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RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND RITUALS DURING THE COVID PANDEMIC IN THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

This article is devoted to the study of religious education and religious rituals in Iran during the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic affected all aspects of human life, people were forced to move away from collective rituals and rituals, and education switched to an online format. One such area that has been subject to various disputes and debates due to the emergence of Covid-19 is religious education and religion in general. The cessation of community rituals, the closure of religious sites are the consequences of this virus. The article used a cognitive approach in the study of religion, religious rituals, religious education during the Covid-19 pandemic in Iran, and the authors also tried to determine how the external religious culture of eReligion was transformed during the pandemic, as well as how comfortable Iranian society feels in the conditions iReligion. Methods were used such as critical analysis, the principle of objectivity, a systematic approach to the study of the crisis, which forced the world order to develop according to a new scenario, a historical and analytical method of studying the state of religious education and religious institutions during a pandemic. In addition to these methods, the authors used an empirical research method that helped to increase the level of accuracy by conducting expert interviews in Persian on the Google Forms platform.

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Key words: religion, religious practices, religious education, world crisis, Covid-19 pandemic, Islamic Republic of Iran.

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Иран Ислам Республикасындағы COVID пандемиясы кезіндегі діни білім беру және діни рәсімдер

Бұл мақала Ковид-19 пандемиясы кезіндегі Ирандағы діни білім мен діни рәсімдерді зерттеуге арналған. Пандемия адам өмірінің барлық салаларына әсер етті, адамдар ұжымдық рәсімдер мен жоралардан бас тартуға мәжбүр болды, ал білім беру онлайн форматқа көшті. Ковид-19 пайда болуына байланысты түрлі даулар мен пікірталастарға ұшыраған бағыттардың бірі – діни білім және жалпы дін саласы. Қоғамдық рәсімдерді тоқтату, діни мекемелерді жабу осы вирустың салдары болып табылады. Мақалада Иран Ислам Республикасындағы Ковид-19 пандемиясы кезіндегі дінді, діни рәсімдерді, діни білім беруді зерттеуде когнитивті тәсіл қолданылды, сонымен қатар автор пандемия кезінде eReligion-тің сыртқы діни мәдениеті қалай өзгергенін, сонымен қатар ирандық қоғам iReligion жағдайында қалай сезінетіндігін анықтауға тырысты. Дүниежүзілік тәртіпті жаңа сценарий бойынша дамуға мәжбүр еткен дағдарысты зерттеу барысында сыни талдау, объективтілік қағидаты, жүйелі көзқарас, діни білім беру мен діни мекемелердің жағдайын зерттеудің тарихи-аналитикалық әдісі сияқты әдістердің жиынтығы қолданылды. Осы әдістерден басқа, авторлар эмпирикалық зерттеу әдісін қолданды, бұл Google Forms платформасында парсы тілінде сараптамалық сұхбат жүргізу арқылы зерттеудің дәлдік деңгейін арттыруға көмектесті.

Қаржыландыру: Мақаладағы зерттеу «Цифрландыру және COVID пандемия кезіндегі әлеуметтік кеңістікті өзгерту контексіндегі Қазақстандағы діни институттар мен тәжірибелер» (ҚР БҒМ 2020-2021 жж. гранттық қаржыландыруымен, ЖТН AP08956706, жоба жетекшісі т.ғ.д.

Л.Г. Ерекешева, әл-Фараби атындағы ҚазҰУ шығыстану факультеті) атты жоба аясында жүзеге асырылып отыр.

Түйін сөздер: дін, діни рәсімдер, діни білім беру, әлемдік дағдарыс, Ковид-19 пандемиясы, Иран Ислам Республикасы.

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Религиозное образование и ритуалы в период COVID пандемии в Исламской Республике Иран

Данная статья посвящена исследованию религиозного образования и религиозных ритуалов в ИРИ в период пандемии Ковид-19. Пандемия затронула все аспекты жизнедеятельности человечества, люди были вынуждены отстраниться от коллективных обрядов и ритуалов, а образование перешло на онлайн формат. Одной из таких областей, которая подверглась разным диспутам и дебатам из-за возникновения Ковид-19, это религиозное образование и религия в целом. Прекращение общинных обрядов, закрытие религиозных мест являются последствиями данного вируса. В статье был использован когнитивный подход в изучении религии, религиозных ритуалов, религиозного образования во время пандемии Covid-19 в ИРИ. Также авторы попытались определить, как внешняя религиозная культура eReligion трансформировалась за время пандемии и насколько комфортно иранское общество чувствует себя в условиях iReligion. Были использованы такие методы, как критический анализ, принцип объективности, системный подход в изучении кризиса, который заставил миропорядок развиваться по новому сценарию, историко-аналитический метод изучения состояния религиозного образования и религиозных учреждений во время пандемии. Помимо этих методов, авторы использовали эмпирический метод исследования, который помог повысить уровень точности путем проведения экспертного опроса на персидском языке на платформе Google формс.

Финансирование: Исследование в данной статье проводится в рамках проекта «Религиозные институты и практика в условиях цифровизации и изменения социального пространства в период COVID пандемии в Казахстане» (при грантовом финансировании МОН РК 2020-2021, ИРН АР08956706), руководитель проекта Л.Г. Ерекешева, д.и.н., факультет востоковедения Казахского национального университета им. аль-Фараби.

Ключевые слова: религия, религиозные обряды, религиозное образование, мировой кризис, пандемия Ковид-19, Исламская Республика Иран.

Introduction

Today, the coronavirus has dealt a colossal blow not only to medicine and the health care system, but also quickly turned into a kind of problem of an economic, political, social and cultural nature, covering the whole world. And one such area that has been subject to various disputes and debates due to the emergence of Covid-19 is religious education and religion in general. The cessation of community rituals, the closure of religious sites are the negative consequences of this virus. The first mentions of the Covid-19 virus appeared in the media for the first time in early 2020, already on January 30, 2020, WHO declared this outbreak a public health emergency at the international level. As of July 10, 2021, more than 187 million cases of the disease were registered worldwide, more than 4 million people have died and more than 171 million have recovered.

Iran is one of the first to face the coronavirus. Iran's plight in the fight against the virus has objectively deepened as a result of the imposed sanc-

tions, falling oil prices and isolation from world markets for medical products and drugs. Failures on the public health front threaten to lead to prolonged economic stagnation, increased social discontent and mistrust in the government, and dependence on external assistance. The pandemic has plunged the country into the largest crisis since the Iran-Iraq war.

As in many other countries, the public health crisis raises questions about the effectiveness of governments. In Iran, the internal political situation, which was unstable even before the crisis, is complicated by the presence of governmental and non-governmental groups pursuing their own goals and interests (the circle of Ayatollah Khomeini, the Majlis, the government, etc.). So, if the secular authorities are trying to find pragmatic solutions, then the clergy persist in continuing the activities of the country's religious institutions.

While both dominant groups in government – reformers and conservatives – recognize the urgency of economic action in the country, their ideological rivalry introduces an element of chaos into govern-

ment decision-making and amplifies voices calling for secular rule, as well as related old discussions about the role of the state and religion.

In particular, the country's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said on March 22 in his sermon on the Iranian New Year that "human enemies" as well as jinn or "evil spirits" were responsible for the outbreak of the pandemic. However, despite this, the government made a pragmatic decision, closing the temples of the eighth Imam Reza in the city of Mashhad and his sister Fatima bint Musa in the holy city of Qom on March 16. This event caused protests from a few religious fanatics. Iranian scholar Azade Zamirrad of the German Institute for International Relations and Security (SWP) writes in this regard that "the closure of shrines, which for centuries have been considered places of immunity and healing, is tantamount to demystifying Shiite beliefs." However, most Iranians are moderate Muslims. They understand that religion and science are different spheres, they do not necessarily contradict each other and can coexist. Despite the new wave of secularism, Iranian believers continue to view religion as a defense against the virus.

The degree of study of the topic. Since the pandemic associated with Covid-19 is a new concept, somehow dividing the life of all mankind into before and after, this is the most urgent topic of study by many scientists from different branches of science. During the study of the influence of Covid-19 on religious education and religious rituals in the IIR, articles by Iranian scientists, Iranian news sites and the official websites of the IIR administration were analyzed. In his research, Dr. Mohammad Jawad Chitsaz writes that the outbreak of coronavirus in Iran has touched the topic of religion and religiosity for two reasons. The first reason, the epicenter of the emergence and establishment of this virus was the city of Qom, which is the religious center of the country. The second is all sorts of discussions of religious representatives regarding the conduct of community religious ceremonies in order to prevent an outbreak of the virus. There have been various assumptions among Iranians regarding the origin of this virus. Some attributed this to a natural phenomenon, like other pandemics in the entire history of mankind like the plague. Another group of people explained this with a change in ecology, an illiterate attitude of people to pollution, various kinds of exhaust gas, etc., in addition to these two categories, there is a third who are sure that this is a clear punishment of the Creator for human sins. The latter reasoning has always been highly prevalent among

Iranians. Since the emergence of the plague was also associated with the displeasure of the Creator.

According to a questionnaire dated April 04-07, 2020, conducted by the Department of Social and Cultural Research of the Tehran Administration (Iran), it was revealed: 12% of Tehran residents believe that the cause of the outbreak of the virus is God's wrath; 15% conspiracy of other countries; 22% believe that this is a common natural phenomenon; and 17% and 26% of Tehran residents indicated that this is due to the weakness of states in controlling the disease and lack of hygiene by people. Whatever the reasons for the emergence of this virus, the coronavirus has made a kind of challenge to religions and religiosity.

Community rituals are the most overt and remarkable aspects of all religions. After all, the performance of religious rites by the whole community strengthens the spirit of co-religionists, thereby consolidating social unity. But the outbreak of coronavirus infections has made its own adjustments to the event. The suspension of Friday communal prayers, the ban on pilgrimages and mourning ceremonies are the consequences of this pandemic.

The ban on visiting holy places such as Mecca, Shiite shrines located in Iraq (Kerbala, Najaf, etc.), the shrine of Imam Reza in Mashhad, the shrine of Hazrat Masum in Qom, the shrine of Hazrat Abdulazim in the city of Rei and the closure of mosques have become the most tangible for Iranians and in general for the entire Muslim community. This situation has caused all sorts of responses. For example, the keepers of the shrine, Hazrat Abdulazim, were convinced that such sacred sites were a healing center and protected.

In order to resolve the issue of maintaining religion in society, virtual meetings and programs using the media were introduced in Iran, as well as almost everywhere. The question of holding a virtual funeral has even been raised, which has been criticized among religious leaders. Despite this, the funerals of the victims of the coronavirus were held online. The reading of the Holy Quran by relatives, friends and loved ones was also carried out through social networks like whatsapp and telegram.

During the pandemic, online pilgrimages to sacred sites also took place. This opportunity did not arise since the announcement of the quarantine regime, because with the development of technology, socially and many culturally significant objects almost everywhere have their own virtual excursions. Also, to visit religious shrines in Iran, these achievements of the modern world were used.

Television has been used for a long time as an effective tool to promote religious values in Iran. The mass events can now be watched on television, along with other religious programs broadcast by the Iranian media.

Considering such consequences of the coronavirus, according to Dr. Mohammad Jewad Chitsaz, today there are two hypotheses. The first is that religion after the pandemic will acquire a secular character, while the other says that religion will return to its former status in society, retaining its importance and relevance as before. The reason for the emergence of the first hypothesis, the author believes that the reduction of the role of society, community in religion will lead to a kind of crisis of religiosity. According to the second hypothesis, it is believed that religion to this day is a kind of last resort and support for people in difficult times, even in the modern world. According to a questionnaire among Iranian students from April 12-15, 2020, the question was asked: "Has the importance of religion and the Creator changed for you during the pandemic?" As a result, 46% of Iranians answered that the importance of religion and the Creator during the pandemic became more important than before, and 48.4% answered that they did not notice any change. Only 3.5% answered that the importance has decreased. According to statistics, in 1974, 83% of the total population of Iran performed prayer (82% of men, 84% of women), in 2006, 81.5% of the IIR population performed prayers (79.2% of men, 83.6% of women). Attendance at joint prayers and Friday prayers tends to decline. But other collective religious practices, such as attending prayers, mourning ceremonies, and pilgrimages to religious sites, were almost constant or expanded. Religious scholars may interpret such an event as a phenomenon of religious fanaticism or the de-politicization of religious holiness.

In short, we can say that there are two categories regarding the ban on visiting mosques and shrines. The first category, where most of the clergy adhere to quarantine measures, even if this leads to the closure of religious sites. And the second is still tuned in to the fact that shrines and religious sites are sacred and pure.

A faculty member of the Institute of Islamic Sciences and Culture expressed his opinion on the impact of the coronavirus epidemic on the suspension of religious observances and ceremonies, Mr. Mehrab Sadegnia argues that: "Although the Covid-19 pandemic has overshadowed religious and collective observances and closed their traditional form of visiting religious sites together, religious

rites took on a virtual form, and I am undoubtedly sure that the awareness of religiosity deepened and helped people and society as a whole to continue to remember God" (Sadegnia, 2021).

Mehrab Sadegnia also emphasizes: "During a pandemic, when the gathering of people was and is considered a threat to life, it is natural that this affected the ritual dimension of religion. The number of gatherings should be reduced, holy and religious sites should be closed, and religious practices that were held in groups should no longer be conducted as before. But we cannot interpret this as "the coronavirus has led to the decline of religion".

Kissinger's article "The Coronavirus Pandemic Will Forever Alter the World Order" (Kissinger, 2020), released in the midst of a pandemic in April 2020, is very relevant today. According to Kissinger, maintaining public trust is critical for social solidarity, the relationship of societies with each other, as well as for international peace and stability. He is confident that the world will never be the same after the pandemic. The author argues that arguing now about the past only makes it harder to do what needs to be done in the future. The coronavirus struck with an unprecedented scale and ferocity, it is clear that the virus does not recognize any borders, therefore, according to the author, countries should rally and fight on a more global scale. Also, Kissinger in his study "The Coronavirus Pandemic Will Forever Alter the World Order" expressed his concept of crisis efforts, in the opinion of the scientist, no matter how large-scale and necessary they may be, should not supplant the urgent task of launching a parallel enterprise for the transition to a post-coronavirus order.

Methodology

Hubert Seivert in his research speaks of three theoretical approaches to the study of religion in history: phenomenological (grounded either theologically or philosophically), socionic and natural science. Nevertheless, the days of Marx, Weber, Durkheim and even Clifford Geertz, when religion was interpreted primarily in terms of the social, have already passed. And so, perhaps, there has recently been an important shift towards a third type of approach – natural science (Tweed, 2006). This, of course, is not about the fact that studies of religion actually become part of the natural science field, but there is a certain shift in this direction, a certain, so to speak, "naturalization" is palpable. More than half of the theories analyzed are based on "bio-centric" approaches — especially those that are commonly

called cognitive. So, religion is a natural, natural, biologically determined phenomenon “rooted in the brain,” that is, it is a definite result of the cognitive structure of human thinking. In this regard, a breakthrough and set the course for the “cognitive approach” as such is the scientific work of Thomas Lawson and Robert McCauley with an absolutely clear, setting title: “Rethinking Religion: Connecting Thinking and Culture” (Lawson, 1990). Lawson and McCauley’s 1990 theory can be considered unconditionally innovative, opening a new discourse in the study of religion (Lawson, 1990). The essence of the problem that all cognitive theorists face is, therefore, not only to find the origins of certain “human phenomena” in the mechanism of thinking, but also to find ways of translating thinking into culture, or projecting thinking onto culture. There is culture, no matter how they try to brush it off, and it is a “collective” phenomenon, and therefore, first you need to understand how individual consciousness, which alone can be the subject of cognitive analysis, turns into collective representations, discourses, identities or behavioral patterns. Pascal Boyer and Ilkka Püsiäinen complement each other in their monographs *Explaining Religion and How Religion Works*. The approach of Boyer (Boyer, 2001) and Püsiäinen (Pyysiäinen, 2003), developed on the basis of their own specialized research and owing much to the influence of the French anthropologist Dan Sperber, can be considered the mainstream of the cognitive approach. Sperber, and after him the rest of the theorists, are changing the optics of religion: religion is not so much a cultural phenomenon as a mental mechanism. By analogy with the dichotomy introduced by N. Chomsky and accepted in linguistics, Joseph Balbulia (in the article on Scott Atran’s theory (Atran, 2002)) opposes iReligion and eReligion: i – from innate, internal; e – from external; the first category reflects internal, innate religious impulses, and the second, external “religious culture”. Atran himself, of course, prefers to see iReligion as defining; moreover, most other cognitive theorists are inclined (Atran, 2002).

In this regard, the use of a cognitive approach in the study of religion, religious rituals, religious education during the Covid-19 pandemic in IRI is justified, as well as to try to determine how the external religious culture of eReligion has transformed during the pandemic, as well as how comfortable Iranian society is in the conditions of iReligion.

Methods. Critical analysis of the diversity of data and information on the research topic, using the principle of objectivity, a systematic approach to the study of the crisis, which forced the world order to

develop with a new scenario, a historical-analytical method to study the state of religious education and religious institutions during the pandemic, required the use of aggregation and sorting methods. In addition to these methods, the authors used an empirical method of research, which helped to increase the level of accuracy by conducting expert surveys in Persian on the Google-platform, systematizing the collected data, comparing information. The method of control helped to analyze the information in periodicals, to evaluate the views of the authors, to systematize the latest opinions in the press.

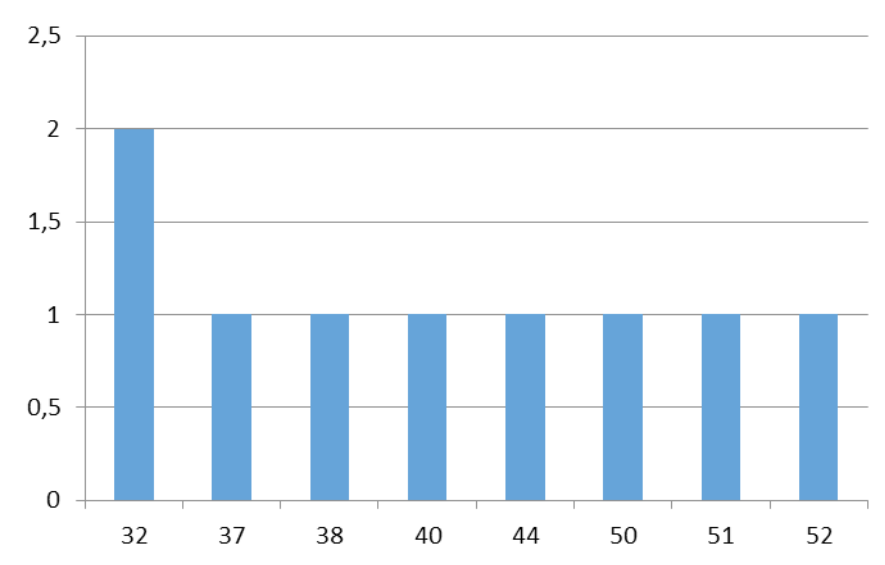
Results and discussion

The expert survey was conducted from February to April 2021, the survey was conducted in Persian language, and was distributed to respondents. The questionnaires for the survey of experts were compiled by the project leader Dr. Yerekesheva L.G. (the project “Religious institutions and practices in the context of digitalization and changes in social space during the COVID pandemic in Kazakhstan” (GF MES RK 2020-2021, IRN AP08956706)) taking into account the purpose of the project, as well as the specifics of the country under study. In particular, there were two blocks of issues related to religious education, on the one hand, and the direction of religious rituals, on the other. Subsequently, the questionnaires were translated by the author into Farsi and sent out to respondents-experts in Iran.

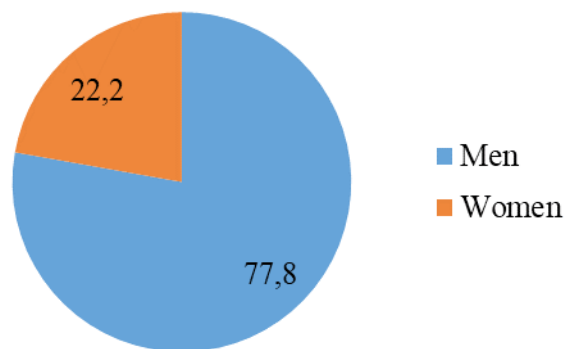
Representatives of various spheres were selected as experts – scientific-academic, educational, in the field of applied analytics, practical. Experts from Iran, France and Turkey were represented in the country.

According to the results of the survey, it is possible to see that the age category of respondents from Iran is from 32 to 52 years (Figure 1), of which 77.8% are men and 22.2% are women (Figure 2).

To the first question whether digitalization and distance education can affect religious education in your country, most of the respondents answered in the affirmative, and only 1 respondent believes that the pandemic will not affect this area in any way, two experts believe that this will certainly have a negative effect. According to experts, the digitization of all areas, including teaching, can sever the spiritual bond between teacher and student and between students and their peers. They stressed that digitizing education and training means individualizing religion and eliminating its social impact. Also, according to experts, one of the negative influences is the lack of control over the content of religious platforms and sites on the Internet.



Source: Compiled by the author based on the results of an expert survey
Figure 1 – Age category of experts on Iran who participated in the expert survey



Source: Compiled by the author based on the results of an expert survey
Figure 2 – Gender of respondents

It is known that widespread discontent in society was caused by the problem of communication. According to the latest poll by the Iranian Statistics Center in 2017, 28% of Iranians did not have or had limited access to the Internet. At the same time, on March 10, the Iranian Ministry of Education announced the closure of all schools and universities in order to slow the spread of the new coronavirus. On April 4, Iran officially launched its national distance learning project. The Ministry of Education has launched “SHAD”, an Iranian application that students must subscribe to in order to attend virtual classes with their classmates and teachers. However, distance learning faces many challenges, the main one being poverty and limited access to the In-

ternet. People are not able to pay for the Internet service, not all students have their own mobile phones. There is also censorship – authorities have banned teachers from using any foreign application for educational purposes. As a result, only 24.6% of Iranian students and about 50% of Iranian teachers signed up for the educational platform. Even according to official estimates, in such poor regions as Sistan and Baluchistan, only about 6.8% of students are connected to SHAD.

To the next question of the expert survey, “Can social distance affect religious teachings?” six respondents answered in the affirmative, the participants in the expert survey believe that there are fewer emotional factors and more perception factors. The

next group of experts who answered negatively believe that teaching religious sciences offline is more effective. In their opinion, social distance means avoiding religious communities, which in Islamic society live next to each other and in close interaction in the name of “barakat” of religious teachings.

Surprisingly, to question 3, can a religious person receive a religious education online remotely, 100 % of all respondents answered in the affirmative, and not a single negative answer.

Having received a 100% answer to question 3, the respondents answered what it is possible to study on the Internet first. As a result, it was received the following list of answers:

- Quran and main religious books
- Fiqh and basic principles of religion
- Usually religious centers try to meet the needs of their audience online or offline depending on their mission
- Quran, hadith, religious stories
- Basic topics and principles can be studied.
- All materials can be studied online

When asked whether it is possible to organize blended learning (distance, online and offline) in religious education, 90% of the experts answered in the affirmative, stressing that this is possible for some time, but it may not always continue. 10% answered that they disagree about distance learning for religious teachings, whether mixed or not.

To the next question about which religious teachings cannot be studied remotely on the Internet, all respondents unanimously answered that practical aspects cannot be studied remotely.

The following responses were received to the question «How digitalization and social distance affect religious practices»:

- Performing ceremonies has become difficult.
- While these methods work, they are less effective than being present.
- Reduces hypocrisy.
- Of course, the rituals are getting smaller, and there are few people at these ceremonies.
- If the teaching of religious teachings is based only on digitalization, then gradually it will become less and less weaker.
- Has no influence
- People mainly use audio voice to read prayers and verses, and some people often do not memorize prayers and verses.

When asked whether religious communities (Islamic or others) can remotely perform important social rituals online (Friday prayers, Ramadan / Eid al-Adha), 20% of experts answered negatively. In their opinion, the essence of these rituals is based

on physical presence. Online won't have much of an effect. The remaining 80% of respondents answered that it is possible, but temporarily and for a short period of time, noting that it is impossible to always perform socially important rituals remotely.

It was also asked whether religious communities (Islamic or others) can perform important social rituals (Friday prayers, Ramadan / Eid al-Adha) while maintaining social distance. All the interviewed experts answered that it is possible if there is an urgent need for it. However, they also noted the fact that this is not comparable to the feeling of the collective performance of certain rituals.

When they were asked whether the followers of Islam or other people are ready to accept and launch a new way (online) for performing religious rituals, 20% of respondents answered in the affirmative, noting that the 21st century is the century of cyberspace and distance education. 80% of respondents were skeptical, stressing that there is a lack of full preparedness, because this situation began with the arrival of the coronavirus pandemic and requires further study, and many people still do not have sufficient knowledge of using the Internet, and collective religious practices are very important in Shiite Islam.

When experts were asked whether the changes due to the epidemic of religious rituals could also affect the debate between religious followers and society as a whole, 44.4% answered negatively (will not), and 55.6% answered in the affirmative (will) (Figure 3).



Source: Compiled by the author based on the results of an expert survey

Figure 3 – Whether the changes due to the epidemic of religious rituals could also affect the debate between religious followers and society as a whole?

Those categories that answered yes to the previous question were asked which religious practices might be more important. According to experts, divine collective rituals of the obligatory type such as Friday prayers, joint prayers and Hajj cannot be

closed or affected by any factors. But the month of Ramadan can be performed individually, because, apart from the Eid al Fitr prayer, the rest of the worship has an individual character.

Residents of Iran were offered various solutions for performing religious rituals during quarantine, improving and creating programs of a spiritual nature and facilitating the availability of the Internet and the creation of training sites for a long time (<https://iranthinktanks.com/religious-beliefs-and-coronavirus-crisis/>, 2021).

Ayatollah Khamenei's order forced delegations to conduct Ghadr Nights ceremonies in parks and open spaces in a hygienic manner after months of closure of religious ceremonies (<https://www.mehrnews.com/news/>, 2021).

In the days of Fatemiye 2020, it was announced that mourning processions were being held in three squares in Tehran, which provoked a reaction from the governor of the city. There are also twofold points about which state representatives expressed their dissatisfaction with the fact that a trip to Turkey is allowed, but not to Iraq.

Despite all fears and objections, the beginning of Muharram was accompanied by a mourning ceremony. A ceremony that challenged adherence to medical protocols, including social distancing. Meanwhile, Iran's health ministry has warned of a sharp rise in the spread of the coronavirus despite a drop in deaths (<https://www.radiofarda.com/a/30796233.html>, 2020).

Following this news, one can observe from the statement of the Minister of Health and Medical Education, Seyd Namaki, confirmed that the number of infected with Covid-19 increased 2-3 times after the Muharram mourning ceremony. But at the same time, his statement about forgiveness becomes interesting, "I urge my colleagues to act in such a way that the mosque and prayer were the last place where we closed ourselves," justifying this as an effective means of preventing mental and physical illness, and said that they should not be neglected (<https://iranintl.com/>, 2020).

It is also impossible to get around the situation with the consequences of the Nauryz holiday and the month of Ramadan. As you know, in Iran, the weekend during Nauryz lasts about two weeks. The increase in the number of sick and injured after the celebration of the Nauryz holiday in Iran plunged the country into a new wave of crisis. A situation that many people blame for recklessness. Citizens themselves are also accused of not taking all the warnings seriously and neglecting measures of caution and social distancing. Now, the celebra-

tion of the Night of Ghadr, despite the widespread outbreak of the Covid-19 virus, has led some to describe Iran's health policy as "one roof and two air" (<https://www.radiofarda.com/a/31234549.html>, 2021).

According to news feeds dated May 28, 2021, the abolition of the ban on Friday prayers is vigorously discussed. Spiritual representatives are confident that today there are no exhaustive reasons for supporting the ban on Friday prayer (<https://www.irna.ir/news/84039700/>, 2021).

According to the news from September 18, 2020, the National Headquarters for Combating Covid-19 has authorized Friday prayers in Tehran and its regions, despite the fact that this area is included in the red risk zone (<https://www.radiofarda.com/a/30845792.html>, 2021).

Conclusion

The coronavirus struck with an unprecedented scale and ferocity, it is clear that the virus does not recognize any borders and influenced the course of events not only in Iran, but also on the entire planet. According to many experts, mankind will have to learn to live with this virus, adapt habitual customs and rituals, ways of communication and education for a different life alignment. In this regard, we would like to note the experience of Singapore and South Korea, which showed successful results and methodology in combating the virus, the key to their success, as noted by the authorities of these countries, in a very high discipline of society. Iran's case is also very important, because this is a country with very high cases of diseases, and the role of religion and clergy is very important in the social and political life of the IRI. According to the results of the empirical study, despite the fact that a conservative view of religious education and religious rituals and customs prevails in the country, in general, Iranian society positively perceives the transition to online learning and the practice of rituals while respecting social distance. Iranian society has adapted to iReligion (innate religion), but emphasize that it is for a short time during a pandemic. All the same, collective rituals are very important to the Iranian and Muslim society, and the role of eReligion (external) is very important. Whatever the reasons for the emergence of this virus, the coronavirus has made a kind of challenge to religions and religiosity. Community rituals are the most overt and remarkable aspects of all religions. After all, the performance of religious rites by the whole community strengthens the spirit of co-religionists, thereby consolidating

social unity. But the outbreak of coronavirus infections has made its own adjustments to the event. The suspension of Friday communal prayers, the ban on pilgrimages and mourning ceremonies are the consequences of this pandemic. There is no doubt that society was forced to adapt to these conditions, and shows its tolerance, believing that this is for a short time. Will these changes remain in our society forever, or is it just a forced measure for a short time, time

will show... But one thing is clear that the pandemic associated with Covid-19 was a kind of catalyst that accelerated the digitalization of all industries, including religious education and religious rituals, increased the digital literacy of the society. There were also problems and communication failures, the weakness of the Internet connection, the shortcomings of online platforms. But these problems were not only in Iran, but also in other countries.

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