An Investigation of Medicine Science and Public Health in Holy Quran

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Abstract

Medicine, like other sciences, drew its nourishment from the Quran and its philosophy of life. And like other sciences, the principal of harmony and balance also worked through and influenced the science of medicine. The whole study of Medicine is also related to the Islamic faith through the injunctions of the Holy Quran and Hadith of the Holy Prophet concerning hygiene and better and healthy living. In short, the Islamic Shariah has issued directions regarding ablution, cleanliness, general hygiene, dietary habits, healthy foods and many other elements affecting the body and its health.

Introduction

There is certainly another intimate link between medicine and Islam. The human body is considered to be the formal residence of the soul (Ruh) and therefore closely related to both the spirit and the soul. Thus both soul and spirit are intimately related to and are dependent upon the physical body of man because the former cannot exist in this world without the latter. Secondly, man has to maintain his outward form as well as his inwardly in a good and healthy condition to exist at all. Therefore the health and care of the body becomes an important matter both for medicine and religion, in order to keep man outwardly and inwardly in a healthy condition. Progress within the 20th century alone has produced an immense amount of literature and understanding in anatomy, medicinal health, and the correlation between the two. Our comprehension of the two, however, would not be possible without the important discoveries and critical observations of our predecessors such as the “Father of Medicine” Hippocrates (463–370 BC), the “Father of Modern Anatomy” Andreas Vesalius (1514–1564), and Abu Ali al-Husain ibn Abdallah ibn Sina (Avicenna) [1] and [2]. While the contributions of Galen and Hippocrates are well known, contributions to medicine by numerous religious texts including the Hindu Vedas, Judeo–Christian Bible and Talmud, and the Islamic Qur’an and Hadeeth (prophetic sayings of Mohammad) are often omitted from the literature. Found within the Qur’an and Hadeeth are accurate descriptions of anatomical structures, surgical procedures, physiological characteristics, and medical remedies. In particular, prophylaxis of general diseases is emphasized by encouraging physical activity, herbal and organic remedies, and spiritual revitalization. Hough revealed during these years, the transmission of the verses was conducted orally until it was compiled and canonized the year after Mohammad's death. The exegesis of the Qur’an was carried out by scholars in later centuries, the most popular being made by Ibn Kathir in the 14th century. The Hadeeth are the sayings, rulings, advices, actions and habits of the Prophet Mohammed which are distinct from the direct words of God and were also transmitted orally until they were organized into a comprehensive permanent record in the 9th century. Scholars of the time were meticulous in their work and employed stringent rules as to which sayings of Mohammad would be included in the compilation to ensure accuracy and authenticity. Only the sayings that had a strong, credible line of transmission were collected and written. Both the Qur’an and the Hadeeth were used when creating the Islamic law Shariah, “Path.” During the same period, the vast Islamic empire was the epicenter of all academia, as major cities consisted of large libraries containing the world’s knowledge translated from most languages into Arabic. Unlike the Christian Church, Islamic teachings strongly encouraged and supported scientific research which led to many advancements and discoveries [3]. In fact, the Qur’an and Hadeeth recognize the pursuit of knowledge as being an act of worship to God. This supportive attitude towards scientific observation and opinion has resulted in numerous scientific achievements and the adoption of a tolerant attitude toward the expression and discussion of scientific observation and opinion.

General views about medicine and health in Quran

The Qur’an and Hadeeth even include some of the discoveries made during the time of its creation. According to the Qur’an and Hadeeth, God created disease and God also created a treatment for every disease. There is a prophetic tradition where Mohammad has been reported to have said that for
every disease there is a remedy, and when the remedy is made apparent, the disease is cured by the permission of God [4]. Therefore, people are encouraged to pray, but also seek out treatments. Anything that harms the body, mind and soul must be treated. It is for this reason that physicians were highly valued members of the community and Mohammad called upon them to treat illnesses. This demonstrates that Islam was compatible with medicine; the need for medical treatment was accepted and required. In the Qur'an and Hadeeth, two different forms of treatment can be found spiritual healing and physical healing. There are at least six verses which discuss divine healing. The medium through which this healing occurs is via the teachings and revelation of the Qur'an, a scripture that has been revealed as a “mercy and healing to those who think” [5]. This form of healing treats, specifically, the heart, as God removes “rage form their hearts” [6]. The Qur'an mentions “hidden ailments meaning doubt, impurity, hypocrisy, disbelief, and falsehood, attributed as diseases of the heart. Proverbs and stories in the Qur'an discuss faith and loyalty to the divine and state that they who sincerely trust will “cure” then when they are ill [7]. Although spiritual healing is most mentioned in the Qur'an, it would be erroneous to claim that the practice of medicine was meant only for the divine. While the scripture and remembrance of God is supposed to heal the hidden ailments of people, many Muslim physicians found treatment options in the Qur'an and the Hadeeth. Physical ailments and their treatments are discussed in the Qur'an and Hadeeth, such as abdominal pain, diarrhea, fever, leprosy, and mental illness. Mohammad is reported to have said that healing is in three things: a gulp of honey, cupping, and cauterizing, but that cauterization should be a last resort [8]. Honey was offered as treatment for many illnesses, such as abdominal discomfort and diarrhea. Honey contains the therapeutic contents sugars, vitamins, anti-microbials, among other things. Black cuminwas also a source of treatment [9], as was At-Talbina (a porridge prepared from milk, honey, and white flour) [10]. Indian incense for throat trouble and pleurisy, eating dates protected against poison [11], breastfeeding [12], ablution and forgiveness. Furthermore, the well of Zam Zam, a miraculously generated source of water in Mecca was believed to be a treatment for fevers [13]. Thus, the Qur'an and Hadeeth offer treatments for numerous illnesses common in Arabia during that time, establishing the important concept that Islamic tradition recognizes treatments for the illnesses and the treatments must be sought out and provided to patients. The importance of cleanliness was emphasized in prophetic traditions. For instance, Mohammad states that while praising God is half of faith, cleanliness is the other half [14]. In another tradition, Mohammad is reported to have said that surgical circumcision, clipping or shaving the pubes, cutting the nails, plucking or shaving the hair under the armpits and clipping (or shaving) the moustache are all acts that benefit the body and thus bring one closer to God [15]. In addition, the transmission of certain diseases that were communicable by touch and air was known, which is why the idea of quarantining the sick was encouraged and practiced. Narrations exist where Mohammad admonishes healthy individuals to “…flee from a lepers as you flee from a lion” [16] and the narration alsowarns those who are healthy to keep away from those who are sick. Furthermore, the Qur'an forbids foods to be eaten that can easily transmit food-borne diseases such as Trichinella, Taeniasis and Neurocysticercosis, as can be seen in the following verse; “Forbidden to you (for food) are: dead meat, blood, the flesh of swine, and that on which hath been invoked the name of other than God; that which hath been killed by strangling, or by a violent blow, or by a headlong fall, or by being gored to death; that which hath been (partly) eaten by a wild animal; unless ye are able to slaughter it (in due form); that which is sacrificed on stone (altars); (forbidden) also is the division (of meat) by raffling with arrows; that is impiety” [17]. Noise pollution is also mentioned in the Hadeeth, where Mohammad encourages his followers not to speak in a loud voice or to engage in any act that consisted of loud sound, which is why drumming, blowing of a horn, and ringing bells were all turned down by Mohammad when it came to deciding how to deliver the call for prayer. Alcohol is also forbidden in Islam, as is made clear by the Qur'anic injunction. Therefore, it is apparent that the Qur'an discouraged actions that might adversely affect the body such as extremely loud noise and unsanitary food. Indeed, these Qur'anic verses motivated health consciousness.

Discussion

The anatomy and physiology of the human body provided a wide field of study for philosophers, theologians and physicians. Quranic studies further encouraged the study of the human body, it being one of the signs (Aayat) of the Creator. Man being the supreme and noblest creation, the study of his physical body was therefore considered necessary and important for the proper understanding of Allah’s Wisdom. The Quraan has invited man to look into the
matter of his own creation in order to find the Wisdom of Allah and to understand the purpose of the whole creation.

It is necessary to keep the physical body very healthy so that spirit and soul may also remain healthy in order to achieve spiritual attainment as well as material. Some of the health regulations prescribed to us by the Quran:

1) The dietary regulations play an important role in Islamic medicine. Islam has prohibited certain foods because of their ill-effects, and allowed all other pure, good and clean things. Allah says, "O Believers! Eat of the good and pure things that we have provided for you and render thanks to Allah, if it is (indeed) He whom you worship." (Holy Quran;2: 172)

As regards the criterion for judging whether a thing is pure or not? It should be noted that all those things are pure which are not unclean according to any principle of Islamic Law, or which are not offensive to good taste or have not universally been regarded as repugnant by cultured people. After stating this general principle with regard to permissible foods, the Quran specifies the prohibited foods in these words, "He has only forbidden you dead meat and blood and swine flesh and that food over which the name of other than Allah has been invoked" (Holy Quran;16 :115)

These four things are absolutely forbidden in Islam for reasons known to Allah. However, research on these things have shown that some of them are injurious to human health - as dead meat, blood and swine meat, and some are harmful to moral health as well - flesh of swine, and still others to spiritual health as food over which the name of any other than Allah has been invoked.

2) Alcohol is also prohibited because of it's harmfulness is greater than it's benefits. The physical, moral, social and spiritual evils of intoxicants and gambling are clearly referred to in the Quran as the filthy work of Shaitaan.

3) The Quran has also given very useful tips regarding a balanced diet which contains every useful ingredient necessary for the growth and repair of the human body, including protein, fat, calcium, iron, salts etc.

The most balanced diets consist of meat; especially roast fat, calf or fish, fresh milk, cheese and fruit. The Quran makes indirect references to the importance of animal protein in human diet on various occasions.

"There came our Messenger to Ibrahim with glad tidings. They said, 'Peace'. He answered, 'Peace! and hastened to entertain them with a roasted calf". (Holy Quran;11.69).

Then the Quran also mentions the meal of fowls, "And the flesh of fowls, any that they desire". (Holy Quran;56:21)

Fish is also considered to be food of very high protein and very important for human consumption. The Quran refers to this fresh food in these words, "It is He who has made the sea to be of service that may you eat thereof flesh that is fresh and tender". (Holy Quran;16:14)

The Quran then refers to the importance of animal protein in general in the human diet. "And the castle He created for you, from them you derive warmth and numerous benefits, and their meal you eat". (Holy Quran;16:5)

The usefulness of fresh milk is stressed in these words. "And in the cattle there is truly a lesson for you. We give you to drink of that which is in their bellies". (Holy Quran;23:21)

The benefits of fruit as good nourishment is described in these words, "And of the fruit of the date-palm, and grapes, you get out wholesome drink and also good nourishment". (Holy Quran;16:67)

The Quran mentions the great medicinal uses of honey for mankind, "And you're Lord taught the bee to build it's cells on mountains on trees and inhabitants." (Holy Quran;16:68)

Honey seems to possess immense medicinal value for various diseases. It is extremely effective and useful for heart diseases and provides top-grade, readymade glucose for body weaknesses. Very good for the eyes, that if used regularly, young people can get rid of their spectacles in a few years.

Honey has also been used for preparing and preserving other medicines. Because it does not rot, which is why it is a substitute for alcohol, good for common colds, blood diseases, and digestion and so on? In fact the Prophet recommended the use of honey for a great many illnesses.

So in short, the ingredients of honey show that it is being useful in these ways:

a) As good nourishment.

b) As a protective measure

c) As a medicine for various kinds of diseases. Its ingredients are calcium, sculpture, carbon, phosphorous, iron, magnesium, chlorine, sodium, potassium and iodine.

4) Surgery: There is no verse of the Quran which specifically mentions surgical and anatomical operations as such but by implication and interpretation, a few scholars reported to have taken this verse in this context, "Have we not expanded your breast". (Holy Quran;94: 1-3)

This is given further support by an incident which occurred during the time of the Prophet's (Sallallaahu Aliyhi Wasallam) childhood when two men clothed in white threw him down and opened his belly and searched therein and stretched it apart.
There is a possibility the above incident might well have initiated surgical medicine in the early phase of Islamic civilization and might have encouraged many physicians to take the line of medicine. Famous physicians like Ibn Sina, Ibn Al-Quff and so on were encouraged performing surgical operations.

Conclusion

The Qur'an and prophetic traditions and sayings of Mohammad were religious, spiritual, and scientific and influenced medical and anatomical texts. An in-depth analysis of the contribution of Islamic medicine in anatomy, physiology, and health is severely lacking in the West and, if conducted, would uncover that discoveries made by European scientists were actually made centuries prior, within the vast Islamic empire. Perhaps European scientists during the middle Ages and beyond failed to benefit from the discoveries of the neighboring Islamic empire for multiple reasons, including poor translations and the unreadiness of the medical establishment to give prominence to observation and study over the word of ancient authority. As new advances in technology and medicine continue to grow at an exponential rate today, there is time to reflect and appreciate the Islamic contribution to medicine. It is for this reason that the discoveries and medical revelations in Qur'an should not be ignored or forgotten.

References

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