

Paper Title: Healing in Islam

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Paper Abstract:

Healing has attracted both divine and scientific approaches. Among the spiritualists, for example, divine means of healing are often resorted to. A scientific approach to healing is however adopted by physicians. While both approaches seem to operate from different angles, there is also a point of intersection between them. That intersection is the recognition of the Supreme Being as the Ultimate Healer.

In Islam for example, Allah is believed to heal all ailments including those considered hopeless medically. In some hospitals one may find a phrase like “We care but God heals” boldly written. This in our opinion is recognition of the divine intervention in healing by medical practitioners.

Though Allah is the Sole Healer in Islam as stated earlier, provisions for medical approach to healing are found in the Qur’an and Hadith. On the basis of these provisions, Muslim physicians like Ibn Sina and Al –Razi had bequeathed to their generations and those after them authoritative treatises on Healing which later medical practitioners used and developed. Similarly some of the Islamic provisions on healing have been confirmed to be potent by modern medicine.

In this paper therefore an attempt will be made to discuss the relevance of the Islamic provisions on healing to the modern world. This we intend to do by identifying and discussing the nature and scope of healing in Islam, determining the potency of the Islamic healing devises and recommending measures aimed at the maximal utilization of the Islamic methods of healing in ensuring recovery from all forms of ailments. After all, Prophet Muhammad (SAW) is reported to have said that there is no sickness to which Allah has not provided a cure.

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Paper Text:

### **Introduction**

Healing has been defined in a variety of ways. Suffice it to provide few of such definitions so that a foundation will be laid for subsequent discussion, or put differently though these definitions the focus of this paper may be known from the onset.

According to A. S. Hornby, healing is the process of becoming or making somebody or something healthy again. It is also the process of getting better after an emotional shock.<sup>1</sup> In Roper's view, healing is the natural process of cure or repair of the tissue.<sup>2</sup> It is also the process whereby the cells in the body regenerate and repair to reduce the size of a damaged or necrotic area. Healing incorporates both the removal of necrotic tissue (demolition) and the replacement of this tissue.<sup>3</sup>

From these definitions, it can be deduced that healing is recovery from an ailing state or condition. Such a condition may be medical, emotional or otherwise.

Healing is as old as human existence and because of the numerous conditions that may necessitate it, it has become an important subject with the spiritualists and scientists. Thus as investigator into healing may come across two terminologies in relation to his or her study. These terminologies are spiritual and natural healing.

The science of spiritual healing has traditionally been taught and passed from one healer to another individualized private instruction. Its techniques have equally been used for centuries in various regions of the world.<sup>4</sup> The spiritual healing process rejuvenates the body's life force and strengthens it through several focal points throughout the body. Its technique produces a neuro-psychological effect which leads the central nervous system to produce a carefully orchestrated endocrine response which relieves pain, heals the disease of the affected areas and balances the entire body.<sup>5</sup> Despite these benefits of spiritual healing, it has too often been ignored and dismissed by many contemporary physicians. Medically, the replacement through healing can happen in two ways, that is, by regeneration and by repair. Through regeneration, the necrotic cells are replaced by the same tissue as was originally there. By repair however, the injured tissue is replaced with scar tissue. An example of regeneration is Acute Tubular Necrosis (ATN) in the kidney.

Healing by repair occurs in the case of injury to cells that are unable to regenerate such as cardiac muscle or neurons. It can also take place when there is a damage to the collagen network by enzymes or physical destruction or its total collapse as in an infarct.<sup>6</sup> Specific examples of healing recognized by physicians are wound healing; bone healing, brain healing and nerve healing.<sup>7</sup>

While these sharp differences exist between the spiritualists and physicians, one incontestable fact is that spiritual and natural healing are interrelated. Indeed physical health is heavily influenced by the spiritual life and vice versa observed Murat Baday of the University of Pittsburgh in a public lecture sponsored by the Cornell Institute for Islamic Spirituality.<sup>8</sup>

In this paper therefore an attempt will be made to discuss the relevance of the Islamic provisions on healing to the modern world. This we shall do by identifying and discussing the nature and scope of healing in Islam, determining the potency of the Islamic healing devises and recommending measures aimed at the maximal utilization of the Islamic methods of healing in ensuring recovery from all forms of ailments.

### **Nature and Scope of Healing in Islam**

Healing in the language of Islam is known as shifa'. The word shifa' in its different grammatical forms is used in several verses of the Qur'an ( Qur'an 9:14; 10:57;16:69; 17:82; 26:80 and 41:44). These six verses are referred to as Ayatu'sh-Shifa-the healing verses. These verses generally provide hints to sources of healing in Islam. Three of such sources that is, Allah, Qur'an and Honey have been specifically referred to.

#### **Allah as Source of Healing**

Two of the above-cited verses of the Qur'an recognize Allah as the Healer. Those verses read thus:

And (Allah) shall heal the breast of  
the believers (Qur'an 9:14)

And when I am ill, it is (Allah)  
who cures me. (Qur'an 26:80)

The healing referred to in the first verse is spiritual while the one mentioned in the second verse is bodily. Since Allah is the source of the spirit and body, healing afflictions on them can not be beyond His control. In addition it is equally deducible from those verses that piety and faithfulness are necessary qualities to qualify for divine healing. Otherwise, believers would not have been specifically mentioned and Prophet Ibrahim (AS) acknowledged as the father of monotheism, would have been convinced beyond doubt that Allah is the source of cure or healing during illness because of unalloyed faith he had in Allah despite hostilities of his kith ad kin.

## Healing Through the Qur'an

While Allah cures and heals, its revelation, the Qur'an can also provide healing for many diseases. The relevant verses on this role of the Qur'an are as follows

Mankind there has come to you a guidance from your Lord and a healing from the (diseases) in your hearts and for those who believe, a guidance and mercy (Qur'an 10:57)

And we sent down in the Qur'an such things that have healing and mercy for the believers, (Qur'an 17:82)

And declare (O Muhammad) that (the Qur'an) is guidance and healing for the believers. (Qur'an 41:44)

In their exegetical works, Ibn Kathir, As-Shawkani, Jumali and Al-Qurtubi identify and explain the ailments that the Qur'an heals. Such ailments have been divided into manifest and latent or hidden by Jurmali.<sup>9</sup> They have also been described as diseases of the heart and body.<sup>10</sup>

Hidden ailments that the Qur'an heals include doubt, impurity of the mind,<sup>11</sup> hypocrisy, disbelief, falsehood<sup>12</sup> Similarly, it heals a variety of if not all forms of bodily diseases. While the entire Qur'an provides these divergent healings, its specific chapters and verses have also been earmarked for this purpose. Three examples of such healing chapters are Suratu'l Fatihah<sup>13</sup> and Al-Mu'awidhatayn<sup>14</sup> The healing power of the Qur'an can be obtained through its recitation, writing for hanging or drinking, massaging of the affected parts of the body. While recitation and massaging have been permitted by majority of Islamic scholars, its writing for the purposes of drinking and hanging have attracted divergent views.<sup>15</sup>

## Honey and healing

The relevant verse of the Qur'an on the healing power of honey reads as follows:

There issues from within the bodies of the bee a drink of varying colors wherein is healing for mankind. (Qur'an 17:82).

The drink of varying colors emanating from the bee, which provides healing to mankind mentioned in the above verse according to exegetes, is the honey<sup>16</sup> Though honey is generally believed to heal yet divergent views are expressed on the ailments it heals. Two of such views are however popular. One states that honey heals all diseases and the other considers it as healing for some diseases..<sup>17</sup>

Upholders of the former opinion establish their case on the following hadith

Indeed honey is a healing every disease and the Qur'an heals diseases of the chest.<sup>18</sup>

You should take seriously the healing features of the Qur'an and honey.<sup>19</sup>

Healing is in three things: A gulp of Honey, cupping or cauterizing. But I forbid my followers to use cauterization.<sup>20</sup>

For specific ailments that honey heals, the often cited hadith is the following :

A man came to the Messenger of Allah (SAW) and complained that his brother suffered from abdominal discomfort and the Messenger of Allah directed that he should be given honey to drink. The man complained the second that the condition of his brother did not improve and the Prophet (SAW) ordered that he should still be given honey. He still came with the same complaint the third time and the Prophet gave the same response. When the man came the fourth time with the same complaint, the Prophet (SAW) said; Allah has spoken the truth but the stomach of your brother belies it so go back and give him honey and the man was given honey and got healed.<sup>21</sup>

While honey can unilaterally heal diseases, its mixture with Qur'anic verse written and washed with rain water or read into the water heals.<sup>22</sup> It may also be mixed with rain water, and olive and given to the patient and he will be healed.<sup>23</sup>

We should also add that modern medicine has also recognized the healing power of honey. Honey for example is essentially a food rich (90%) in simple, easily digestible sugars, fructose, glucose and saccharose which makes it an excellent source of energy. Its high energetic power and nutritional values make it a food for physical effort. Its dynamogenic and stimulant action on the heart increases stamina and favors the body's powers of recuperation and prolonged effort. Generally, when consumed daily, honey increases resistance to physical and intellectual fatigue, strengthens the body against stress and strains of life and favors the assimilation and digestion of other foods. Indigestive disturbances, honey is of great value. The flavor of honey excites appetite and helps digestion. It is also an excellent remedy and tonic for anemics, dyspeptics, convalescents and the aged. In malnutrition, no food or drug can equal it. The laxative value of honey is well known. Its fatty acids content stimulates peristalsis. It is also recommended for hyperacidity and gastric and duodenal ulcers. Honey is also advised in cases of asthenia (state of physical or psychological fatigue), anorexia and states of undernourishment. The antibacterial substances it contains make it appropriate for certain ENT infections

(laryngitis, coughs) and intestinal or kidney disease.<sup>24</sup> Having discussed the four major healers referred to in the Qur'an our attention will now be turned to others mentioned in hadith.

There is no doubt that the hadith has also provided insights into the subject of healing. In addition to cupping, honey and cauterization mentioned above there are still other sources of healing.

. The basis for cupping as a source of healing is contained in this hadith.

Jabir to Abdallah narrated that he paid Al-Maqanna' a visit during his illness and said, I will not leave till he gets cupped for I heard Allah's Apostle (SAW) saying there is healing in it.(cupping).<sup>25</sup>

The best medicines you may treat yourselves with are cupping and sea in cense.<sup>26</sup>

To demonstrate the healing nature of cupping, the Prophet (SAW) got cupped on a number occasions and paid for the services provided him.<sup>27</sup>

In addition, milk and wine of camel can also heal.<sup>28</sup> Their healing powers are mentioned in the following hadith.

Anas (RLA) narrated that some people were sick and they said: O messenger of Allah! Give us shelter and food. So when they became healthy, they said: "The weather of Madinah is not suitable for us". So he sent them to Al-Harra with some she camels of his and said: Drink of their milk. But when they became healthy, they killed the shepherd of the Prophet (SAW) and drove away his camels. When the news reached the Prophet he sent some people in their pursuit. Then he got their hands and feet cut and their eyes branded with heated pieces of iron. I saw them licking the earth with their tongues till they died.<sup>29</sup>

Anas also narrated that the climate of madinah did not suit some people, so the Prophet (SAW) ordered them to follow his shepherd, i.e his camels and drink their milk and urine till their bodies became healthy. Then they killed the shepherd and drove away the camels. When the news reached the Prophet he sent some people in their pursuit. When they were brought, he cut their hands and feet and their eyes were branded with heated pieces of iron.<sup>30</sup>

There is no doubt that these reports are similar and related by the same authority. Yet there are marked differences in them. While in the first report the people are reported to have complained of ill health to the messenger of Allah (SAW) in the second there is nothing suggestive of such a complaint. Another difference is that the healing nature of

camel's milk was reported in the first hadith, while the second describes unmincingly, that of camel's with and urine. The similarities of the hadith notwithstanding, the recovery of the sick from their ill health shows that the milk and urine of camels possess some healing power.

Black Cumin (habatus-sawda') equally heals all diseases except death according to a hadith reported on the authority of Abu Hurayrah. The Hadith reads thus:

I heard Allah's messenger (SAW) saying: There is healing in black cumin for all diseases except death.<sup>31</sup>

Another relevant hadith on the healing nature of black cumin was narrated by Khahid .b. Sa'ad. The content of that hadith is as follows:

We went out and Ghalib.b.Abjar was accompanying us. He fell ill on the way and when we arrived Madinah he was still sick. Ibn Abi 'Atiq came to visit him and said to us. "Treat him with black cumin. Take five or seven seeds and crush them (mix the powder with oil) and drop the resulting mixture into both nostrils, for 'A'ishah (RLA) has narrated to me that she heard the Prophet (SAW) saying: This black cumin is healing for all diseases except death.<sup>32</sup>

From the above reports, it is found that Black – cumin can unilaterally heal will forms of diseases except death and its combination with oil is equally valuable for sickness.

There is also healing power in At-Talbina, a kind of porridge prepared from milk, honey, white flour etc.<sup>33</sup> It is good for the sick as well as those who grieve over the death of a beloved one. According to 'Urwa: 'A'ishah (RLA) used to recommend At-Talbina for the sick and for such a person as grieved over a dead person. She used to say: I heard Allah's messenger (SAW) saying At-Talbina gives rest to the heart of the patient and makes it active and relieves some of his sorrow and griefs.<sup>34</sup>

Another important source of healing in Islam is water. It is a healing for fever. This is clearly described in the hadith reported by 'Urwah.b.Zubayr.

The Prophet (SAW) declared that fever was the boiling of Hell, cool it by water.<sup>35</sup>

Although fever is cured by water, our earlier discussion has shown that water combined with honey, and olive also provides cures for a number of ailments.<sup>36</sup>

Indian incense also cures seven diseases according to a hadith narrated by Um Qais bint Mihsan who said that I heard the Prophet (SAW) saying: Treat with the Indian Incense for it has healing for seven diseases. It is to be sniffed by one having throat trouble, and to be put into one side of the mouth of one suffering from pleurisy.<sup>37</sup>

Water of trafflers heals eye disease according to the hadith narrated by Sa'id .b. Zayd. I heard the Prophet saying: Trafflers are like manna (i.e they grow naturally and their water heals eye diseases.<sup>38</sup> Eating of dates is a protection against poison.<sup>39</sup>

In addition to the use of the above materials for healing, prayers of different types other than chapters and verses of the Qur'an mentioned earlier have been reported from the prophet (SAW) to assist people with a variety of visible and invisible ailments. Evil eye is one of the diseases to which such prayers have been found useful. The efficacy of prayers for evil eye is established in this report.

Humaid b. Qais reported that two sons of Jafar b. Abi Tahib came to the Messenger of Allah (SAW) who looking at them., asked their nurse as to why they were so thin. She replied: Messenger of Allah, they are easily affected by the evil eye and we did not exorcise for we did not know whether you would allow it. The Messenger of Allah (SAW) said; Do chant prayer for them, If anything advances in front of fate, it is the eye.<sup>40</sup>

Acute pain suffered by 'Uthman b. Abi Al-As was also cured by prayers.

Uthman b. Abi Al-As said that he went to the Messenger of Allah (SAW) and reported that he was suffering from such acute pain as brought him near death. The Messenger of Allah said; pass your right hand seven times upon the seat of pain and say: I seek refuge in the honor and power of Allah form the evil that has come upon me. 'Uthman said: I recited accordingly and my pain vanished and that I asked my household and others always to do so.<sup>41</sup>

Healing is also obtained from a number of practices enjoined on the Muslims. Three of such practices namely, breast feeding, ablution and forgiveness and their healing powers will be discussed.

### **Healing Through Breastfeeding**

Allah enjoins breast-feeding on Muslims. This may be carried out by the biological mother or wet nurse appointed for that purpose. In this regard Allah says in the Glorious Qur'an.

And the mothers should suckle children for two whole years for him who desires to make complete the time of suckling; and their maintenance and clothing must be borne by the father according to usage. No soul shall have imposed upon it as duty but to the extent of its capacity: neither shall a mother be made to suffer harm on account of her child, nor a father on account of his child. And a similar duty (devolves) on the (father's) heir,

but if both desire weaning by mutual consent and counsel, there is no blame on them, and if you wish to engage a wet-nurse for your children, there is no blame on you so long as you pay what you promised according to usage” and be careful of (yours duty to) Allah and know that Allah sees what you do. (Qur’an 2:233).

Nursing a newborn baby in Islam is a natural duty of the mother, or in the case that she is unable, service of a wet nurse may be employed. Breast-feeding according to the above verse fulfills many requirements, which may have been laid because of its benefits for the children and their mothers.

According to Karima Burns, breastfeeding is a variant of natural healing in Islam. It benefits the mothers health, enabling her to perform her household duties more efficiently; provides better health to infants, enabling the healthier development of Muslim child; and cuts down on health care and nutritional expenses ( less expensive than bottle feeding). Nursing also protects against disease in developing countries.

Nursing helps new mothers lose weight more easily as more calories are burned during milk production. It promotes better health in children but man cannot mimic the protein and nutrients that Allah has provided in a mother’s milk. In fact more of such protein and nutrients are being discovered each year. Recently, yet another nutrient was found-a soluble protein called C14 which stimulates the development of B cells, immune cells made in the bone marrow and key to the production of antibodies. This discovery has been carefully presented by Dr. Micheal Julius of the University of Toronto and Toronto Hospital who led the study as follow:

Over the last decades, the scientific basis for this conventional wisdom has increased due to our identification of many of the elements of breast milk that mediate all these good things. In addition to being full of growth factors, it is full of things that protect the newborn.<sup>42</sup>

In addition, the two year breast-feeding period prescribed by Islam has equally been found appropriate by medical experts for the optimal attainment of all the benefits breast-feeding confers on the mothers and their children. This finding has been fully discussed in our earlier presentation, repeating them here will be turtological.<sup>43</sup> What can be safety said about breast-feeding is that, if it provides these health benefits and protect against diseases then its healing capability should not be in doubt.

### **Ablution and Healing**

Ablution prescribed in Islam for observance of spiritual duties like recitation of the Qur’an and observance of the Ritual Prayers to mention just but two of the spiritual duties for which it is performed is said to beneficial in terms of healing. Such benefits include

cleaning softening and refreshing the prescribed parts of body. When performed before going to bed as enjoined by the prophet (SAW), it relaxes the body and prepares it for a deep sleep.

Ablution stimulates the biological rhythms of the body and specifically Biological Active Spots (BASES).<sup>44</sup> It's observance five times daily before each of the ritual prayers serves as preventive measures against diseases before hand.<sup>45</sup> It also becomes a kind of treatment complex which includes the hydromassage of the BAS, their thermal and physical stimulation.<sup>46</sup>

Ablution helps prevent skin cancer. This is because the areas that are washed during ablution are the parts of the body that are most prone to be exposed to pollution, whether it is pollution from the internal secretions of the body on to the skin surface, such as sweat or whether it is external. Ablution removes this pollution at least five times a day, and maintains a clean outside layer of skin, which in turn helps the cells underneath to function properly.<sup>47</sup> Also, washing with water helps invigorate the ends of the blood vessel, as well as the glands that are near the skin surface, and hence helps them perform their functions efficiently.<sup>48</sup>

### **Healing in Forgiveness**

One of the moral traits recommended in the Qur'an is forgiveness. (Qur'an 7:197 and 24:22) In fact, it is a superior moral trait. (Qur'an 42:43) As a result the believers' notion of forgiveness is very different from that of those who do not live by the morals of the Qur'an. When forgiving, they make no distinction between large errors and small ones.<sup>49</sup>

Studies on the relationship between forgiveness and healing by American scientists have shown that those capable of forgiveness are healthier in both mind and body. In a particular study carried out by Dr Frederic Luskin of Stanford University and his team on 259 people in the City of San Francisco, it was found that the subjects suffered less after forgiving people who have wronged them. It was also established through this experiment that psychological and physical symptoms such as stress related backache, insomnia and stomachaches were significantly reduced in these individuals.<sup>50</sup>

As a matter of fact all the available research shows that anger is a state of mind that seriously damages human health. Forgiveness on the other hand eliminates all the harmful effects of anger and helps the individual to enjoy a healthy life, both psychologically and physically.<sup>51</sup>

From the foregoing discussion the following remarks can be made.

- i. Healing has been adequately provided for in Islam.
- ii. Bodily and spiritual ailments are healed through natural and spiritual methods.
- iii. Though the Muslims have practiced spiritual and natural healing, the spiritual approach can cater for both spiritual and bodily ailments.

To what extent have these methods of healing discussed in this paper been potent?

## Potency of the Islamic Healing Devises

Without prejudice to cases where Islamic healing methods have yielded positive results in individual cases cited earlier, one may add that some of these methods have been scientifically proven efficacious. Honey, breastfeeding, ablution and forgiveness with the scientific discourses on them are instances of such potency.

With regards to chapters and verses of the Qur'an, the speed at which a ruler stung by scorpion or bitten by snake was healed after chanting of Suratu'l Fatiha is a demonstration of the potency of the Qur'an. The account goes as follows:

Some of the Companions of the Prophet came across a tribe amongst the tribes of the Arabs and they did not entertain them. While they were in that state the Chief of the tribe was bitten by a snake (or stung by a scorpion). He said to the Companions : Have you got any medicine with you or any body who can treat with Ruqya'? The Companions of the Prophet (SAW) said , you refuse to entertain us, so we will not treat (your chief) unless you pay us for it. So they agreed to pay a flock of sheep.

One of them ( the Prophet Companions) stated reciting Suratu'l Fatiha and gathering his saliva and spitting it (at the snake bite). The patient was cured and his people presented the sheep to them but they said, we will not take it unless we ask the Prophet (SAW) whether it is lawful. When they asked him, he smiled and said: How do you know that Suratu'l Fatiha is Ruqya? Take the flock and assign a share for me.<sup>52</sup>

In addition, the of patronage of the Muslim Spiritualists by people with divergent problems in different parts of the world is another proof that the patrons recognize that miracles can be performed in their lives through divine intervention which most Muslim spiritualists use.

Considering these facts therefore, one can unmincinly state that the spiritual and natural healing of Islam have been embraced by people because of their potency and efficacy. If this is so, how then can those ignorant of the Islamic healing benefit maximally from its numerous methods?

## **Measures Aimed at Maximal Utilization of the Islamic Methods of Healing**

Methods of healing in Islam can be maximally utilized if the following are taken. One, research on other healing methods of Islam, which have not been studied scientifically, should be embarked upon. This challenge is thrown to both Muslim and non-Muslim scientists. When their benefits have been discovered they must be given adequate publicity so that more people can benefit from them.

Two, efforts of Muslim scientists in popularizing the healing values of honey, ablution, forgiveness and breastfeeding are commendable. Such scientists should further their research in areas not exposed to scientific scrutiny. While the old should continue the unfinished job, new investigators should be on board for collaborative or extensive efforts.

Three, constructive dialogue between Science and Religion championed globally by Metanexus Institute and embraced by over two hundred Local Societies Initiative world wide deserves commendation. We therefore call for more funding of the Metanexus Institute on Religion and Science programs. Complimentary efforts of institutions and organizations will also be needed at the local level.

For, it is high time that scientists and spiritualists close their ranks in the interest of the humanity and truth that both claim to promote. We will at this juncture argue that neither the scientists nor the spiritualists could solve the entire human problems on their own. Be that as it may collaboration between the two is needed now than before when the world is threatened by the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper, we examine healing in Islam. We began the examination by providing definitions of healing from the general and specific perspectives. The discussion then moved to the nature and scope of Healing in Islam where it was found that both the bodily and spiritual ailments have been healed through natural and spiritual means. Some of these methods we argued have been found efficacious scientifically. Consequently, a four way measures aimed at ensuring maximal utilization of the methods of healing in Islam was recommended. The measures it needs be stressed require the support of all the stakeholders to be effective and efficient.

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