

Research

Indigenous Knowledge of Medical Herbs: Islamic Education Perspectives

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Islam is the most comprehensive religion that presents myriads of ideas, traditions and practices for teaching Muslims from multi-disciplinary perspectives. One of such areas is the medical traditions. The purpose of this article is to investigate whether such traditional medications are included in the Islamic education. To achieve this objective, textual analysis was done on Islamic Holy Scripture (the Qur'an) and Hadiths. Literature review was also done on the issue. It was found out that before 1450 years the Qur'an and the Prophetic Hadiths mentioned the beneficial properties of many plants and food stuffs such as fig, olive, date palm, zinger, onion, garlic and many more. Medical experts assert that such herbal medicines are being widely used in the world since such plants has got better cultural acceptance, least injurious with little or no side effects.

Key terms: Islamic education, Prophetic medicines, Qur'an, Hadith, Herbs

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INTRODUCTION

Prophetic Medicine simply refers to the actions done and thought said by the Prophet Muhammed with regards to sickness, treatment, nutrition, and hygiene. Prophetic medical traditions urge humans to not simply stop at following Muhammad's teachings, but encourage them to search for cures as well. The literature of Prophetic medicine thus occupies a symbolic role in the clarification of Islamic identity as constituted by a particular set of relationships to science, medicine, technology and nature.

Ibn Abbas has also narrated that Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him) said: "There are two blessings which many people lose: "(They are) health and free time for doing good." (Al-Bukhari). Prophet Muhammed had a firm belief in the existence of a cause and a cure for every disease and that was described in many prophetic hadiths such as: "Make use of medical treatment, for

Allah has not made a disease without appointing a remedy for it, with the exception of one disease, namely old age" (Sunan Abu Dawud).

About 50 hadiths on specific ailments and their remedies have been grouped together under the Chapter called Kitab-al-Tibb of well-known collections of hadith by Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, Tirmidhi, and others. In addition of those, more than 300 hadiths referred to hygiene, cleanliness, habit of eating and drinking. All these prophetic hadiths, which number about 400, constitute the Prophetic Medicine, and can be found together in the classical books of Ibn al-Qayyim Aljuzi (8th Century AD), and Abu Abd-Allah al-Dhahbi (8th Century AD).

The purpose of this article is to help both Muslims and non-Muslims understand the concepts of Prophetic healthy advices and communicate with them what Islamic education teaches about medicine briefly.

The Problem

Tradition in general and Islamic education in particular is perceived wrongly by many educated people. As a result, many people are ignorant of the relevance of Islamic education (especially in the west) in the modern world. Islam is understood by Muslims in the world as a comprehensive way of life. In this regard, it has got myriads of topics that are relevant for contemporary life.

One of the most misunderstood concepts is the issue of diseases and their treatments. Muslims believe that "For every disease, there is a cure". This is one of the Prophetic hadith injunctions. For this reason, a disease with no cure is unknown in the Muslim culture. Many people also associate religion as a mechanism for spiritual treatment only. They think that religion in general and Islam in particular has little or nothing to do with the use of treatments. In fact, I know different Sheiks and Imams and other religious individuals serving as local doctors for all kinds of ailments. They treat not only humans but also plants and other animals using different herbs. That may imply some sort of medical instructions in Muslim education. What does Islam teach about medication? Such and related questions will be demystified in this article.

Research Objective

The principal purpose of this study was to investigate the teachings of the scriptures of Islam (The Qur'an and Ahadith) in order to communicate how Islamic education can contribute to health and medication of people in Ethiopia.

Research Questions

The research questions were (1) What does Islam teach about medicine? (2) What are the common herbal medicines described in the Qur'an and used by the Prophet himself?

Research Paradigm

I used the constructivist paradigm considering reality to be multiple and subjective according to the meanings given to different issues by the scriptures and that of mine.

Research Design

Textual analysis was used in this study by discussing the meanings and interpretations of the Qur'an and the ahadith. .

Research Analysis

I used three different analytical strategies: structured analysis (developing codes and themes); interpretative analysis (using the voice and meaning of the texts and that of mine given to an issue); and finally reflective analysis (giving my own imagination and insight).

Research Methods

To achieve the objective of the study, data were collected from the teachings of the Prophetic Hadiths and the Qur'an through reading and re-reading in the form of text analysis. I also used review of research literatures on the agenda.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion

Healthy Prophetic Advices

Salman reported, The Messenger of Allah said "The blessing of food is the washing of hands before it, and the washing of hands after it."

The traditions (sunnah) of the Prophet Muhammad are rich in advice and instructions on such matters as hygiene, sanitation, and treatment of disease through the use of medication (www.onislam.net)

Islamic Foundations of Well-Being

The Prophet Muhammad laid down the foundation for a social order in which every member of society was advised to maintain a healthy life, physically, psychologically, and spiritually. No aspect of life was to be disregarded. In the opinion of Douglas Guthrie (A History of Medicine, 1945), great advances in medicine made by Muslims during the Middle Ages were mainly due to the impact of the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad. Guthrie writes, "Had not the Prophet Muhammad himself said, 'O Servant of God, use medicine, because God hath not created a pain without a remedy for it'" [Tirmidhi].

As a matter of fact, there are several such sayings in which the Prophet laid great emphasis on medicine and discouraged seeking help through amulets, relics, and charms. For instance, the Prophet once said, "There is a remedy for every malady and when the remedy is applied to". This and several such hadiths have been described in Bukhari, Muslim, and Abu Dawud.

Once the Prophet was asked by one of his companions, "Is there any good in medicine?" To this he emphatically replied, "Yes." As a result, Islamic teachings make it the duty of every society or group of people to

conduct research and discover the remedy for diseases that afflict human beings. The concept of incurable diseases is thus alien to Islam (www.onislam.net).

Changing Age-Old Attitudes

There were several occasions when the Prophet visited the sick, and after enquiring about the ailments advised to take the medicine prescribed from experienced physicians who were known in the community. On several occasions he advised “the disease is curable.”

On one particular occasion the Prophet visited Sa`d ibn Abi Waqqas who had suffered a heart attack. When the Prophet placed his hand on the chest of Sa`d he felt great relief, but the Prophet cautioned him and said, “You’ve had a heart attack and therefore should consult Harith Bin Kalda, who is the expert physician.” It is these and many other similar occasions that greatly changed the attitude of the Arabs towards diseases. Arabs, during the pre-Islamic period, depended mainly on invoking supernatural aid or different deities for the treatment of disease.

The Prophet Muhammad, realizing the consequences of infectious epidemics, advised his companions that, “When you hear about a break of plague in any area, do not enter there and when it has broken in a land where you are, then do not run away from it (and thus spread it elsewhere).” On the basis of this hadith, Muslims considered precaution and vigilance against infectious epidemics as the command of God.

The Prophet also opposed charms and incantations as a form of remedy for diseases. On some occasions, however, when physical remedy (medicine) was not available, he allowed, mainly for psychological reasons, the recitation of an incantation that has definite meaning. He also declared the victims of epidemics such as cholera and the plague as martyrs. This was a great consolation for those who suffered from it.

The Prophet always cautioned physicians to take extreme care in treating their patients and warned those not well-versed in the skill of medicine not to attempt treating the ill lest they might be held responsible for any complications. Deception is, therefore, forbidden in Islamic medical ethics.

The Prophet Muhammad advised his followers to always care for their health, and whenever they were ill, whether seriously or otherwise, consoled them and told them not to feel that they were victims of the wrath of Allah. “Disease,” he said, “is not the wrath of Allah, because Prophets also suffered great pains, much greater than ordinary people.” Imagine what a comfort these sayings would have provided to the followers of Islam.

There are many Prophetic hadiths in Bukhari, Muslim and others that show that people were accustomed to go

to the Prophet regularly and tell him about their ailments. He would advise them to resort to medicine first and then pray to God to get rid of the disease. On several occasions he would himself suggest certain medicines. For instance, in case of loss of appetite he frequently advised his followers to take talbina, a preparation made from barley.

For constipation he used to recommend the use of Senna. He was also in favor of regular use of honey for keeping fit. Similarly, for different ailments he would advise the use of olives, black cumin, chicory, endive, fenugreek, ginger, marjoram, saffron, vinegar, and watercress. Hadiths on these medicines and others show the concern of the Prophet for the welfare and good health of his followers. For even apparently small matters like drinking water, eating food, and keeping clean and tidy he also gave advice. He is noted to have said, “Cleanliness is half of faith.”

Some of the hadiths on black cumin, henna, and watercress are very thought provoking. For instance, the Prophet is reported to have said that, “Black cumin (tikur azmud) is a remedy for every disease except death.” The Prophet expressed similar views on the efficacy of henna and cress.

The style and language of these hadiths are a clear indication of the fact that the Prophet placed great focus on medicines. These hadiths also put emphasis on confidence building of the ill towards their diseases and agonies suffered. Very rational advice was given that none should be disheartened by the intensity and duration of the disease because remedies have been provided by nature. They were also advised not to be afraid of imminent death.

Once during the time of the Prophet, a person committed suicide as he could not bear the agony of his disease. The Prophet condemned the act and refused to participate in the last rites. Thus, hopelessness, despondency, dejection and frustration on account of serious disease and pain are against the spirit and tenets of Islamic medical ethics, as shown by the tradition of the Prophet.

Shunning Charms and Incantations

There are several authentic hadiths, according to which people were said to come to the Prophet for spiritual remedies for their illness and that of their kith and kin. The Prophet, of course, prayed for them, but only after suggesting remedies in the form of medicines. Often he would advise the patients to consult the best physician in the area. On one occasion he is reported to have said, “charm is nothing but a work of Satan.”

As a matter of fact, it is not desirable to consider the Prophet’s traditions on medicine as similar to the prescription of a physician. In this connection, the opinion

of Ibn Khaldun (14th century AD) is highly relevant and realistic. He says, "The Prophet's mission was to make known to us the prescription of the Divine Law and not to instruct us in medicine of the common practice of ordinary life" (Muqqaddima). In his opinion, even very authentic hadiths cannot be taken as a mere medicinal prescription, which is the duty of an experienced physician.

The Prophet's favorite foods and implications for our health

The Qur'an (2:168) says, "Yea people: eat of what is on earth, lawful and wholesome." According to Muslim, Allah's Messenger said, "The stomach is the central basin of the body, and the veins are connected to it. When the stomach is healthy, it passes on its condition to the veins, and in turn the veins will circulate the same; and when the stomach is putrescence, the veins will absorb such putrescence and issue the same."

We can assume from this Hadith that the Prophet ate what suited his stomach. And what better time to eat the best and the most suitable foods than during Ramadan? For the Prophet has said, "Fast (the month of Ramadan) so to heal your bodies from diseases."

Honey

In Bukhari (Volume 7: Book 65), Aisha narrates that, "Allah's Apostle used to love sweet edible things and honey." He also attributed many healing powers to honey. The Holy Qur'an (16:69) says, "From its [the bee's] bely, comes forth a drink of varying colors wherein is a cure for people. Surely there is a sign for those who would give thought."

Honey is not just a sugar, but also a complex combination of enzymes, organic acids, esters, antibiotic agents, trace minerals, and yet unidentified components! One pound of honey contains 1.4 grams of protein, 23 milligrams of calcium, 73 milligrams of phosphorus, 4.1 milligrams of iron, 1 milligram of niacin and 16 milligrams of vitamin C. Honey has been attributed externally with healing wounds and burns, and making the skin supple and smooth. Internally, honey is a cure-all and specific benefits for the digestive system and as a tonic for general health and well-being (www.onislam.net).

Olive Oil

The Prophet also advised us to, "Use olive oil as a food and ointment for it comes from a blessed tree" (Tirmidhi). In Crete, a recent study showed that even though 90% of Cretans consume an average of 60-70 pounds of oil a

year per person, the incidence of coronary disease is very low compared to other countries (Sajid, Amir and Imran, 2019).

Olive oil also contains vitamins E and K, and polyphenols, which provide a defense mechanism that delays aging and prevents carcinogenesis, atherosclerosis, liver disorders, and inflammations. The Olive oil also promote bone formation in children and protect the bones of the elderly. Even The Journal of the National Cancer Institute reported that olive oil offers strong protection in the fight against breast cancer (www.onislam.net).

Salt

Contrary to popular modern belief, salt is also a beneficial condiment. The Prophet said, "Salt is the master of your food. God sent down blessings from the sky - fire, water, iron and salt" (Ibn Majah). UNICEF reports that the body needs only minute amounts of iodine (from iodized salt) to function properly. Yet, a lack of the nutrient causes various disorders, from stunted growth to cretinism, a most serious condition.

Even mild deficiency produces mental impairment. Studies estimate that children living in iodine- deficient areas forfeit up to 10 to 15 IQ points.

Doctors often recommend replacing water and salt lost during exercise and when working outside in jobs such as agriculture. Increased salt intakes have been used successfully to combat Chronic Fatigue Syndrome as well.

Vinegar

The Prophet has also called vinegar a "blessed seasoning" (Muslim). Modern science has confirmed that it indeed does have many "blessings." A recent book called, simply, Vinegar talks about many ways in which vinegar benefits our health, and cites numerous scientific proofs of this claim.

However, vinegar "miracles" were known even before the time of the Prophet (SAW). This is because apple cider vinegar is nutrient-rich, including amino acids, enzymes, manganese, magnesium, potassium, and silicon. It improves metabolism and can counteract the effects of excess lactic acid in the bloodstream released during exercise and stress.

Perhaps, though, the most important thing we can learn from Prophetic nutrition is moderation. As we sort through the wisdoms of Prophetic nutrition in our attempt to reconcile them with modern "science," we must always remember what the Qur'an (20:8 1) says, "Eat of the good things We have provided for your sustenance, but commit no excess therein" (www.onislam.net). The

Qur'an (Surat Al-A'raf: 7:160) says, "Eat of the good foods We have provided for you" (Sajid, Amir and Imran, 2019).

Black Seed

Bukhari reports that the Prophet recommended that we "use black seed regularly because it has a cure for every disease except death." The magazine Food Chemistry found black seed to be high in protein, carbohydrates, essential fatty acids, vitamins A, B1, B2, C and niacin as well as calcium, potassium and iron. These are the very nutrients that modern science has found that we most lack. We are encouraged to drink milk for calcium, to take supplements for EFA's (Essential Fatty Acids), and to consume niacin pills to lower our cholesterol; however, black seed can provide many of these same benefits (www.onislam.net).

Fenugreek

Fenugreek is another herb that was favored by the Prophet and herbalists for thousands of years. Qasim bin Abdur-Rahman narrated that the Prophet said, "Mix fenugreek in your medicines." It is also related in the collection of Hadith that the Prophet visited one of his blessed companions, Sa'ad bin Abi Waqqas, who had contracted an illness during his stay in Mecca, and then requested that a physician examine him. After a diagnosis was made, the Prophet (PBUH) said, "He will be fine. Give him the soup of a concoction of dates and fenugreek."

Fenugreek seeds have been found by laboratory tests to be very high in a number of nutrients, most notably fixed oils, which are comparable to the beneficial cod liver oil and other therapeutic oils that contain high amounts of vitamin A and choline. For this reason, fenugreek is often used to lower blood cholesterol and provide strength to the body systems, particularly the heart, lungs and digestive system. (www.onislam.net)

Aloe

Aloe vera is another very useful and favorite herb of the Prophet. Qays bin Rafi al- Qatsi narrates that God's messenger (PBUH) said, "Aloes and watercress are a sure cure for illness." In fact, in some areas of the world such as South America, aloe vera is still used as an "all-purpose" cure (Sajid, Amir and Imran, 2019).

Aloe vera is most famous in the Western world for its external uses, particularly in treating kitchen burns, acne and wounds from injuries or surgery. In fact, documented cases of radiation burn victims in Japan showed that aloe

healed the burns more rapidly than any other method.

We are wise to use these herbs that Allah has provided, remembering that, "For every malady Allah created, He also created its cure (and he who) acquires such knowledge shall benefit from it and one who ignores it will forgo such benefit" (Sahih Bukhari).

Black Cumin

With it (water) He produces for you corn, olives, date palms, and grapes and every kind of fruit: Verily in this is a sign for those who give thought (Surat: An-Nahl: 16:11). Narrated Abu Huraira: I heard Allah's Apostle saying "There is healing in Black Cumin for all diseases except death." Muslims have been using and promoting the use of the "Black Seed" or "Al-habbat ul Sawda" for hundreds of years.

Black seed is mentioned along with many other natural cures in the Hadith (sayings of the Prophet Mohammad and in the Qur'an. However, many herbs and natural cures in the Hadith and Qur'an are simply "mentioned" briefly, leaving the bulk of the descriptive narrative up to later Islamic scholars such as Ibn Sina or Ibn Rushd.

Black seed is one of the few that is said to "cure all diseases except death." It is unique in that it was not used profusely before the Prophet Mohammad who made its use popular, and it is one of the few herbs that is described in great detail in the Hadith with recipes and instructions on usage actually being found in the Hadith themselves. Last, but not least, black seed has been studied by Muslims and non-Muslims alike (www.onislam.net).

Ahmad Akhtar studied the effects of the black seed on worm infections in children (Akhtar, 1999). The black seeds contain over 100 valuable components. Black seed is also a significant source of fatty acids, proteins, carbohydrates and other vitamins and minerals.

Date Palm

The Qur'an states "He causes to grow for you thereby the crops, palm trees, grapevines, and from all fruits. Indeed, in that there is a sign for a people who reflect" (Surah al Nahl:11).

The Prophet also stated: The Ajwah [a kind of date] is from Paradise and it is an antidote against poison".

Grains used by the Prophet

There is a famous Hadith reported by Abu Hurairah that, "Allah never inflicts a disease unless he makes a cure for it" (Sahih Bukhari). While some of us may assume that this cure is always in the form of a medicine

or herbs, the Hadith does not state that. Two of the greatest cures Allah has given us for heart disease are foods that the Prophet (PBUH) ate: whole wheat and barley.

Both of them provide multiple benefits in the fight against heart disease as they both lower cholesterol, increase proper elimination of wastes by the body, facilitate proper blood clotting, and improve general circulation and cellular health.

It is revealing that Prophet Muhammad did not indulge in regular wheat consumption, but ate instead mostly barley and bread made from barley flour. Abu Hazim narrated (in Sahih Bukhari) that he asked the Prophet "Did you use to sift barley flour?" The Prophet answered, "No, but we used to blow of the husk (of the barley)." Barley is so easily digested that the Prophet even recommended that barley soup (talbinah) be used for all stomach ailments (Sahih Bukhari). Possessing even more health benefits than wheat, barley is extremely high in calcium and protein, and is far less allergenic. It does not encourage bloating or unhealthy bacterial growth; therefore, while wheat is healthful, barley is better for daily consumption (www.onislam.net).

Jabir reported, The Messenger of Allah said: "When you go to sleep, put out the lamp and shut the doors and cover the mouths of water-skins and cover food and drink." (www.onislam.net).

Other herbs mentioned in the Qur'an and Hadiths

There are many more herbal items that are mentioned in the Qur'an and Hadith literature that are used for medical purposes. These include, common fig, garlic, onion, lentil, cucumber, ginger/zanjabil/, grape, and the like modern medical researchers proved that these and other herbs described in the Qur'an and used by the Prophet himself proved the medical importance for treating different ailments (Sajid, Amir and Imran, 2019).

Siwak/Tooth stick/: Preventive Medicine for Your Teeth

One of the best ways to protect one's teeth is the siwak, which was mentioned in several sayings of Prophet Muhammad. Siwak are the wicks that are used to rub inside the mouth, and they get their name from the Arabic word "yudlik," which can be roughly translated to mean "massage" (i.e., massage the inside of the mouth). It means more than "tooth brush." The best type of siwak is that which comes from the arak tree which is also sold around mosques and streets in Ethiopia. The siwak of the Prophet was from that tree. The siwak is a natural twig fortified with natural minerals that help clean the teeth, other inhibitors that prevent gums from bleeding, cleaning

agents that kill microbes and germs and a scent that gives breath a naturally fresh smell. The siwak is an ideal, natural brush that has been endowed with more than any artificial toothpaste could ever have.

The Prophet taught Muslims more than 1,400 years ago to use the siwak to clean our teeth and mouth and give it a nice scent. Anas quoted the Prophet (PBUH) as saying: "Whenever the Angel Gabriel would visit me, he would advise me to use the siwak." (www.onislam.net)

The Prophet (PBUH) used to rub the siwak over his tongue, teeth and gums. Abu Musa Al- Ash'ari said, "I visited the Prophet, peace be upon him, and the siwak was at the edge of his tongue."

A tradition states, "There are no new ideas, just new people to discover them." It is, in fact, amazing to find how many "modern discoveries" have already been written about in the Qur'an or Hadith. There are a number of words of advice and nutritional habits of the Prophet that have substantial support in recent scientific literature. Among this advice is that we should eat whole foods, we should combine foods properly, we should eat foods in their seasons, and we should not drink with meals.

In Sahih Al-Bukhari, a number of examples can be found showing how carefully the prophet combined foods. One hadith relates, "A man from among the Companions of the Prophet said, 'The Prophet forbade (mixing) unripe dates and dried dates, and (mixing) raisins and dried dates. Aisha, (may Allah be pleased with her), related that, 'The Apostle of Allah (PBUH) used to eat melon with fresh dates, and he used to say, 'The heat of the one is broken by the coolness of the other, and the coolness of the one by the heat of the other.' He was also said to have never combined fish and milk.

Modern science supports these habits by informing us that the combination of foods we eat and the order in which we eat them are very important factors in health. "Recently," it has been found that foods require different digestive processes in the body; thus, they are most easily digested when combined properly. The Qur'an (Surat Taha: 20:81) also advises us to, "Eat of the good things We have provided for your sustenance, but commit no excess therein." The Prophet himself was always known to eat fruits and vegetables grown in the region in which he lived and in season.

In reality, healing with food is one of the oldest methods of healing known to man and is not a "new" concept in any way. It is also one of the most economical and globally available methods of healing known to man. The Prophet Muhammad used it more than a thousand years ago and even a thousand years before him the Chinese used it. In fact, in areas where medicine and herbs are not available, food can provide a solution to many medical problems. In many developing countries where people cannot afford to buy medicines, traditional healers commonly hand out prescriptions in terms of berries or cups of oats.

Yuhanna bin Masawayh (known in the West as Mesue), an accomplished pharmacist, said, "A physician who can cure by using only diet without drugs, is the most successful and skilled of all physicians."

Certainly food should be considered a very real alternative to importing special medicines and herbs or taking risky medicines (<http://www.curezone.com/foods/>).

CONCLUSIONS

Islamic education teaches considerable treatment mechanism for many diseases. Contemporary medical scientists demonstrated that fruits like bananas, figs, olive, dates, grapes and the like are useful and necessary for health. The Qur'an and Prophetic hadiths have noted this important matter and have introduced these fruits and edible substances in different verses and prophetic narrations.

During the Golden Age of the Islamic Empire, Islamic education urged the development of medical knowledge and ensured the new and classical literature was passed down to western civilization. However, considering the changes that would soon occur as the Empire shifted values, religion in itself cannot claim to be the universal impetus for the development of medical knowledge. Even so, Islamic education has given strong instructions in the

Prophetic Sunna and the Qur'an about traditional medicine for students which needs to be investigated further in the future by different academicians who are interested in indigenous and traditional medical practices.

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