

and hand sanitising wherever we go will be the new normal.

Muslim Reluctance to Vaccination

In 1796, the English Dr Edward Jenner developed the first vaccine against the deadly smallpox disease when he successfully conferred immunity against the smallpox virus.



While his discovery took some time to be implemented and vaccination at the Cape was still new in the second half of the 19th Century, the Muslim population steadfastly refused it on the basis of their religion. This stance against smallpox vaccination cost them dearly, both politically and in terms of loss of life, as they stuck to their interpretation of their religion. The current Covid pandemic is similarly causing successive peaks of mortality and morbidity, and arguments against vaccination is again being embraced by many Muslims. While this is their constitutional right, it is extremely dangerous in a disease where so-called super-spreaders are the main stokers of the peaks. We must learn from history, as our Creator warns us in the Quran.

Lessons from Smallpox and Covid

As Muslims, some of the lessons that Allah (SWT) has taught us as we survey our responses to the smallpox and the Covid epidemics are:

1. When human beings make effort for scientific discoveries, like

vaccination, Allah (SWT) guides them in their discoveries. He states in the Holy Quran: ***'And He has subjected to you, as from Him, all that is in the Heavens and on the Earth: behold in that are the Signs indeed for those who reflect.'*** (45:13)

2. Allah will test us with fear, loss and adversity, as in the Holy Quran : ***"Be sure we shall test you with something of fear and hunger, some loss in goods, lives and the fruits (of your toil), but give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere."*** (2:155)
3. Allah tests each generation differently, and that we cannot always do what they did, as in the Holy Quran : ***"That was a people that hath passed away. They shall reap the fruit of what they did, and ye of what ye do. Ye shall not be asked about what they did."*** (2:141)
4. We must learn from what history teaches us; that smallpox vaccination has eradicated this dreaded disease entirely from the earth. The Quran says: ***"See they not how many generations before them We destroyed?"*** (36:31)
5. As believers we must always live with hopeful optimism, even when matters look bleak and unfavourable. Allah (SWT) declares in the Holy Quran : ***"So verily, with every difficulty there is relief."*** (94:5)

From Smallpox to Covid

Lessons for Muslims



19th Century

Long ago, on 17th January 1886, the streets of Cape Town experienced one of its worst periods of unrest, as the



Muslim community started their defiance at the official closure of their Tana Baru cemetery. On that fateful Sunday, two days after the Tana Baru's closure, the child of Muslim fisherman Amaldien Rhode died.

At two o'clock that same afternoon, a funeral procession of 3 000 Muslims started walking along Sir Lowry Road in Woodstock, through Darling Street on their way to the Tana Baru, an act in direct defiance of the law, yet collectively determined to execute what they considered their rightful duty.

Abdol Burns

Their leader was Abdol Burns, a well-spoken and educated man who had been at the forefront of pleading to the authorities for several years for the continued right of Muslims to bury their dead at the Tana Baru.

Smallpox epidemics at the Cape

Smallpox is an age old disease that first visited the Cape in 1713, when a crew



The Lantern's impression of the Muslims' Ward at the Renskie's Hospital in 1882

member aboard a ship was infected, his clothes were taken to be washed in the river near the Castle, which then contaminated the Cape's drinking water. The resultant smallpox epidemic hit the local population very hard, and similar epidemics followed in the years 1755, 1767, 1807, 1812 and 1839.

Cemetery Riots at Cape

The background to the 1886 Cemetery Riots started with the smallpox epidemic of 1858, when it was found that most of Cape Town's cemeteries were overcrowded and a danger to public health. The exceptions were the Muslim cemeteries.

Part of the problem was that burials were often placed in vaults above the ground, giving rise to poisonous gases and offensive smells being discharged from these graves. Muslims are buried 1.5m to 1.8m below ground.

Between 1858 and 1882, several

Municipal and Parliamentary Committees investigated this state of affairs, and Abdol Burns, a cab-driver turned politician, ably represented Muslims throughout that period.

His strategy was based on the evidence that the Muslim cemeteries were the best maintained and posed no danger to public health, and that because it was a religious duty for Muslims to carry the deceased to their last resting place, the cemetery could not be moved outside Cape Town.



A typical example of a vault used for burial in Christian cemeteries in Somerset Road during the 19th century

Tana Baru

The smallpox epidemic of 1882 resulted in the passage of several laws related to the control of city burial grounds and the spread of the disease by carrying the dead to their last resting place. Such laws were not accepted by Muslims who felt they interfered with their hard attained religious freedom and the Tana Baru was a symbol of that acquired privilege.

Vaccination

The Muslim community also objected to vaccination, quarantine and fumigation, which earned them the anger of both the authorities and the press, as Muslims were accused of being the main spreaders of the deadly virus.

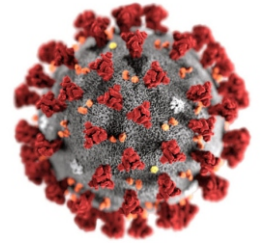


21st Century

Fast forward to the 27th December 2019, when a number of unusual pneumonia cases were reported at the same time in the city of Wuhan in China. Over the next few weeks the infection was found to be caused by a new virus called the SARS - CoV-2, or Covid 19, a coronavirus that is highly contagious and transmissible between humans. This new virus has a diameter of 100 nanometres, and if the diameter of an adult hand is 100 millimetres, it means that one million of these viruses can fit into an adult's palm.

Covid-19

To date this virus has killed over 4.2 million people globally, of which 73 000 have been in South Africa, which has also recorded over 2.5 million cases to date.



These staggering figures do not begin to tell the story of the economic hardship endured, and how this new virus has turned the world upside down. For example, when last did you see the inside of a mosque?

Pfizer and J&J jabs

The only effective treatment is vaccination, which has already been shown in many countries to be highly effective. Our country is currently busy with its own programme of vaccination, using mainly the Pfizer (2 doses) and the Johnson & Johnson (1 dose) vaccines.

While these have shown to be up to 95% effective in preventing infection, the virus has meanwhile adapted and a new variant, called Delta, has spread across the world. Thus the fear exists that over time other variants may emerge, and that living with social distancing, masks

