



Social Ethics, Dealings, Business and Trade in Islam

The outbreak of Coronavirus has made many people change their behaviour. We have all seen images of empty supermarket shelves, people purchasing absurd quantities of food and sanitary products. Businesses have also taken to increasing prices. From an Islamic point of view, such behaviour has been condemned. Additionally, there are significant economic impacts on the poorest and most vulnerable.

Islam is a complete way of life. Hence, just as emphasis has been placed on worship, emphasis has also been placed on social ethics and social dealings which includes business and trade. Honesty in business and truthfulness in trade are much emphasised by Rasullulah ﷺ. Islam has denounced, in the strongest possible terms, all sorts of deceitful dealings and illegal profits. It has disallowed all transactions not based upon justice and fair-play. Rasullulah ﷺ while reprimanding the dishonest dealer, said: *"Whosoever deceives us is not one of us."* (Muslim)

The Holy Qur'an has stressed the importance of fairness in business: Prophet Shu'ayb عليه السلام when advising his people on fair and honest trade said:

وَلَا تَبْخَسُوا النَّاسَ أَشْيَاءَهُمْ

"Do not defraud the people by reducing their things" (Al Shu'araa 183).

(means, do not short-change them. " Ibn Katheer)

Profiteering, especially in times of scarcity, is indeed an evil act, it is a form of zulm/oppression, which is strictly forbidden. In a Hadith Qudsi recorded by Imam Muslim RA Rasullulah ﷺ has said that Allah the Exalted and Glorious states: *"Verily I have made oppression unlawful for Me and for My servants too, so do not commit oppression."* Hoarding which results in suffering for the others is also prohibited in Islam, whether this hoarding is intended for personal use or for profiteering. Rasullulah ﷺ has warned:

مَنْ اخْتَكَّرَ فَهُوَ خَاطِي

He who hoards is a sinner. (Muslim)

It was narrated that 'Umar bin Khattab said:

عَنْ عُمَرَ بْنِ الْخَطَّابِ، قَالَ سَمِعْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ - صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ - يَقُولُ " مَنْ اخْتَكَّرَ عَلَى الْمُسْلِمِينَ طَعَامَهُمْ ضَرَبَهُ اللَّهُ بِالْجَذَامِ وَالْإِفْلَاسِ

"I heard the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) say: 'Whoever hoards food (and keeps it from) the Muslims, Allah will afflict him with leprosy and bankruptcy.'"

(Sunan Ibn Mājah, Chapter on Business Transaction)

The true Muslim is he/she who is a source of mercy and compassion for his fellow mankind, as can be understood from the narration of Nasai: Rasullulah ﷺ has said, *"The Muslim is the one from whose tongue and hand the people are safe; and the believer is the one from whom the people's lives and wealth are safe."*



Those businesses that are profiting from the Coronavirus situation and overcharging must understand the evilness of their actions and seek forgiveness from the people they have wronged and from Allah Almighty. The spirit of the Muslim should be as understood from the narration of Adab al-Mufrad that, Rasullullah ﷺ has said: *"A believer is the brother of another believer. He protects him against loss and defends him behind his back"*. He is not the one who robs him and benefits from him in his/her time of distress and suffering. Describing the Muslim Rasullullah ﷺ said: *The Muslim is the brother to the Muslim, he does not cheat him, lie to him, nor deceive him...* (Tirmizi).

So those businesses who are committing an act of injustice and sin by benefiting from this Coronavirus crisis; fear Allah Almighty and fear the consequences of the hereafter. Our pious Predecessors used to say: "pity the person who purchases the valley of 'Vayl' (In Hell)) by taking a single extra grain which does not belong to him" (Al Kabaa'ir-62nd Major sin). A 'single grain' is probably less than a penny; from what we are hearing the shops up and down the country are taking 'Pounds' unjustly; what category of hell fire will that result in? May Allah Almighty protect humanity from the hell fire and those acts that lead to the hell fire. Aameen.

The Economic Case Against Hoarding

The Competitions and Markets Authority (CMA) has stated that it will act against businesses that charge excess prices.

CMA Chief Executive Andrea Coscelli said:

"We urge retailers to behave responsibly throughout the coronavirus outbreak and not to make misleading claims or charge vastly inflated prices. We also remind members of the public that these obligations may apply to them too if they resell goods, for example on online marketplaces."

Both consumers and businesses should bear in mind the following points:

When you hoard, the vulnerable pay more for necessities.

Consider the following example:

Zaid goes to the shop and buys 10 bags of rice. Amr who owns the shop sees that customers like Zaid want a lot of rice so if he charges £5 more for each bag so that he will make more money. But customers like Zaid already have all the rice they need. Another person, Khalid, then walks in. Khalid cannot afford to buy 10 bags in one go. With his wages, he can only buy a single bag. He sees the price has gone up by £5. Unfortunately, it's too expensive for him, but he still needs to feed himself and his family. If you hoard, you are directly impacting the most vulnerable.

When businesses raise prices, they take essentials from where they are needed the most.

Businesses will want to buy as much stock as they can from suppliers because they are making more profit from the higher prices. Because of this, suppliers will increase prices to make more money from businesses. This will make it more difficult for hospitals, charities and food banks to purchase essential food and sanitary products. Institutes like these do not have money to spare. Again, if you hoard, you are harming the most vulnerable.



Empty shelves do not necessarily mean that there is a shortage

The massive increase in people buying from shops means that the shops are not able to restock and re-shelve fast enough to keep up with the demand. As of yet, the spread of Coronavirus has not significantly affected food supply chains, and the Government is working closely with supermarkets to continue food supply. This means that you do not have to hoard.

When you hoard, you drive the spread of people catching the virus.

If shelves are empty in one shop, people will travel to different shops instead. This increases the risk of spreading the virus. Additionally, hoarding sanitary products also spreads the virus. To stop the spread, we all have to maintain hygiene, not just one of us. If you hoard, you might be contributing to the spread of the virus.

Conclusion

The Islamic case against hoarding is very clear. This should be enough for any believer to stop such behaviour. There are significant economic impacts of hoarding as well. To stop this from harming the most vulnerable, both consumers and businesses need to adopt ethical behaviour. This is incumbent upon us all during these difficult times.