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Medicine of the Prophet (Tibb al-Nabvi) A Message Par Excellence

by

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Practice and Saying (Traditions) of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) on hygiene, sanitation and treatment of diseases by medicine are called *Tibb-al-Nabvi* (Medicine of the Prophet or Prophetic Medicine) by Muslims all over the world. About fifty Traditions (Arabic, *Ahadith*) on specific ailments and their remedies have been grouped together under the Chapter called *Kitab-al-Tibb* (Book of Medicine) of well-known collections of *Ahadith* by Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, Tirmidhi etc. In addition of this fifty, more than three hundred Traditions on aspects of hygiene, cleanliness, habit of eating and drinking etc. find mention under the head of Drinks. (*Kitab al-Ashribah*), Foods (*Kitab al-Atimah*) Clothing (*Kitab al-libas*), Purification (*Kitab al-Tahara*), Menstruation (*Kitab al-Haid*), Funerals (*Kitab al-Janaiz*), Diseases (*Kitab al-Marza*) etc. All these Traditions, which number about four hundred, constitute the Prophetic Medicine, and can be found together in classic books of Ibn al-Qayyim Aljoui (8th century *Hegira*) Abu Nu'aim (5th century *Hegira*). Abu Abd-Allah al-Dhahbi (8th century *Hegira*), Abu Bakar Ibn al-Sani (4th century *Hegira*). Most of these original Arabic treatises have been recently translated in English and other languages.

Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) laid foundation a social order in which every Muslim, for that matter every human being, was advised to maintain healthy life physically, psychologically and spiritually. Indifferences to any aspects of life was discouraged by the Prophet. In the opinion of Douglas Guthrie (A History of Medicine - 1945), great advances in Medicine made by Muslims of Middle Ages were mainly due to the impact of the Sayings of Prophet Muhammad. Guthrie says, '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"'. Guthrie has not quoted the

source of this important Tradition but it is obvious that he was referring to the famous Saying from *Tirmidhi* (one of the six most important collections of Traditions). As a matter of fact there are several such Sayings in which Prophet laid great stress on Medicine and discouraged seeking help through amulets, relics, charms etc. For instance Prophet once said, 'There is a remedy for every malady and when the remedy is applied to the disease, it is cured'. These and several such Traditions have been described in *Bukhari*, *Muslim*, *Abu Dawud* etc. Once Prophet was asked by one of his Companion, 'Is there any good in medicine'. To this he emphatically replied, 'Yes.' He is also reported to have said that the use of Medicine is the Decree of God. One can see the basic truth made known to the humanity by the Prophet that there is no disease for which there is any remedy. These Sayings have made it the duty for every society or group of people to conduct research and find out the remedy for diseases that afflict human beings. The concept of incurable diseases is thus alien to Islam. There were several occasions when Prophet visited the sick (He used to advise his followers 'visit the sick') and after enquiring about the ailments, advised to take the medicine prescribed from genuine Physicians. On several instances he advised the sick to approach Harith bin Kalda, a well-known Jew Physician of *Thaqif* (A place near *Madina*). Once Prophet visited Sa'ad Bin Waqqas who had suffered heart attack. Prophet placed his hand on the chest of Sa'ad and he (Sa'ad) felt great relief but the Prophet cautioned him and said, 'You have heart attack and, therefore, consult Harith Bin Kalda, who is the expert Physician'. Such instances greatly changed the attitude of the Arabs towards diseases, who during pre-Islamic period depended mainly on invoking supernatural aid or different deities for treatment of diseases.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), realized the consequences of infectious epidemics and, therefore, advised very rationally, '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 spread elsewhere).' On the basis of this Tradition, Muslims considered precaution and vigilance against the epidemic as the Command of the God.

The Prophet opposed charms and incantations as the remedy for diseases but on some occasions, when physical remedy (medicine) was not available, he allowed, mainly for psychological reasons, to recite something having definite meaning. He also declared the victims of epidemics like Cholera and Plague as martyrs. This was a great consolation for those who suffered from it and knew the consequences.

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

Prophet Muhammad advised his followers to be always careful about their health and in case of any ailments, serious or otherwise, consoled the patient not to feel guilty of being sufferer or victim 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 solace these Sayings would have provided to the followers of Islam.

There are many Traditions of *Bukhari*, *Muslim* etc. that show that people used to come to the Prophet regularly and tell him about their ailments. He used to advise them to resort to Medicine first and then pray to God to get rid of the diseases. On several occasions he would himself suggest medicines. For instance, in case of loss of appetite he frequently advised to take *Talbina*, a preparation of Barley. For constipation he used to recommend the use of Senna. He was also in favour of regular use of honey for keeping fit. Similarly, for different ailments he would advise for taking herbal drugs like Olive, Black Cumin, Chicory, Endive Fenugreek, Ginger, Marjorum, Saffron, Vinegar, Water-Cress etc. Sayings on these medicines and others show the concern of the Prophet for the welfare and good health of his followers. For apparently small matters like drinking water, eating food, keeping clean and tidy he gave appropriate advices. He is even reported to have said 'Cleanliness

is half of faith (*Iman*)’.

Some of the Sayings on Black Cumin, Senna and Cress are very thought provoking. For instance the Prophet is reported to have said that - ‘Black Cumin (*Hadith; Habb al-Sauda*) is a remedy for every disease except death. The Prophet expressed similar views on the efficacy of Senna (*Hadith, Sana*) and Cress (*Hadith; Thafa*). The style and language of these Sayings are the clear indication of the fact that the Prophet laid great stress on medicine (herbs), some of which might have uses in more than one ailment. These Sayings also put emphasis on confidence building attitude of sick persons towards their diseases and agonies suffered. Very rational advice was given that none should be disheartened by the intensity and duration of the diseases because remedies have been provided by Nature. And also none, should be afraid of impending death. Once during the time of the Prophet, a person committed suicide, as he could not bear the agony of the disease. Listening the episode, Prophet condemned the act and refused to participate in the last rites (*Namaz-Janaza*) of the person. 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.

There are several authentic Traditions, according to which people used to come to the Prophet for spiritual remedies of their own sickness and that of their kith and kin. The Prophet, of course, blessed them but after suggesting remedies in the form of medicines. Often he would advise the patients to consult the best physician around the place. Once a lady came to him with her child who was bleeding because of the throat infection (*Hadith, Udhirah*). He admonished her and advised to treat the disease by putting the extract of costus (*Hadith, Qust*) and pseudo-saffron (*Hadith, Warus*). Similarly once his wife complained of some boil (abscess) in her fingers. Prophet suggested application of Sweet flag (*Hadith, Dharira*) on the fingers and then asked her to pray to Allah for recovery. There was also an instance when a scorpion bit Prophet himself. He immediately asked for hot water in which salt was added. The hot solution was poured on his bitten fingers while he recited *Maudhatin* (Quranic Verses). These instances and Sayings led Muslims to believe in rationale of the use of medicine rather than resorting to charms and incantations. On several occasions he exhorted them not to depend on supernatural methods of healing. He is also reported to have said, ‘charm is nothing but a work of Shaytan’ (Satan). Once he asked for a particular person of the Tribe *Hazm*, to treat one of his Companions bitten by a poisonous snake. He was told that after his (Prophet) exhortations against incantation, *Hazm* tribe had given up the practice of supernatural treatment. He then gave special permission of invoking supernatural aid, provided what was recited had some meaning and sense. This clearly implies that the practice was only allowed as a psychological remedy when no other remedy in the form of medicine was available.

Although the Prophet on one hand gave suitable advice to his followers on earthly affairs when such situations were brought to his attention, but on the other hand tried his best to create confidence in themselves so that they could act according to their own experience and opinions. Once, while withdrawing his advice given earlier on the fecundation (cross pollination) of Date Palm, he said, “Whenever I command you to do something related to religion, do obey and if I command you something about earthly matters, act on your own (experience) and (do remember) I am a human being”; This statement of the Prophet was transmitted by *Al-Saraksi (Al-Usal- Principles)* in the following words:

“If I bring something to you on your religion, do act according to it, and if I bring you something related to this world, then you have a better knowledge of your own earthly affairs (Maurice Bucaille in ‘Quran Bible and Science’).

In recent years several books have been published, particularly in India and Pakistan, on Prophet Medicine,

which do not project the true message on Medicine by the Prophet. For instance, the author of recently published book entitled *Tibbe Nabwi Aur Jadid Science* (Prophetic Medicine and Modern Science), claims that Prophetic treatment of heart attack by eating seven dates, as was suggested to Sa'ad bin Waqqas, is still the better treatment than modern by-pass surgery, provided people have faith in the treatment of the Prophet. The learned author failed to understand that the Prophet while suggesting to Sa'ad bin Waqqas to take dates as temporary relief, also advised him to consult the expert physician Harith bin Kalda for treatment. As a matter of fact it is not desirable to consider the Traditions on Medicine as something like the prescription of a physician. In this connection, opinion of Ibn Khaldun (14th century AD) is highly relevant and realistic. He says, 'Prophet's mission was to make known to us the prescription of the Divine Law and not to instruct us in medicine of common practice of ordinary life.' (*Muqqaddima*). In his opinion, even very authentic Traditions cannot be taken as a mere medicinal prescription, which is the duty of ordinary physician. He, however, says, 'with sincere faith, one may derive from them (Traditions) great advantage though this form no part of medicine properly called.' To emphasize his point of view, Khaldun refers instances when the Prophet tried to create confidence in his followers by advising them to take their own judgments in worldly affairs.

Prophetic Medicine, infact, is a *MESSAGE PAR EXCELLENCE*. It is an advice to keep always healthy body and soul and to have faith in both physical and spiritual treatment. It is a command to us o strive hard to find newer medicines and newer remedies. It is a warning to those who consider diseases as the Will of God for which no remedy is needed. It is an admonition for us to keep away from so-called spiritual treatment based on superstitions like sorcery, amulets, charms etc.

Islam is the name of a mass movement and a radical change in every aspect of human life, both spiritual and physical, based on reason and rationale. Great advances in medical science made during the medieval ages, is, therefore, an important part of Islamic revolution, which has its origin in Prophetic Medicine

(This is a Chapter from the Book by the Author entitled Medicinal Plants in the Traditions of Prophet Muhammad, Sidrah Publishers, Shahid Apartments, Golaganj, Lucknow-226018 Price Rs 300/=; Mobile: +919839901066, Email: mihfarooqi@sify.com)