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Compassion toward All Creatures: Parasitology Lessons from Prophet Ayyub's (A.S.) Treatment of Worms

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ABSTRACT
Through the narrative of Prophet Ayyub (A.S.), this research study examines the relationship between parasitology and Islamic ethical precepts. According to Islamic tradition, worms lived in his wounds during his protracted sickness, and when they fell, he compassionately returned them. The Islamic concept of mercy towards all living things is shown in this deed. The article explores the biological aspects of wound infestation, such as cutaneous myiasis, host-parasite interactions, and the ecological roles of parasites, from a parasitology perspective. The study highlights how the tale exemplifies ecological balance, patience, and reverence for creation by fusing Islamic texts with scientific material. According to the article's conclusion, Ayyub's example encourages a holistic perspective that views illness, parasites, and nature in terms of biological interdependence and divine wisdom.

Introduction

What is Parasitology?

Numerous definitions of parasites, parasitism, and the parasitic relationship have emerged over time. The notion that parasites are reliant on their hosts is part of the description, and this relationship's necessity sets them apart from some of the other relationships [1]. In other words, Parasitism is a physiological relationship between two living things in which one of them, the parasite, has lost its ability to function independently and depends on the other, the host, for feeding and occasionally for other metabolic needs. In addition to receiving nothing in return, the parasite frequently causes active harm to the host [2]. In a healthy, immunologically normal human host, well-adapted parasites are unlikely to produce severe or even significantly acute symptoms. The detrimental long-term effects of persistent and mildly symptomatic parasite liver infections, however, are increasingly becoming recognized. Lethal symptoms may result from parasite adaption failing because the host is immunosuppressed following transplantation or immunocompromised from HIV infection. Organ damage and serious consequences are frequent when a parasite that has evolved to nonhuman hosts unintentionally infects a person, as in the case of cystic and alveolar hydatid disease[3]. Consumption of parasites influences both food-web topology and disease risk in humans and wildlife due to their high productivity, distinct nutritional makeup, and pathogenicity in hosts. Predation on parasites is one of the most common linkage pathways, and its incorporation affects patterns of biodiversity, linkage density, and connectance, with implications for changing interaction networks and network stability. This discovery was made after parasites were recently added to some food webs [4].

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Islam and Nature

وَمَا مِن دَآبَّةٍ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ وَلَا طَٰٓئِرٍ يَطِيرُ بِجَنَاحَيْهِ إِلَّآ أُمَمٌ أَمْثَالُكُم ۚ مَّا فَرَّطْنَا فِى ٱلْكِتَٰبِ مِن شَىْءٍ ۚ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ يُحْشَرُونَ ٣٨

"All living beings roaming the earth and winged birds soaring in the sky are communities like yourselves. We have left nothing out of the Record. Then to their Lord they will be gathered all together."[5]

Islam promotes the principle of compassion towards all creatures, including insects and parasites, by discouraging unnecessary harm and emphasizing ethical restraint. This moral framework aligns with modern biological and parasitological perspectives that recognizes all organisms as part of complex ecological systems. Such teachings provide a valuable ethical lens for discussing host-parasite interactions and human disease management.

وَمَآ أَرْسَلْنَٰكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَٰلَمِينَ١٠٧

"We have sent you (O Prophet) only as a mercy for the whole world" [6]

The principle of compassion is clearly illustrated in hadith highlighting the moral significance attributed to even smallest creatures in Islam and establishes that harm to living beings should not be inflicted without just cause.

"I heard Allah's Messenger (PBUH) saying, 'An ant bit a Prophet amongst the Prophets, and he ordered that the place of the ants be burnt. So, Allah inspired to him, 'It is because one ant bit you that you burnt a nation amongst the nations that glorify Allah?" [7]

Prophet Ayyub (A.S.) a role model

Prophet Ayyub (A.S.) represents one of the most profound Quranic exemplars of patience in the face of prolonged illness and adversity. The Quran narrates his supplication during severe affliction, stating:

۞ وَأَيُّوبَ إِذْ نَادَىٰ رَبَّهُۥٓ أَنِّى مَسَّنِىَ ٱلضُّرُّ وَأَنتَ أَرْحَمُ ٱلرَّٰحِمِينَ ٨٣

"And (remember) when Ayyub cried out to his Lord, I have been touched with adversity, and You are the Most Merciful of the merciful" [8]

وَعَلَّمْنَٰهُ صَنْعَةَ لَبُوسٍ لَّكُمْ لِتُحْصِنَكُم مِّنۢ بَأْسِكُمْ ۖ فَهَلْ أَنتُمْ شَٰكِرُونَ ٨٠ وَلِسُلَيْمَٰنَ ٱلرِّيحَ عَاصِفَةً تَجْرِى بِأَمْرِهِۦٓ إِلَى ٱلْأَرْضِ ٱلَّتِى بَٰرَكْنَا فِيهَا ۚ وَكُنَّا بِكُلِّ شَىْءٍ عَٰلِمِينَ ٨١ وَمِنَ ٱلشَّيَٰطِينِ مَن يَغُوصُونَ لَهُۥ وَيَعْمَلُونَ عَمَلًا دُونَ ذَٰلِكَ ۖ وَكُنَّا لَهُمْ حَٰفِظِينَ ٨٢ ۞ وَأَيُّوبَ إِذْ نَادَىٰ رَبَّهُۥٓ أَنِّى مَسَّنِىَ ٱلضُّرُّ وَأَنتَ أَرْحَمُ ٱلرَّٰحِمِينَ ٨٣ فَٱسْتَجَبْنَا لَهُۥ فَكَشَفْنَا مَا بِهِۦ مِن ضُرٍّ ۖ وَءَاتَيْنَٰهُ أَهْلَهُۥ وَمِثْلَهُم مَّعَهُمْ رَحْمَةً مِّنْ عِندِنَا وَذِكْرَىٰ لِلْعَٰبِدِينَ ٨٤

"So We answered his prayer and removed his adversity, and gave him back his family, twice as many, as a mercy from Us t=and a lesson for the (devoted) worshippers" [9]

Classical Tafsir and Reports of Worm Infestation

Classical exegetes such as al-Tabari, Ibn-Kathir, and al-Qurtubi mention narrations suggesting that Prophet Ayyub's illness involved severe skin disease, sometimes describing as involving worms. One widely cited report states that when worms fell from his body, he returned them saying "Return to the place Allah created you from" (these reports are not established as sahih hadith and are general classified as athar or israliyyat [narrations transmitted from earlier traditions])

Ethical Interpretation: Compassion Even in Affliction

The moral lessons derived from these narrations is profound: Prophet Ayyub (A.S.) did not attribute moral blame to the organisms associated with his suffering. Instead, he recognized them as part of Allah's creation, operating with divine decree. This reflects

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the Quran principle

مَّا كَانَ عَلَى ٱلنَّبِيِّ مِنْ حَرَجٍ فِيمَا فَرَضَ ٱللَّهُ لَهُۥ ۖ سُنَّةَ ٱللَّهِ فِى ٱلَّذِينَ خَلَوْا۟ مِن قَبْلُ ۚ وَكَانَ أَمْرُ ٱللَّهِ قَدَرًا مَّقْدُورًا ٣٨

"There is no blame on the Prophet for doing what Allah has ordained for him. That has been the way of Allah with those (prophets) who had gone before. And Allah's command has been firmly decreed" [10]

From an ethical standpoint, this suggests restraint, humility, and mercy, even towards organisms causing harm, a principle highly relevant to parasitology.

Host Population Dynamics

It was often thought that parasites were unlikely to have an effect on host population dynamics since the parasite would perish if its actions caused the host to die. There is currently theoretical and empirical data that demonstrates this viewpoint's irrationality. Parasites can have extremely harmful effects on their hosts because their lifetime reproductive success depends not only on survival but also on the interactions between survival, reproduction, and transmission that determine the parasites' capacity to establish breeding offspring in new hosts. Parasitic infections can manifest as either endemic (parasites whose prevalence does not show significant changes over time in a given location) or epidemic breakouts (sudden, rapid spreading, or spikes in prevalence or intensity). Microparasites, or parasites that directly multiply within their hosts, typically occur as epidemics where "waves" of infection spread through populations before the pathogen vanishes due to previously susceptible hosts either dying or developing immunity, whereas macroparasites typically occur as endemic infections (causing host morbidity) [11]. In the absence of super- or coinfection in a homogeneous host population, within-host dynamics result in the selection of a parasite with an intermediate growth rate that is simply managed by the immune system before killing the host. Thus, concluding that parasites evolve an intermediate growth rate. However, contrary to popular belief, it was discovered that virulence (measured by case mortality or the rate of parasite-induced host mortality) increased with heterogeneity [12]. The parasite's rate of reproduction within the host determines how virulent it is. Intermediate virulence parasites not only release the most transmissible forms from individual infected hosts but also drive other parasite strains to extinction in the population as a whole when hosts can only be infected with one strain of the parasite. It was suggested that the immune system might be in charge of the development and upkeep of the virulence of the microparasites it eliminates [13].

Parasitism and Its Impact on Immune System

One of the defence mechanisms used by animals to maintain the integrity of their bodies is the immune system. The skin's physico-chemical barrier, the epithelium, and mucous membranes are the other kinds of defence systems. The natural and acquired immune responses are components of a healthy immune system[14]. In low- to middle-income nations, where access to clean water, adequate housing, well-planned water management, and sewage systems is not always common, parasitic illnesses are very common and many parasites can spread unchecked. In children, pregnant women, and HIV-positive individuals, intestinal protozoa are also quite common and significant. Other protozoan infections that occupy various bodily niches are extremely prevalent across the tropics, in addition to the common co-infections in the stomach. These infections are systemic because they either infect circulating erythrocytes or monocytes/macrophages, or they spread freely throughout the peripheral circulation [15]. The composition of the body and skeleton is altered by parasitic infection: water content rises, protein and fat content falls,

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and the concentration of calcium and phosphorus in bones falls. When helminths develop in animals, they can result in severe local lesions, anemia, and altered plasma proteins. The poisons produced by worms cause a decrease in voluntary feed intake by stimulating the synthesis of gastrointestinal hormones[14]. Through interactions with evolutionarily conserved chemicals including growth factors, neuropeptides, and hormones, the central nervous system (CNS) plays a significant role in regulating immunological processes, both protective and pathogenic, as well as potentially in parasite activity[16]. Islamic theology similarly affirms purposeful creation:

ٱلَّذِى لَهُۥ مُلْكُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ وَلَمْ يَتَّخِذْ وَلَدًا وَلَمْ يَكُن لَّهُۥ شَرِيكٌ فِى ٱلْمُلْكِ وَخَلَقَ كُلَّ شَىْءٍ فَقَدَّرَهُۥ تَقْدِيرًا ٢

“(Allah is) the One to Whom belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, Who has never had (any) offspring, nor does He have a partner in (governing) the kingdom. He has created everything, ordaining it precisely.” [17]

Parasite Control In Veterinary Medicine

Parasites continue to be a major cause of morbidity and mortality despite advancements in the prevention and treatment of parasitic diseases. Additionally, its zoonotic potential often poses a threat to public health and the environment. In animal and public health, medications used to manage internal and external parasites in companion animals are essential. As recommended by the makers, these medications should be used on a regular basis and at intervals to guarantee ongoing protection. Even with the abundance of effective and specific antiparasitic medications on the market today, parasitic illnesses are still common in animals. Antiparasitic medications are administered by most, but it has been shown that this happens irregularly, making them useless [18]. Although not entirely new, the ideas of agro-ecology and holistic agriculture, which support the use of integrated management techniques like target-selected treatment, herbal medicine, and the application of other parasite control alternatives are experiencing a resurgence due to their more sustainable appeal. The idea of integrated parasite control has presented difficulties for parasitologists, and it is essential to close the gap between our labs and field veterinarians. Harmony among all stakeholders is essential, but a flawless set of tactics that would constitute the best practice of parasite control is not the aim. More veterinarian participation is needed in the planning and oversight of parasite control initiatives, and technology transfer is desperately needed [19]. Prophet (PBUH) stated that

“Seek treatment. For Allah has not created a disease except that He has created for it a cure” [20]

Lessons for Contemporary Veterinary and Parasitological Ethics

The narrative of Prophet Ayyub (A.S.) offers several enduring lessons:

Patience in disease- recognizing illness as a test, not a punishment.

Moral neutrality of parasites- avoiding demonization of organisms.

Ethical inrervention- treating disease without cruelty or excess.

Humility in science- acknowledging limits of human control over biological systems.

Conclusion

Compassion towards all creatures is not a peripheral concept in Islam but a central ethical mandate. Through the story of Prohet Ayyub (A.S.), Islamic tradition presents a nuanced understanding f suffering, disease, and biological coexistence. While parasitic organisms may cause harm, they remain part of a divinely ordered systems deserving consideration.

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For parasitologists and veterinarians, particularly in Muslim contexts, this narrative reinforces the integration of scientific rigor with moral responsibility. Prophet Ayyub's example reminds us that true excellence in science is not only measured by eradication of disease, but by the compassion with which life, in all its form, is treated.

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