الدعاء ولا يزيد في العمر إلا البر)

6. **The rule of isolation (Quarantine Principle) and to treat God's destiny by God's destiny:** Omar Ibn Al-Khattab went out to Syria, and when he reached 'Sar'a', he met people of Ajnad battle (Abu Ubaidah bin Al-Jarrah and his companions), so they told him that the epidemic had occurred in the Levant, Ibn Abbas said: Omar said: Call for me the first immigrants So I called them, so he consulted them and told them that the epidemic had occurred in the Levant, but they differed (in opinions).

Some of them said: You have come out for a matter, and we do not think you should turn back from it, and some of them said: The rest of the people and the companions of the Messenger of God, may God's prayers and peace be upon him, are with you, and we do not think that you should precede them over this epidemic. He said: leave me alone and call the Ansar (the supporters), but they took the same path of the Emigrants, and they differed as their differences, so he said: Invite the sheikhs of Quraysh from the Emigrants of the Conquest, so I called them, and two men did not disagree about it, they said: We see that you return the people and do not lead them to this epidemic, so Omar called out to the people: I am waking in the morning and at noon, they came to him. 'Abu Ubaidah bin Al-Jarrah' said: Fleeing from God's decree?! Omar said: "If someone else said it, O Abu Ubaidah - and Omar hated disagreeing with him — **yes, we flee from God's destiny by God's destiny.** What do you think if you had camels? and descended into a valley that had two areas, one of them fertile and the other barren, is it not that if you graze them the lush, you graze them by destiny of God, and if you graze them the barren, you graze them by destiny of God?" He said: So 'Abd al-Rahman bin Auf' came and was absent engaged in some of his needs, and said: I have the knowledge of this, I heard the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, say: **[if an epidemic (plague) befalls a land, do not enter it, or leave it, in order to escape from it (i.e. from the epidemic or the plague)].** Omar Ibn Al-Khattab said: Praise be to God, then he left.

The witness in the story here is the words of Umar, may God be pleased with him, to Abu Ubaidah: **"yes, we flee from God's destiny by God's destiny."**

This word that the inspiring Caliph uttered has become immortal and clarifies the matter decisively.

7. **Giving reasons to see doctors, not just treatment by performing the legal 'ruqyah', and drinking holly water of Zamzam, and praying a lot, and not despairing.** For example, having cancer does not mean death from it or the inability to recover from it as some might imagine. Imam Muslim narrated on the authority of Jaber, that the Prophet, may God's prayers and peace be upon him, said: **"For every disease there is a cure. And the appropriate medicine hit that particular disease, he will be cured, God willing.**

On the authority of Anas, he said: The Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, said: **"God the Mighty and the Majestic commanded that wherever the disease is created, the medicine is created too, so seek medical treatment."** Narrated by Ahmad on the authority of Osama bin Sharik, he said: The Bedouins said: O Messenger of God, shall we not seek medical treatment? He said: **(Yes, O servants of God, seek medication, for God has not created a disease without creating a cure for it, except for one disease. They asked: O Messenger of God, what is it? He said: Al-Haram).** Narrated by Al-Tirmidhi. (Al-Haram) is the terminal disease and weakness of the elderly, and it has no cure.

8. **For the sake of illness, he learned patience, endurance and strong will. Patience in this world will bring about a high degree on the Day of Resurrection (Only the patient will be paid their wages without reckoning)**

(إنما يوفى الصابرون أجورهم بدون حساب).

Narrated that Anas: (The greatest reward goes to the greatest affliction, and that if God loved folk, He tests them, whoever is pleased God will be pleased with him, and whoever has discontent, God will be discontented with him." Narrated by Al-Tirmidhi.

(إن عظم الجزاء من عظم البلاء، وإن الله إذا أحب قوماً ابتلاهم، فمن رضي فله الرضا، ومن سخط فله السخط)

Thus, the greater the affliction, the greater the reward, for the easy affliction has a small reward, and the severe affliction has a great reward, and this is from the grace of God Almighty over His servants.

This does not contradict the legitimacy of asking God for wellness, guarding against the causes of illness and calamity, and searching for medicine and treatment after a disease has occurred. Grumbling is contrary to contentment with God destiny. There is nothing wrong with showing one's pain, just as there is nothing wrong with seeking medical advice because of illness.

The poet says: Patience like its name, its taste is bitter, but its consequences are sweeter than honey
والصبر مثل اسمه مرٌّ مذاقته * لكن عواقبه أظلى من العسل

Patience is the path to healing, safety, and glory, and one of the greatest advantages of leadership, as Abu Ali al-Baghdadi says:

Do not count glory as dates you eat @ You will not reach glory until you lick the patience

لا تحسب المجد تمرًا أنت أكله * لن تبلغ المجد حتى تلعق الصبرا

9. Illness is a test to erase bad deeds and increase good deeds. Al-Bukhari narrated that the Prophet said: "No illness, anxiety, sadness, or harm befalls a believer, not even a thorn that pricks him, but that God erases some of his sins through it."

(ما يصيب المؤمن من وصبٍ ولا هم ولا حزن ولا أذى، حتى الشوكة يشاكها إلا كفر الله بها من خطاياها)

That testing is:

A- Sometimes, it is to erase sins and bad deeds.

B-Sometimes, it is to raise degrees and increase good deeds, as is the case in God's testing of his prophets. The Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him, said: "The most severely tested people are the prophets, then the next best, then the next... The affliction does not end with the servant until he leaves him walking on the earth with no sin on him." Narrated by Al-Bukhari.

(أشد الناس بلاء الأنبياء، ثم الأمثل فالأمثل... فما يبرح البلاء بالعبد حتى يتركه يمشي على الأرض وما عليه خطيئة)

C-For scrutiny of believers to distinguish them from the hypocrites, the Almighty said: (We have tried those before them so that God knows who the honest from the liars) Spider:3.

Thus, God tests His servants so that the true believers may be distinguished from others, and that those who are patient in affliction may be known from those who are not.

D-And sometimes the believer is punished with calamity for committing some sins, as the Messenger,

may God's prayers and peace be upon him, said: (A man is deprived of sustenance by a sin that afflicts him, and nothing faces fate except by supplication, and the life only increases by righteousness) Narrated by Ahmad, and others. There are 2 other sayings for the Prophet ﷺ:

(Wonderful is the affair of the believer, for all his affair is good, and this is not for anyone except for the believer. If good things befall him, then he is thankful to God, he will have a reward, and if adversity befalls him, he is patient, then he will have a reward, so all of God's decree for the Muslim is good).

(عجبًا لأمر المؤمن، إن أمره كله خير، وليس ذلك لأحد إلا للمؤمن، إن أصابه سراء فشكر الله فله أجر، وإن أصابته ضراء فصبر فله أجر، فكل قضاء الله للمسلم خير).

(Indeed, a man will have a rank with God, so he does not reach it with action, so he continues to afflict him with what he hates until he reaches that rank). The believer who experiences prosperity and grace and thanks his Lord will achieve good, and that is because God loves the thankful and increases them from His blessings, the Almighty said: (If you are thankful, I will surely increase you) Ibrahim:7

(إن الرجل ليكون له عند الله المنزلة فما يبلغها بعمل، فما يزال يبتليه بما يكره حتى يبلغه إياها).

10. Responding to the patient's supplication for himself and for others, for the patient is very close to God spiritually and with him. His visitors ask the patient to supplicate for them, because illness brings the sick closer to God Almighty, and this is a special closeness. God Almighty says in the Qudsi hadith: (Son of Adam, my servant was sick, and you did not visit him, but if you visited him, you would find me with him), Narrated by Muslim, عبيد بن جابر (يا ابن آدم، عبيدي فلان مرض فلم تعده، أما لو عدته لوجدتني عنده) (I am at the broken hearted) (أنا عند المنكسرة قلوبهم).

11. God made disease a station to break the Caesars, break the Khosrau's, and reduce the unjust rulers to size. Nimrod of Iraq was killed by an insect, and the Pharaoh of Egypt was tortured by lice and locusts.

12. To strengthen social bonds at the patient's bed between the patient's relatives, families, and peers. Paying a visit to the sick is one of the rights of the Muslim (a Muslim has to visit his brother if he becomes ill, and to walk in his funeral if he dies).

13. To know the nature of his family and to know his enemy from his friend: in adversity you know the real brothers, and (may God have a brother for you that your mother did not give birth to).

(رُبَّ أَخٍ لَكَ لَمْ تَلِدْهُ أَمَكَ) Friend in need is friend indeed.

14. In the aggravation and spread of infectious disease, people are urged to support one another in social solidarity, when fighting epidemics and diseases.

15. Sickness encourages charity. And the hadiths of the Prophet (PBUH) are among the masterpieces in this field: (Treat your patients with charity -sadaqa). (Doing good deeds protect from bad endings).

(داووا مرضاكم بالصدقة) (صنائع المعروف تقي مصارع السوء)