

Imaginary and real during the times of the pandemic
By Ahmed Umer Farooqi

The world is witnessing some tough times these days, with the appearance of the Coronavirus. Life situations are changing rapidly. How should one process all this information that is changing every hour?

We can't see it but everyone is terrified. Is it something real or imaginary? People have become so paranoid that anything heard or seen about the virus and how to prevent it is becoming a 'must to do' for everyone. Wearing masks have become essential but they are required only if you are infected. No touching and social distancing is being practiced. Something imaginary has become the reality and creating a havoc. We carry sanitizers like we carry a mobile phone with us. I heard somewhere that drinking hot water may prevent the infection and that has made my throat dry. As I'm drinking too much hot water these days. Myths about how to prevent it are becoming viral rapidly and people are panicking.

But this is not the first time that the world has witnessed a pandemic like this. The history is full of examples of how the world was effected with all kinds of diseases. When I used to read about them they seemed imaginary to me but now that has become my reality, which makes me question about time. We are living over and over again. The world is revolving. Time is repeating itself. Is it possible that imaginary (past) is interchangeable to the real (present). Then what is the future? Do future exist? If time is repetitive then maybe the future is non-existent. Future is a myth.

We are studying and gaining knowledge about our past and the history of the world in order to determine what our future might be but if time is linear and interchangeable then we are actually studying about our present. This is all very confusing. Then again these are confusing times.

Calamities and the mass destruction of populations and lives stretch back to biblical times and on through the days of plague in medieval Europe. Wars, too, have brought a Darwinian pruning of entire societies. Technological advance, from siege engines to long bows, from gas chambers to weapons of mass destruction, has magnified the process, culminating in the Cold War's calculations of mutually assured destruction.

People are asking: Does this have anything to do with the end times? After all, this generation has not witnessed anything so humongous and scary like The Coronavirus. People have become perplexed and confused.

Rasoolullah SAS did predict many happenings among the signs of The Hour but could The Coronavirus be one of them? Could The Coronavirus be one of the major signs of The Last Day? The major signs are ten in number based on the Hadith of Rasoolullah SAS narrated by Hudhaifa b. Usaid al-Ghfari (RA) who said: Allah's Apostle (PBUH) came to us all of a sudden as we were (busy in a discussion) He said:

What do you discuss about? They (the Companions) said. We are discussing about the Last Hour. Thereupon he said: It will not come until you see ten signs before and (in this connection) he made a mention of the smoke, Dajjal, the beast, the rising of the sun from the west, the descent of Jesus son of Mary (Allah be pleased with him), the Gog and Magog, and land-slides in three places, one in the east, one in the west and one in Arabia at the end of which fire would burn forth from the Yemen, and would drive people to the place of their assembly. (Sahih Muslim)

For sure Coronavirus does not fit any of the ten major signs of The Last Hour. Or so it seems! The appearance of The Mahdi and the return of Prophet Jesus (PBUH) and the coming of Dajjal all of

which will follow one another still yet to come. None of these has yet happened. Are they far away? Only Allah SWT knows.

In the annals of conflict, dating to the Plague of Athens from 430 to 426 BC during the Peloponnesian War, disease moulded national fates as much as — sometimes more than — competing armies.

The fears from the latest pandemic are rooted deep in history. Plague in medieval Europe took millions of lives even at a time when globalisation was in its infancy, slashing national and continental populations by staggering amounts in the mid-14th century.

Across millenniums, cholera, smallpox, typhus and other diseases have changed history's course and reinforced human perceptions of frailty. The catalog ranges over swine flu and avian flu, leprosy, measles and malaria.

Reaching much further back, the sacred texts that define belief and identity to this day chronicled the ninth plague in the book of Exodus, which now seems to be a harbinger of the quarantine, self-isolation and social distancing that stretches ahead of many of us for months, if not years, to come.

"And total darkness covered all Egypt for three days," it reads. "No one could see anyone else or leave his place for three days."

The world is on a cleanse all around and I wanted to share some images I found about the past pandemics and just a thought that as those times have passed then this will also pass. Time passes. As these photographs show — and as the pre-photographic chronicles of history, faith and mythology confirm — the Earth and its people have long been prey to the invisible pathogens that bring their victims low with equal efficiency



An emergency hospital in Kansas during the 1918 influenza epidemic. National Museum of Health and Medicine



The influenza ward at the Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, circa 1918. Harris & Ewing/Underwood Archives, via Getty Images



San Francisco held court hearings in the open air during the influenza epidemic. Bettmann, via Getty Images



Baseball players wearing protective masks during the Spanish Flu epidemic of 1918. George Rinhart/Corbis, via Getty Images



Dr. Joel Gitlit gave flu vaccinations to some 200 seniors at a Board of Health clinic in New York City in 1968. Robert Walker/The New York Times



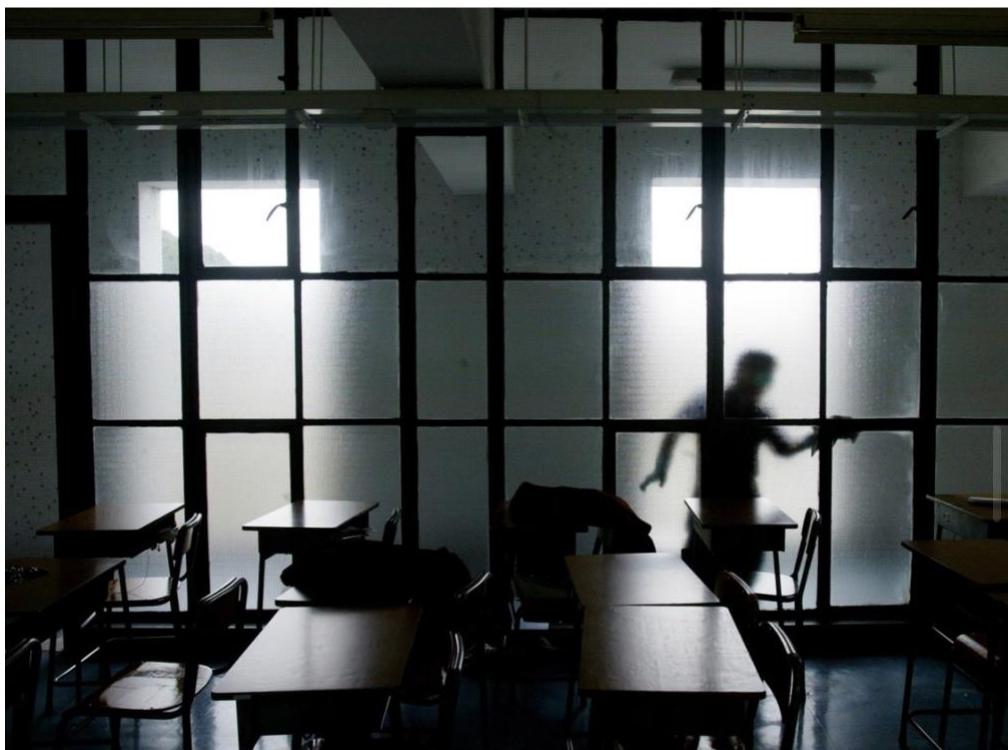
This billboard advertisement appeared in Des Moines in 1968. Bettmann, via Getty Images



Customs officers at Haneda Airport in Tokyo gargling and washing their hands as preventative measures, August 1968. The Asahi Shimbun, via Getty Images



A medical worker checking the temperatures of travelers to Wuhan, China, in 2003. Reuters



Cleaning a classroom using diluted bleach at St. Joan of Arc School in Hong Kong in 2003. Kin Cheung/Reuters



Children learning ballet in Hong Kong in 2003 wore masks to protect themselves from SARS. Vincent Yu/Associated Press



A family outside Mexico City's Metropolitan Cathedral in 2009, after discovering a baptism had been canceled because of swine flu. Adriana Zehbrauskas for The New York Times



Patients waiting to be attended in a temporary flu clinic at Maimonides Medical Center in Brooklyn in 2009. Evan Abramson for The New York Times



Wearing a mask in a bus in Lviv, Ukraine, in 2009. James Hill for The New York Times



Medical workers took James Dorbor, 8, into an Ebola treatment center in Monrovia, Liberia, in 2014, after he had spent hours waiting outside. He later died. Daniel Berehulak for The New York Times



The Ebola field hospital in Bong County, Liberia, in 2014. Daniel Berehulak for The New York Times



Eric Gweah grieving as members of a Liberian Red Cross burial team removed the body of his father, a suspected Ebola victim, in central Monrovia in 2014. Daniel Berehulak for The New York Times



Spraying a concert hall in Seoul, South Korea, with antiseptic as a precaution against the spread of MERS in 2015. Lee Jin-Man/Associated Press



A camel herder at his farm outside Riyadh in 2014.
The MERS virus is believed to have spread to
humans from animals. Fayez Nureldine/Agence France-
Presse — Getty Images



A temperature check as part of preventive measures
against the spread of MERS at the Hong Kong
international airport in 2015. Philippe Lopez/Agence
France-Presse — Getty Images



Paramedics transporting a man believed to be Hong Kong's first coronavirus patient to a hospital in January. Lam Yik Fei for The New York Times



A temporary hospital for coronavirus patients in Wuhan, China, in February. CHINATOPIX, via Associated Press



The Piazza Duomo in Milan was nearly empty on Thursday. More coronavirus deaths have now been reported in Italy than in any other country. Alessandro Grassani for The New York Times



GETTY IMAGES

Social distancing measures and surgical masks can now be spotted across the country