

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



Conveners of Imams



Associated with the Community of Imam W. Deen Mohammed

Guiding Our Community through Transformational Change

March, 2020

Introduction

إِنَّ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَآيَاتٍ لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ
وَفِي خَلْقِكُمْ وَمَا يَبُثُّ مِن دَابَّةٍ آيَاتٌ لِّقَوْمٍ يُوقِنُونَ

“Indeed, within the heavens and the earth are Signs for the believers. And in the creation of yourselves and what He disperses of moving creatures are Signs for people who are certain.

Qur’an 45:3-4

Over the last few weeks, civil and medical authorities have alerted us to the increasing threat of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) Pandemic. During that time, a number of other public and community-based health organizations have reinforced those warnings. The magnitude of this pandemic has the potential of devastating social and economic consequences, impacting individuals, families, communities, and institutions, in our country and globally. The length of time this pandemic may adversely impact our lives may be weeks or months (*with some estimates as high as eighteen months*).

As a result, Imams and Islamic community leaders have been deliberating with their communities, civil and health authorities, and each other, to meet the Islamic needs of their communities while ensuring the safety and well-being of the Believers. In response, the **Conveners of Imams** have identified three important areas for the consideration of Islamic communities and community leaders. The first two commentaries reflect the thinking of noted healthcare professionals and Imams in the **Community of Imam W. Deen Mohammed** on these serious issues. The third represents input from shuraa conversations taken with Imams (*including health professionals*) over the last month.

1. “*Coronavirus Pandemic Update: Shelter in Place, Hunker Down, Pray, and Survive This!*,” Imam Dr. Mikal Ramadan, Muslim Health Consortium

Welcome to the different world that has been thrust upon us!

This coronavirus pandemic will require us to learn whole new sets of skills, quickly adapt ourselves and families to them, and drop old habits and ways.

Our survival, your families’ survival and your local communities’ survival will depend on how each of us can make the necessary changes in our lifestyles. Staying home can save your life. We are truly all in this together!

This is nothing less than a major test on us from our Creator.

It reminds me of the story in Scripture during the time of Prophet Moses (pbuh). The tenth plague on Pharaoh’s Egypt was the Angel of Death who circulated invisibly killing all of the first-born sons. The Death Angel passed over those households who had lamb’s blood placed on their door wells. It was a time of great hardship for the Jews. It was important for the early Jews to follow the instructions from Prophet Moses (pbuh) because the Angel of Death would kill the first-born son of all of those who did not have the sign above their door. After this plague, the Children of Israel were set free. Much more could be said on this historic analogy.

The cases of the Coronavirus in the United States are increasing. It is now in all 50 states with 7700 (82,000+ as of 3/26/20) confirmed cases and 135 (1100+ as of 3/26/20) deaths at the time of this writing. In New York city, 1000 new cases have occurred in the last 24 hours. In Italy over the same period, 475 new deaths have occurred. We seem to be following two weeks behind Italy’s lead.

Across this country, schools have been stopped, sports events suspended, meetings with more than ten people cancelled.

The testing for the coronavirus has slowly arrived, but far below the number that is required. Every other western country is ahead of us in testing. The test is important for the clinician at the bedside to know if the pneumonia a person has is due to the Coronavirus or a treatable bacteria. It helps him to know if the symptoms another person is displaying is due to COVID 19, a cold, allergies, or the seasonal flu. And, most importantly for the hospital staff to know if they have contracted the coronavirus. Testing is important in Public Health in surveillance. To identify cases, isolate them and to tract their contacts. This helps to identify clusters of infections which may themselves need to be isolated (quarantined). Without the test, we are driving in the dark without headlights and changes are occurring daily and rapidly.

High risk populations for coronavirus transmission are jails, prisons, nursing homes, among the homeless, migrants at the border, and those on the frontline - ER staffs and doctors, first responders, firefighters, rescue, and the police, They need our best strategies to mitigate the coronavirus and the necessary protective equipment to do their jobs safely. Our medical system can quickly become overrun. The system has minimal capacity to cope with practically any surge in the number of cases.

How do we battle the virus?

First is Prayer! Allah is in charge of all things, and our safety lies in His Hands. Holy Quran 2:45and seek Allah's Help with patience and prayer.

It is important for us to maintain the recommended social distancing, keeping the six feet away from one another. Frequent hand washing, coughing and sneezing into your elbow, avoid shaking hands, or touching our faces. Also the frequent cleaning of public surfaces. Each of us must prepare where we are going to shelter in place - hunker down with your family for a month or more.

What does this mean for you and your family?

You must stockpile food, water, and medications even if it is necessary to delay paying some bills to complete these stockpiles. We must begin forming new virtual communities for mutual support and safety. We should not rely on the government to supply food and money in sufficient amounts to sustain us for any length of time, nor count on a vaccine coming soon enough to rescue us. We must protect our elderly and love them, but not visit them. This places them at risk for the coronavirus. Ideally use Skype or FaceTime. Don't forget possible predators. Those are the individuals who target you and your families' stockpiled supplies. They may originate from inside of our community such as street gangs or from outside of our community such as hate groups etc. You should prepare for that unlikely possibility.

During this extra time with your family you can begin homeschooling. There are many resources on-line to assist you in this process. This is a good time to rediscover nature by planning camping, hiking and canoeing trips. You can also plan a family garden this spring and begin growing some vegetables from seeds in the house. This can begin a new era of family communications and adventure.

Be at peace and keep your family in Prayer. May Allah keep us safe.

2. *Preserving Our Health*, Imam Dr. Abdel Jaleel Nuriddin, *Mid-Atlantic Section Convener*

As Salaam Alaikum! Dear Imams and Community Leaders, this brief synopsis of my presentation on this past Thursday's (*March 19, 2020*) Conveners call is to bring to your recollection some of the things I saw as important to our relative position as a Islamic Society and the Coronavirus Pandemic. Our government restrictions relative to lack of congregation is leading to mitigating circumstances which will cause us to improvise our community activities.

- Our primary concern is for those who are most at risk, such as our seniors, disabled and debilitated. Since we will be shut in it is necessary for us to create monitoring systems to check on each other periodically.
- The need to be mindful of what the authorities are saying related to activity should be adhered to by all members.
- Because we will not be frequenting our houses of worship in most cases contemporary social media should be used for Jumuah and other community activities.
- We should ask our young adults and youth to help their parents and those among us that don't have the knowledge and skill in the use of these platforms to help in setting them up for their use if they have with all. i.e. Zoom, Facebook, Instagram Etc.
- It is necessary to stock up on basic necessities such as food, water, medications and other basic accessories while faced with this global crisis. We should make sure those at the most risk in particular have food.
- My background in health prompts me to suggest vitamins and minerals, essential oils and amino acids, nutraceuticals, herbal botanicals, nutrition and cleansing as being paramount to good health. Blackseed Oil, Micro Particle Silver, Echinacea, Golden Seal, Olive Leaf Extract, are some herbal botanicals that will help boost the immune response and protect the respiratory tract. In the Chinese Hospitals they discovered that the Proteolytic Enzymes will also help to remove the protein shell from around the Coronavirus and dislodge it from the lung cells. You should always work in conjunction with a health practitioner when considering alternatives to established health protocols.
- Liver cleansing is recommended also to preserve your health in matters such as this.
- Nine out of ten times this pandemic started because of poor nutrition, poor hygiene and poor sanitation so lets us be mindful of good health standards.
- Remember our Zakat and Sadaqat are important to the maintenance of our communities. Now is the time to set up direct deposits to the masjid account seeing we won't be getting to the masjid. Each week we miss hurts and our liabilities and obligations don't stop so pleas encourage your members to mail

or set up direct deposits to keep us meeting our weekly and monthly obligations.

3. *Transforming Our Community Life and Connections, Imam Dr. Bashir Ali, National Convener, on Behalf of the Conveners of Imams*

Reconceptualizing Our Community Life and Institutions

Faced with the realities of a life-threatening pandemic, Islamic community leaders are compelled to ensure the safety and well-being of community members, while preserving the institutions of our faith. In Al-Islam, safety and security of the natural human life is the highest priority. As a result, every tradition of the faith can be observed to preserve the safety and health of the Believers. This is literally one of the definitions of “salama” (*root word for Islam, Muslim, and Salaam*).

During this time of a “*once in a century*” occurring pandemic, with the potential of catastrophic loss of human life and livelihood, Islamic community leaders will have to reconceptualize the practices of our community life. This will include: 1) expanding our shuraa; 2) new platforms for Jumuah and Taleem; 3) daily salat at the masjid 4) maintaining our obligations for zakat and sadiqah; 5) Ramadan activities; 6) Janazah, Nikah and other community functions; 7) and community conferences.

Expanding Our Shuraa

A fundamental tradition of our faith, community life, and the human nature is shuraa (*mutual consultation*). In the Qur’an, this principle is known as “*Amruhum Shuraa Baynahum*.” As our local Islamic communities and leaders seek to cope with the realities of reconceptualizing the practices of our community life, it will be important to expand our traditional shuraa mechanisms to include both medical professionals and those Believers that have expertise and can assist with communication technology. In a time when physical contact of the Believers is discouraged, communities can maintain critical social and communication connections via technology.

New Platforms for Jumuah and Taleem

As we know, in Al-Islam, the Jumuah Prayer is obligatory on the Believers. While this obligation can be observed in small groups (*i.e. the workplace*), the great benefit of Jumuah lies in the larger community connection. As a result, many Masajid/Islamic Centers have turned to communication technology to connect their communities for the Jumuah services and other activities. During an extended period of “*social distancing*,” maintaining our community connections via live-streaming, teleconferencing, and online applications should be considered, both for Jumuah services and Taleem classes.

Daily Salat at the Masjid

At the time of this writing, a number of states have instituted “*Shelter in Place*” policies which are intended to reinforce “*social distancing*.” As a result, citizens are only allowed to travel outside of their homes for essential functions. In these states, this includes travel for medical, food, or family care. In these states, public, social, or religious gatherings are also discouraged. This restriction would obviously impact our Islamic tradition of group Salat at the Masjid. However, during this exceptional time, Believers should continue their group Salat in their homes and at their places of business (*as applicable*). In the workplace, or other locations (*outside of the Masjid*), when Salat is observed, special consideration should be given to appropriate personal spacing to avoid close contact.

Maintaining Our Obligations for Zakat and Sadiqah

The pillar of Zakat/Sadiqah reflects the economic safety net for the Islamic community. One of the most profound impacts of this pandemic will be economic. Millions of Americans may be adversely impacted economically, by virtue of job loss or business shut-down. It will be critically important to maintain our ability to collect and distribute Zakat/Sadiqah to those needy Believers in our communities. It will also be important for Masajid/Islamic Centers to be able to collect Sadiqah donations to support the infrastructure and functions of the facility. As a result, local Islamic communities should explore offering the options of direct deposit (*through personal bank accounts*), *Cash App*, or on-line donations so Believers may donate directly to the Masjid/Islamic Center electronically. This feature allows Believers to continue to observe their Zakat obligations and Sadiqah contributions without personal hand transactions or travel.

Another dimension of Sadiqah is deeds of charity, kindness, and compassion. During this time of “*social distancing*,” it becomes even more important to check on the well-being of elderly or needy Believers. This includes physical, emotional, and financial well-being. Islamic communities should remind Believers to check on each other and, where possible, create organized initiatives to regularly contact Believers, assess their needs, and respond, as necessary, to ensure their well-being.

Ramadan and Eid Activities During a Pandemic

It is traditional for many Masajid/Islamic Centers to offer daily or weekly activities during the month of Ramadan. This year, the month of Ramadan will span the last week of April to the last week of May. This period also coincides with the growing expansion of the current pandemic and recommended period of “*social distancing*.” As a result, traditional religious and social functions at local Masajid/Islamic Centers (*including: daily prayers, Qur’anic Reading, Iftar,*

Taraweeh) will likely be modified or suspended. This may also include the Eid Celebration, which can be done via live-streaming and online applications. In place of these activities at the local Masjid/Islamic Center, Believers will have the opportunity to fulfill their obligations in home-based settings.

On a related note, the institution of fasting (*Saum*) should also remind us to conserve our finite resources of food and supplies and share our limited resources with those who are less fortunate. The spiritual blessing of Ramadan also teaches us to sacrifice our physical personal desires for the higher purposes of pleasing Allah and serving humanity.

Janazah, Nikah, and Other Community or Social Functions

Despite the realities of living through a once in a lifetime global pandemic, the natural functions of life still go on. One of these functions is the reality of death and our Janazah rituals.

Special precautions will have to be taken during the Ghosl ritual (*washing of the deceased body*). When performing this ritual, attention should be given to: 1) limit the number of persons to the minimum necessary to perform the washing; 2) fully cover the body parts of each person participating in the ritual (*i.e. face/eyes, hands, hair, and clothing cover*); 3) use disposable waterproof gloves, waterproof gowns, and face masks; and 4) maintain appropriate distancing while performing the washing ritual.

In the performance of the Janazah Prayer, there should be a minimum number of Believers in physical attendance outside of the circle of family and close friends. Those in attendance should also consider wearing disposable gloves and face masks for their protection. Masajid and Community Centers should consider the possibility of utilizing live-streaming and online applications to connect other Believers, family, and friends, with the Janazah Prayer and associated memorial services. Those Believers unable to attend or participate in the physical or streaming/online prayer service should perform the Janazah Prayer, on behalf of the deceased, from home.

A different approach should be taken for Nikah (*wedding*) ceremonies. Nikah ceremonies should be postponed until a time when it is recommended, by civic and health authorities, that large groups of people can gather safely. Imams should counsel prospective couples and families to observe this protocol for their safety and for the safety of their family members, friends, and Believers. If couples choose to proceed. Nikah ceremonies should be conducted with a minimal number of people, utilizing streaming/online technology (*where possible*) to connect a wider circle of family, friends, and Believers. Another option is to postpone the larger wedding reception for a later date in the future.

Other optional community social functions held at the Masjid/Islamic Center should be postponed/rescheduled until the appropriate time in the future.

Community Conferences

In conjunction with the above-mentioned thoughts, Masajid/Islamic Centers and Islamic organizations should postpone planned conferences until a time, in the future, when it is recommended, by civic and health authorities, that large groups of people can gather safely. Similarly, consideration should be given to utilizing online technologies and webinars to communicate conference topics to interested parties, in place of the physical conference.

Final Thoughts

As our world, country, and community seek to deal with the ramifications of this global pandemic threat, Muslims are reminded of the “**Signs**” from Allah that inform and guide our lives. These include the importance of trustworthy, competent, enlightened, and compassionate leadership. In times of collective crisis, when people are looking for answers and guidance, this leadership is needed and desired. In the human nature and our Deen, this guidance should come as a result of the best minds (*including those with professional subject matter expertise*), with the right character and intentions, deliberating and offering the best information to the society. This is the Shuraa principle in action.

The second, is community consciousness, the innate need to stay connected. During these times, individual sacrifice for the greater collective good becomes necessary. Ironically, as we distance ourselves from each other for safety and security to battle the virus, our loving social nature (*Anisa*) keeps us connected mentally, spiritually and emotionally. We find collective solutions to our problems. We find it easier to minimize our differences and find common ground. We sacrifice individual interests for the collective good. We are also more likely to display deeds of charity, kindness, and compassion to each other. This represents the excellence of the Human Nature (*Fitraa*). **With Allah’s help and guidance, through the excellence in our human nature, we OVERCOME TOGETHER.** To paraphrase one contemporary philosopher: ***we are at our very best when things are worst.***