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## MEDICINE OF THE PROPHET AS THE FORM OF TRADITIONAL MUSLIM MEDICINE

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**Key words:** Medicine of the Prophet, Islamic medicine, herbs, natural medicaments, cupping, scarification, phlebotomy, rukja, mental diseases, Muḥammad.

**Summary:** "Medicine of the Prophet" is the form of Islamic traditional medicine based on the words and advice of Muhammad. It contains the recommendations of preserving one's health, prevention and the hygiene. It can be divided into three main parts: the herbs and natural medicaments; the surgery which consists on cupping, scarification and phlebotomy; and the last one is a very interesting form of exorcism – called *rukja* – which is the method of curing especially mental diseases but not only them. This notion of medicine is still very vivid and very present in everyday life of Muslims and goes side by side with conventional medicine. The books of this kind of curing can be bought nearly at every library, people really use and recommend these methods which makes research on this topic a very fascinating part of inquiring into Arabic culture.

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Arabic medicine is known to historians primarily thanks to the outstanding doctors of Muslim origin such as Ibn Sīna, ar-Razi or az-Zahrāwī. However, apart from the classic medicine there is also its other aspect, known also to the Europeans as well as to all primitive cultures – folk medicine. In the Muslim world it has taken the form of the so-called prophetic medicine. It embraces a variety of Muḥammad's recommendations, carefully compiled by authors of collections of traditions concerning specific foods, hygiene, prophylaxis, procedures, thaumaturgy (the healing action of the prayer)<sup>1</sup>.

There is an overwhelming belief among Muslims that Muḥammad's knowledge is revealed and thus infallible. They maintain that being an illiterate, uneducated man the prophet can't have gained knowledge from all the fields on which he spoke in any other way. In the opinion of Muslims this is proof of the divine inspiration being the source of Muḥammad's knowledge.

What has drawn my attention and encouraged me to explore the prophetic medicine is its enormous vitality and constant presence in the everyday life of the Muslims. Handbooks of prophetic medicine can be bought on almost every stand with books, people are always ready to refer to the recommendations contained therein and belief in the healing power of the prayer seems to be firm in a vast part of them.

Moreover, traditional treatment is not only the domain of the common people – the conversations I have had with doctors of Arab origin educated in Poland reveal that also they consider prophetic medicine a form of treatment supporting conventional medicine and are far from questioning its methods.

I have based my knowledge of Arabic folk medicine first of all on the experience gathered in the course of my stay in Yemen – talks with people practising traditional medicine, visits to the herbalists' market in Sana or to the University of Faith, educating, among others, future doctors supposed to treat solely with the power of the prayer. My second source are collections of prophetic medicine – both contemporary and classic, by Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyya, an author well recognized in the Arab world.

The reading of the collections made me divide the recommended medicines into three groups: 'divine' remedies, natural remedies and procedures. The first group comprises: ritual prayer; fast; individual prayer being frequently a form of *ruqya*; act of repentance or exercise of patience. These are forms confirming the omnipresence of the phenomenon of theurgy in the world of Islam. Their presentation is the aim of the first part of this article. As regards natural remedies, belief in the effectiveness of herbal treatments remains unwavering – crowds of people gather on the herbalists' market in Sana every day. Many people say that in treatment it is better to trust ages of experience than untested chemical drugs with a multitude of side effects. The reading of the contemporary collections of prophetic medicine concerning natural remedies reveals clearly a certain tendency manifested by their authors. They tend to provide the presently known chemical composition of a given plant, describe how a given component acts on the human organism, in health and in disease, and then conclude that Muhammad advised to use a given fruit, seed or herb because he was well aware of the beneficial influence they have on the human organism. In the second part of the article I am presenting selected natural remedies as well as the cupping therapy interpreting them as a panacea of Muslim medicine.

### ***'Divine' remedies in prophetic medicine***

*Ruqya* – an unusual form of treatment consisting in uttering over the patient or by the patient of the words of quranic verses, Muḥammad's personal prayers or God-worshipping formulae – *dikr*, *takbīr* and *tasbīḥ*. However, the application of *ruqya* can arise certain controversies because of its link to magic practices as the very etymology of the word indicates. The verb *raqa* means to cast a spell, to stave off, to apply magic which have been firmly condemned by Islam. *Avoid seven baleful things warned the Prophet* (Dziekan, 1993:80), naming magic as one of them. The question arises how *ruqya* found its place into Islam? – The point is that the old pagan incantations and spells have been replaced with Muslim prayers and allowed to be used only for the purpose of treatment, protection against disease and any other evil. It has however been forbidden to use these means to 'order' a disease with the intention to bring misfortune to somebody. The Prophet allowed to apply only the protective and healing 'white magic', leaving bad, frightening spells to bad, malicious people. In Sūrat 113, The Dawn, we can read: 'I seek refuge in the Lord of daybreak (...) from the evil of the blowers in knots (v. 1;4)'. Blowing in knots, pronouncing over them enigmatic words and throwing them in front of the house of a person it was to bring harm to was a black

magic practice, popular before the emergence of Islam. Muḥammad, ‘seeking refuge in the Lord’ from this practice, thus admits that for him magic is something real and that is why we should seek God’s protection against it and also that it is bad, that we should seek protection against the ‘evil’ blowing in knots.

It is also worthwhile to point out that the word which today means a doctor – *ṭabīb* – was in the old Arab culture a synonym of a sorcerer – *sāhir* which is evidence of the close relation between witchcraft and medical treatment and the take-over of this belief by Islam.

Reverting to the explanation of the term, in one of the contemporary medical handbooks we can read: ‘*ruqya* includes all the verses, spells and prayers inspired by the words of the Prophet (...) serving to provide protection from the evil eye of people and genies, from the touch of the satan, from witchcraft, from mental diseases (...) as well as diseases of the body. This is the *ruqya* regulated by the Muslim Law and not, as some may imagine, a collection of spells and quakery’ (as-Sayyid, 2007:76).

The world of Islam seems to be permeated with the belief in the so called evil eye generated primarily by jealousy. This belief was also inherited from the ancestors living in the *ḡahiliyya* period and its presence in the culture of Islam was sanctioned by the Prophet who said: ‘The eye is the reality. If anything is to act faster than destiny, it is the evil eye’ (al-Ġawziyya, 1998:155).

Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyya explains that the energy of the evil eye can radiate from both people and genies – there are thus two kinds of the evil eye (al-Ġawziyya, 1998:155). To confirm the existence of genies the author quotes the ḥadīth: ‘The Prophet – let God pray for him and give him peace – saw in the house of Umm Sulma a slave and noticed that she had been touched by the genie’s eye.

He said then: ‘use *ruqya*, because she is victim to the evil eye the perpetrator of which is a genie’ (al-Ġawziyya, 1998:155).

Al-Ġawziyya speaks in very negative terms about people who question the existence of the evil eye. He believes them to belong to the most ignorant and the most unaware of people. He maintains that they are shrouded by a thick curtain making it impossible for them to recognize the true nature of spirits as well as the principles of their action and impact on human life, in particular on their health status. Conversely, referring to those who understand that a look can convey evil energy containing poisonous, murderous power, he calls them wise men. He believes that like snake venom this evil energy spreads in the human organism and can kill a man (al-Ġawziyya, 1998:155).

Muslims commonly believe in the harmful, widespread spectrum action of the evil eye which can make man develop a mental disorder, cause blindness or induce a spontaneous abortion in a pregnant woman (al-Ġawziyya, 1998:155).

It is when doctors recognize the spell cast by an evil eye to underpin an ailment that *ruqya* enters. The treatment consists in disempowering the demon or the fluid proceeding from the evil eye by resorting to a more potent power – to God. This takes the form of an exorcism, with words of prayer being spoken over the patient to expel the evil spirit from the body and the soul of the patient. And it is in its application in mental diseases that the most spectacular action of *ruqya* can be witnessed. In Yemen, there is a separate hospital for mentally ill people the staff of which is qualified in the treatment

solely and exclusively with Quranic verses, words of the Prophet and religious formulae. In the case of lesser complaints, as I was assured by people I talked to, it is enough to place the Quran on the site of pain and pray with faith and the pain must subside.

Although in the Muslims' opinion the whole Quran has healing properties, certain of its fragments are preferred during the *ruqya* ritual and namely the following sūrat: *The Opening*, *The Cow* (in particular its *Throne Verse*), *Sincerity of Faith* as well as two shorter ones, called protective sūrat – *The Dawn* and *The Men*.

Muḥammad's personal prayers a lot of which can be found in the collections of traditions are also of great potency. Here is an example of one of them: ' You are the lord, there is no God above You, in You I place all my trust, You are the Lord of the Throne, what you want, immediately becomes, and what you do not wish, never happens, there is no power no force above God, God is omnipotent over all and any things and is omniscient over all and any of them. He counted meticulously all that exists. God I escape to you from the evil of my own soul, from the evil coming from Satan and his companions.' (al-Ġawziyya, 1998:61).

The ritual of *ruqya* also applies Muslim religious formulae such as *dīkr*, *tasbīḥ* and *takbīr*.

*Dīkr* – remembrance of God is a form of Muslim prayer consisting in reciting the so-called most beautiful names of God . This is done with the help of *misbaḥa*, a kind of a Muslim 'rosary' – moving the beads of *misbaḥa* in his hands a Muslim contemplates one of the names of God. There are 99 of them, the highest, the hundredths being Allah – that is God the Only. The names are adjectives specifying the attributes of God and include, among others, the Merciful, the Compassionate, the Creator, the First, the Last, the Wise, etc.. When the name of God is used in the *ruqya* ritual having a healing aim, God is most often summoned with names related to power such as the Powerful, the Great, the Strong, the Omnipotent.

*Dīkr* does not form part of the basic religious duties and yet it cannot be underestimated – according to the words of the Prophet, if the inhabitants of paradise regret anything, it is the fact that they did not remember God often enough (°Abd Allāh, 1997:21).

In a contemporary handbook of prophetic medicine we can read: *Remembering God and peace of the heart can cure any disease* (°Abd Allāh, 1996:9). Apart from mental disorders, *dīkr* finds its application, due to its soothing actions, also in the treatment of sadness, worries and uncertainties. (In the culture of Islam any negative or excessive emotions are perceived in terms of a disease). Recommending *dīkr* contemporary authors refer to the following Quranic verse: *Those who have believed and whose hearts are assured by the remembrance of Allah.*

*Unquestionably, by the remembrance of Allah hearts are assured!* (Surah 113, *The Thunder*, v. 28); and the words of the Prophet: *With people who remember God, angels celebrate and enjoy themselves, they send them peace and mercy* (°Abd Allāh, 1997:20).

Islam is a religion which attaches great importance to rituals – *dīkr* is thus also subject to certain conditions. First and foremost, you should attempt it in a state of ritual purity (*ṭahāra*) the principles of which are in turn specified by the regulations of

Muslim Law schools. In addition, a clean place should be chosen compliant with the power and majesty of God. It is also absolutely obligatory to clean the mouth with a toothpick, the procedure being carried out with the face turned in the direction of Mecca. Another prerequisite is concentration on the awareness of the glory of God and expression of gratitude for all that is good (°Abd Allāh, 1997:32-33). The prayer should not be loud but discrete. The prophet assured: *Indeed, you are not calling the deaf or the absent ... He who you call is the hearing, the close, closer than the neck of your donkey or your camel* (°Abd Allāh, 1997:34).

There are a few types of *dīkr*. The principal division distinguished between the recommended discrete *dīkr* and the discouraged loud and public one. Secret *zīkr* is in turn divided into this which is said in whisper and therefore called the *zīkr* of the soul, in compliance with the Quranic recommendation : *Call on your Lord with humility and in private: for Allah love not those who trespass beyond bounds* (Sūrat The Elevated Places, v. 55); and the *dīkr* being a consideration, a contemplation of the act of creation. *An hour of contemplation over the works of God means more than fifty years of cult* (°Abd Allāh, 1997:32).

Other sets of words frequently accompanying *ruqya* are the so-called *takbīr*, *i.e.* : Allāh Akbar (Allāh is the highest) and *tasbīh* : Praise be to Allāh. This finds its justification in the ḥadīṡ which says: *The Prophet – let God pray for Him and grant it peace – said: The words most beloved by God are: Glory to God, Let God be praised. There is no God above Allah and God is the Highest* (°Abd Allāh, 1997:30).

God-praising phrases are very common in the everyday life of the Muslims. They have come to be regularly incorporated in any conversations on matters of great importance as well as on trifles performing a phatic function. However, their primary function is protective.

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According to traditional beliefs *tasbīh* is uttered by all the living beings giving thus testimony that Allāh is the Highest God and the Lord of the world. Consequently, *tasbīh* is a tool distinguishing the living from the dead and the dead are those whose heart and lips do not praise God (°Abd Allāh, 1997:28).

In treatment, the effectiveness of *tasbīh* is amplified by combining it with *dīkr*, in compliance with the words of the Quran: *Oh you who have believed, remember Allāh with much remembrance And exalt Him morning and afternoon. It is He who confers blessing upon you, and His angels [ask Him to do so] that He may bring you out from darkness into the light. And ever is He, to the believers, Merciful.* (Surah The Combined Forces, vv. 41-43) – the darkness being interpreted as a disease.

It is worth mentioning that the idea of ‘casting a spell’ to cure an illness and to attain it through prayer is not alien to the Christian culture, either. Here is an example of a prayer made in the case of colic: *Mother Mary, Saint Lady Emerencja, Saint Lady Agatha, please return to your place, between the umbilicus and the spleen, in the name of the Father ...*; in the case of burns: *Fire, lose its heat just as Judas lost his colours when he betrayed Our Lord*; in the case of a haemorrhage: *Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem and suffered in Jerusalem, His blood boiled over. I tell you and order you, stop by the power of God and with the help of All Saints, the same as the River Jordan stopped in which Saint John the Baptist baptized Our Lord, in the name of the Father ...*; and in the case of any illnesses and injuries: *In the name of the Father, the Son and*

*the Holy Spirit, Lady Saint Anne who gave birth to Virgin Mary, Virgin Mary who gave birth to Jesus Christ, let God bless you and cure the poor creature (name) from the compression, the wound, the fracture, the weakness and any other type of suffering, no matter what, to the glory of God and Virgin Mary and the Lords of the Holy Church and Saint Damian, Amen; say Pater Noster and three Ave Maria three times.* (Lebrun, 1997:113). Francois Lebrun writes that although bishops condemned healing practices, they did not negate the existence of magic and – like it was in the case of Muhammad – they considered it part of the reality (Lebrun, 1997:105).

Another analogy between European and Muslim therapeutics can be found in the identification of epilepsy with the action of bad ghosts as well as with casting spells which resembles the belief in the evil eye present in the Muslim culture. Blaise Pascal suffered seizures already in early childhood. *Doctors remained helpless and finally the desperate father (...) concluded that it must be a spell cast by an old woman his wife had refused alms. Threatened with a stake the woman confesses. She suggests moving the spell from the child to a black cat. She prepares a brew, prays to the devil. The cat dies but the child does not recover. Then, feeling that the stake is near, she prepares a 'cataplasm from nine leaves of three different plants collected by a seven-year old child at full moon.'* When she applies the cataplasm, the boy is seized by an attack of terrible convulsions and falls in catalepsy. (...) Suddenly the child wakes up from the coma, smiles. The witch announces recovery. The attack subsides, never to return again (Szczeklik, 2007:66). The event described had place in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Today practices of this kind would be, as a rule, described as superstitious while in the Muslim world a lot of people would not question their rationale.

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As emphasized by the staff of the University of Faith in Sana, what is of utmost importance in healing procedures of this kind is the faith of both the doctor and the patient. Also al-Ġawziyya draws attention to it when he writes that in the *ruqya* treatment there is no place for doubt because everything depends on the power of faith and the depth of the trust in God. He adds: *This way of treatment is not accepted by doctors, it is totally unacceptable for them while it does not work when one questions it, negates it, ridicules it or applies it only as an attempt, without conviction* (al-Ġawziyya, 1998:162). In another fragment he says the following words: *And this is the secret: (...) a prerequisite to recovery with the use of a medication is its acceptance (...) with a full conviction of its effectiveness, of God having contained in it the blessing of recovery* (al-Ġawziyya, 1998:151).

An analysis and description of the role of faith in the process of treatment and recovery would require a separate study. I would only like to draw attention to an interesting remark made by Władysław Szumowski, a doctor and a philosopher of medicine. Pondering over the phenomenon of the success of numerous healers and quacks, he came to a conclusion that the personality of the therapist must have an enormous influence on the patient's belief in recovery and their will to fight for it. He writes that quacks can be really impressive in their extraordinary self-confidence, belief in the effectiveness of the methods they apply, and this exerts a potent suggestive impact on the patient. Meanwhile, educated medical practitioners, precisely because of their vast and extensive education, are aware of a likelihood of a diversity of complications and are thus more cautious. They do not assure patients of complete

recovery. Szumowski believes that criticism, so valuable in research work, can constitute an obstacle in medical practice where emotions seem to have more power, especially in the case of disease of a hysterical background, than erudition or knowledge, no matter how rich and extensive (Szumowski, 2007:96-124).

Another question related to *ruqya* is the use of amulets which were also supposed to wave away all evil and protect man. Amulets have aroused controversies because carrying an amulet and recognizing the power of the object might be considered idolatrous and this would stand in contradiction to the principal idea of Islam proclaiming belief in the Only God. Interestingly, the founder of the most conservative of the law schools – Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal – did not see anything wrong in having amulets, and did not find them contradictory to the teachings of Muḥammad as according to tradition the prophet's wives would wear them and he did not forbid it (Perho, 1995:113). Also two authors of collections of prophetic medicine, Ibrāhīm al-Azraq and aṣ-Ṣanawbarī who were practicing doctors advised amulets as a way of combating a disease. They contained most frequently different combinations of letters, figures and geometrical patterns (Perho, 1995:113). The great Arab scientist Ibn Ḥaldūn went even so far as to say that magic and amulets are a branch of science (Perho, 1995:114).

J.Ch. Bürgel, an expert on Arabic medicine, believes that it was just in this way, with the participation of orthodox authors of collections of prophetic medicine, magic forms of treatment developed into a great system of religious magic. He writes that amulets were worn not only against the evil eye but also against any sinister forces. They were also put on by pregnant women as protection against labour-related difficulties (Bürgel, 1997:58).

Also in this context an analogy can be found to Christian practices: *Wearing Agnus Dei (a reliquary) or habit of Virgin Mary (a scapular) or other scapulars is recommended as protection against all diseases* (Lebrun, 1997:130).

In the Muslim culture of today the most popular amulets are these in the shape of a palm which Muslims believe to be endowed with a particular blessing. *To protect themselves against danger the Muslims extend a palm with wide spread fingers uttering a formula of some kind, for instance 'Five into your eyes' (...). Five fingers signify five pillars of Islam, fivefold daily prayer* (Dziekan, 1997:28).

The proper attitude of repentance in the face of God and patience in the face of various events can also prove a remedy, and even more frequently, a prophylactic measure.

According to tradition, Muḥammad would express his repentance over seventy times a day. He would encourage people to repent saying that God forbids sins even if they were as numerous as sea foam, leaves on a tree or grains of sand or all the days of the world (° Abd Allāh, 1997:22). He also taught what a prayer for forgiveness might look like: *Oh God, You are my Lord, there is no God but You, You created me and I am Your servant (...) I escape to you from the evil I have done (...) Nobody but You can forgive sins* (° Abd Allāh, 1997:22).

Another ḥadīth enumerates benefits resulting from sincere repentance by a believer: *'He who asks for forgiveness, for him will God prepare a way out of any situation, any of his worries will turn to joy, and he will provide him with the means to live from the least expected side* (° Abd Allāh, 1997:22). This very general statement

speaking about an outcome from every situation or protection against the evil of what one has done is interpreted in the context of curing from an illness or protection against it.

Patience is, in turn, one of the features belonging since time immemorial to the Bedouin moral code. The character of the Bedouin developed in hard geographical and climatic conditions, making him resistant to the hardships of everyday life. *Perseverance, patience seem to be (...) an utmost virtue, making it possible (...) to survive even in conditions in which almost everything alive perishes.* (Hitti, 1969:26). The feature was adopted by Islam as compliant with its core idea of succumbing to the will of God and thus bearing patiently the God predestined fate, including disease.

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Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyya, and a multitude of his followers, believes that the majority of diseases results from lack of patience. He writes: *The health of the heart, the body and the soul is not maintained by any other behavior in such an extent as thanks to patience* (Hitti, 1969:26). Patience is to distinguish the faithful from the unfaithful. Who in the face of mounting difficulties becomes a malcontent, blames God for the ill fate is not a true believer (° Abd Allāh, 1997:24). It is the patient who obtain God's mercy and the great privilege – their patience causes that He himself prays for them. In the case of a disease this privilege becomes invaluable.

All the methods used by *ruqya*, remembering God through His names, praising Him, humbling oneself before God, reciting verses and words of prayer, are a form of individual prayer known as *du'a'*. The belief in its usefulness rests on the words of the Prophet and the words of the Quran. The Prophet said: *'Nothing apart from du'a' can reverse the course of destiny and nothing can lengthen life as much as good deeds* (° Abd Allāh, 1997:7).

Prayer proves most effective when it is tenacious and repeated: *Don't spare time on prayer – du'a', because who applies it does not die. (...) God loves those who are persistent in du'a'* (° Abd Allāh, 1997:7).

*Du'a'* is accepted and heard on certain conditions. It does not happen if (° Abd Allāh, 1997:7-8):

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- a man harbours in his heart hatred towards somebody;
- the heart of the faithful is weak and his faith not firm;
- the faithful ingests forbidden foods (alcohol, donkey milk, port, frog meat, carcass meat, meat of predatory animals);
- a man's thoughts are occupied with enjoyment and entertainment – the Prophet was to say: Call God and be sure that He shall send you an answer, however know that He shall not listen to the lax;<sup>43</sup>
- a man calling God belongs to people who broke off with their family, does not take care of them and does not offer them assistance – in the collective culture of Islam this is a very serious offence;
- the prayer is superficial;
- the faithful expects an immediate answer to his supplications and if it does not come, he abandons prayer and begins to doubt the effectiveness; haste and impatience, expectation that the result will be visible immediately are major obstacles to positive response on the part of God.

Moreover, as a *ruqya* - praying woman told me, to be effective in an individual



prayer one must be in a state of ritual purity, face in the direction of Mecca and pray for Prophet Muḥammad. If one forgets about the latter, his prayer remains suspended between the heaven and the earth.

Apart from *ruqya* and the individual forms of prayer belonging to it, divine remedies include the so-called pillars of faith that is the basic duties of the Muslims. In addition, the faithful performing his religious duties earns God's respect and multiplies his chances of salvation and eternity in the gardens of happiness. It may also help him gain better health. Prophet Muḥammad instructed Abū Hurayra, complaining of stomach pain with the following words: Raise to prayer, in it is the healing (Perho, 1995:111). Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyya maintains that this healing is the effect of both the state of mind which develops in the course of prayer and the physical effort put into it – a Muslim prayer consists of a specific number of bows known as *rak'a* and *suġūd*, bends forward, upward extensions, hip movements. All these movements, as he writes, accelerate digestion and this helps in the excretion of waste products of the metabolism which were the cause of the disease. While praying a Muslim moves the majority of joints and relaxes the internal organs such as the stomach, the intestines, respiratory and digestive organs (al-Ġawziyya, 1998:198).

Ad-Dahabī, another author of a classic collection of prophetic medicine, adds also that such a form of prayer can help people suffering from rhinitis – falling face on the ground opens the stuffed nose (Perho, 1995:111).

All the authors admit that they must resort to such rational arguments because of heretic, non-Muslim doctors to convince them and to encourage them to recommend prayer to patients. (On the other hand, it is hard to imagine a non-Muslim doctor recommending a Muslim prayer to a patient. Even if such a doctor found bending the best way of treating rhinitis, he would simply recommend specific gymnastic exercises. Although it cannot be ruled out that dealing with a Muslim patient and being aware of the role of faith in the process of recovery, the doctor might combine the recommendations). An exemplary Muslim doctor and also every believer do not need any additional explanations. They both know that prayer heals because it is a prayer, a duty towards God.

Prayer heals everything. It should be added that it is best to accept this dogma according to the *bilā kayfa* principle without asking why and without doubt. And then recovery will come sooner.

Fast in the month of Ramadan is but another *farāiḍ* the Muslim's duty, the performance of which is not solely of religious and spiritual importance but also of healing importance. Restraint from the consumption of meals and the thus achieve cleansing of the organism was applied and recommended already by ancient doctors. In the beginnings of Arabic medicine it was this idea that served as the principal prophylactic and recommended tool due to the widespread of digestive problems (Rashed, 2005:166). This conviction concerning the effectiveness in treatment and prophylaxis of the proper nutrition and of regularly observed fast persist till today.

Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyya believes that advantages resulting for the body, the heart and the soul from fast are innumerable. The author emphasizes in particular its role in improving metabolism and expresses a belief that fast allows internal organs to rest and thus maintains their vitality. Not to mention the benefits for the soul – fast

gives the soul an opportunity to practice perseverance and endurance and though it requires some sacrifices, it brings joy to the soul sooner or later (al-Ġawziyya, 1998:309).

A contemporary author, Zaġlūl an-Naġġār, claims that the majority of people have a wrong impression about fast believing that it benefits only the soul. He refers to *numerous studies* which testify to a variety of benefits enjoyed by the whole organism (an-Naġġār, 2007:460). What improves in a fasting man is the resilience of his muscles as well as the production capacity of the circulatory system, the digestive system and the respiratory system, of course, provided he keeps to the specified fasting hours because then the powers of the organism become exhausted (an-Naġġār, 2007:460). He also adds that the state of internal satisfaction which a man feels while fasting, resulting from his feeling of being close to his Creator as well as from following a noble religious duty, in the most blessed month of the year makes the quantity of endorphins in the human organism increase. They help him survive the period of restraining from consumption without a feeling of exhaustion (an-Naġġār, 2007:461). (One may argue with these words watching aggressive behaviour among Muslims which intensify during Ramadan.)

In addition, an-Naġġār points out that the change in the pattern of nutrition during fast allows all systems of the human body to rest and get rid of all the surpluses of fat, toxins, viruses gathered in the course of the whole year. The author believes that this was also the aim of God the Highest when he set fast in the month of Ramadan (an-Naġġār, 2007:461).

He reminds that Muḥammad advised also voluntary fasts because he believed fast to be the highest expression of the cult of God as well as a prophylactic means for the body, peace for the soul and purification of the spirit (an-Naġġār, 2007:461). I have had numerous conversations with people who practice voluntary fasting on a regular basis as a form of prophylaxis. According to tradition, Muḥammad was to fast on Mondays and on Thursdays and it was these days that the said persons devoted to their individual fasting. Speaking about the effectiveness of the fast they would pass to me what can be read in manuals of prophetic medicine and which I have described herein above – advantages resulting from getting rid of toxins, relaxation of the whole organism or feeling of being exceptionally close to God.

Summing up his considerations on the subject of the fast, an-Naġġār writes that many people must ask themselves a question – how it is possible that the Prophet living thousands of years earlier knew that fast is good for keeping the body in health. According to the author all discoveries of contemporary science confirm the words of Muḥammad who lived in the desert area of Arabia in the 7<sup>th</sup> century . He maintains that Muḥammad's vast knowledge was revealed to him and it is because of its divine origin that it is so complete and irrefutable (an-Naġġār, 2007:461-462).

Frequently, the first reaction of people in Yemen to different ailments is to pay voluntary alms. Unlike *zakāt* – ritual alms – it does not belong to the Muslim's duties, to the pillars of faith. It is, however, widely spread, which must be emphasized, in a very poor country. In spite of their own material difficulties people offer support beggars believing that thanks to it they will also share in God's blessing. A certain man told me that for him it is the best tested way to cope with health problems affecting his

family. *When only one of us falls ill – he said – I immediately go to town and give my money to the largest possible number of the poor.* He claims that it always works – the ill either recovers or at least his condition improves or - according to his words – thanks to voluntary alms God sends a good doctor who never fails.

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### *Natural medicines – in search of a universal panacea*

Hygiea and Panacea are daughters of the god of medicine, Asclepius. They are still alive and who knows, they may always live, to the end of times – and Panacea will live as long as hope springs in human hearts. The search for a panacea, a drug against all and any ailment, seems to be inherent to human nature. It can take a variety of forms – it may be the search for live water present in so many folk tales and fairy tales, transferring Samuel Hanhnenman's tincture, known as homeopathy, acupuncture. In the Muslim cultural circle a person seeking a panacea will find detailed guidelines and directives – the words passed by Muḥammad and stories about him known as sunnahs or the Prophet's tradition pathways, a reliable direction guide. Muḥammad said: *There is a medicine against any disease* – and an outstanding Muslim scientist Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyya interpreted these words as intended to strengthen the soul, both the patient and the doctor though he did not negate the verbal interpretation. *The words of the Prophet – let God pray for him and grant him peace – 'There is a remedy for every disease' - are meant to strengthen the soul of the patient and the soul of the doctor, encourage them to ask for the remedy and seek it. If the patient's soul is pervaded by the conviction that a medication which can eradicate his disease really exists, then his heart is invigorated and the burning despair is extinguished. The gates of hope open before him. When the soul is strengthened, natural warmth begins to spread through the organism which is the source of the power of animal, psychic and natural spirits. And when they become stronger, so do their capacities and disease can be overcome. It is the same with a doctor: the awareness that there is a remedy against every disease enables him to seek it. Like with the diseases of the body, so with the diseases of the heart – God did not create any disease without creating a way to recover from it though what is its opposite. If a man affected by a disease knows this way and applies it, then, if God lets him, he will be cured* (al-Ġawziyya, 1998:21).

Here are examples of Muslim remedies against all and any diseases:

### *Grapes in the Quran*

Grapes belong, next to dates, to the most common fruits applied in folk medicine. They are mentioned in numerous quranic verses and this is reason enough to trust them and be convinced of their effectiveness. Here are Quran fragments which speak about grapes: *Then let mankind look at his food. How We poured down water in torrents, Then We broke open the earth, splitting [it with sprouts], And caused to grow within it grain And grapes and herbage.* (Sūrat 80 He Frowned, vv. 24-28) *And it is He who sends down rain from the sky, and We produce thereby the growth of all things. We produce from it greenery from which We produce grains arranged in layers. And from the palm trees - of its emerging fruit are clusters hanging low. And [We produce]*

*gardens of grapevines and olives and pomegranates, similar yet varied. Look at [each of] its fruit when it yields and [at] its ripening. Indeed in that are signs for a people who believe. ( ... ) And We have certainly revealed to you verses [which are] clear proofs, and no one would deny them except the defiantly disobedient. (Sūrat The Cattle, v. 99) With it He causes to grow for you the crops, the olives, the date-palms, the grapes, and every kind of fruit. Verily! In this is indeed an evident proof and a manifest sign for people who give thought. (Sūrat The Bee, v 11) And within the land are neighboring plots and gardens of grapevines and crops and palm trees, [growing] several from a root or otherwise, watered with one water; but We make some of them exceed others in [quality of] fruit. Indeed in that are signs for a people who reason. (Sūrat The Thunder v.4) And We placed therein gardens of palm trees and grapevines (...) That they may eat of His fruit. (Sūrat 36 Yā' Sīn, vv. 34-35) Indeed, for the righteous is attainment - Gardens and grapevines. (Sūrat 78 The Event vv. 31-32)*

As we can see from the fragments quoted above, Quran does not say anything about the application of grapes in treatment. However the enigmatic words *In this is indeed an evident proof and a manifest sign for people who give thought* are interpreted as an indication of therapeutic properties hidden in this fruit. As we can read in a contemporary manual of prophetic medicine: *It is certain that grapes belong to the fruit the consumption of which is most beneficial to man. Taking active part in building the cells of the body, in building tissues and strengthening them, they are used in the treatment of numerous diseases and play a special role in prophylaxis. Their composition is characterized by a large number of nutritive values. In the Quran, grapes are referred to in twenty one places (Mūsa Ibrāhīm, 2007:5).* The last sentence of the statement quoted substantiates the use of grapes as a Muslim panacea. The fact that there are passages concerning this fruit in the Holy Book is evidence enough that grapes are blessed and their consumption is useful and curative. Grapes have gained a permanent place in folk medicine also thanks to the words of the Prophet to be found in the collections of traditions: *Bread is the best food for you and grapes are the best among fruits. (Mūsa Ibrāhīm, 2007:5).* Other ḥadīṭ, being an account of one of the Prophet's companions, are quoted by Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyya: *I saw the prophet – let God pray for Him and give Him peace – eating grapes picking them from trees; (al-Ġawziyya, 1998:313) and the Prophet - let God pray for Him and give Him peace – liked grapes and water melons (al-Ġawziyya, 1998:314).*

Anything that the Prophet does is a guideline for Muslims irrespective of whether it concerns matters of great or little importance. It is evident that the mere fact that Muḥammad preferred a given type of food is enough to conclude that there is something more to it, not only personal preference. If the Prophet liked grapes, they must contain blessing and power. The Muslims will always emphasize that Muḥammad was not God, *ergo* – there are no grounds to surround Him with worship but they tend to always interpret any of His behaviours and statements as God-inspired and consequently - follow Him so indiscriminately and faithfully that an outside observer may often find it difficult to distinguish between what is cult and what is inspiration with a good example.

***Grapes in the collections of prophetic medicine***

Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyya calls grapes one of the three fruits superior to others, next to dates and figs (al-Ġawziyya, 1998:314).

In turn another author of a collection of prophetic medicine, ʿAbd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī, who also presented an alphabetic list of natural remedies together with their description, characterized grapes in the following way: *The best grapes are the white, followed by the red and finally the black (...) They taste well, ripe grapes belong to the best and the most recommendable. It is better to refrain from picking them for some time because the very fresh ones cause bloating and diarrhea when eaten in great quantities, grapes cause hunger which can be eased with a bitter pomegranate. (...) It has been told that the Prophet – let God pray for Him and grant Him peace – liked grapes and water melon* (al- Baġdādī, 2005:87).

**Raisins** maintain the majority of vitamins and minerals contained in red grapes. In Arabic folk medicine they are believed to stimulate the work of the liver (Mūsa Ibrāhīm, 2007:23).

In his monumental medical compendium *al-Qanūn fī aṭ-ṭibb*, Ibn Sīna writes about raisins in the following way: *They are friends of the heart, the stomach, have a favourable influence on the kidneys and the bladder* (Mūsa Ibrāhīm, 2007:26).

The folk medicine of today makes use of a drink being a mixture of raisins, honey and sugar which is supposed to ease cough. Another variant of the drink is a combination of raisins, figs, dates and grapes cooked in water which helps clear the air passages (Mūsa Ibrāhīm, 2007:26).

The author also adds that raisins can be eaten in large quantities without any harm for the organism (Mūsa Ibrāhīm, 2007:26).

Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyya described the properties of raisins separately while the prophetic medicine handbooks of today discuss grapes and raisins together. Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyya begins by making reference to two ḥadīṭ but points out that they do not belong to the most reliable: *Raisins are the most blessed of foods – they improve respiration, help get rid of phlegm* (al-Ġawziyya, 1998:294). And again: *Raisins are the most blessed of foods – they remove tiredness, strengthen nerves, extinguish anger, cleanse the blood, improve respiration* (al-Ġawziyya, 1998:294).

The author writes that the best raisins are those which have a lot of pulp and thin, delicate skin. Their properties are the same as those of grapes. They have their place in the treatment of cough, renal pain and bladder pain, strengthen the stomach, the liver and the pancreas. Raisins certainly deserve to be called a panacea – not only do they make you feel better, let you forget about tiredness and anger but they can also be applied in any digestive and urinary tract conditions, not to mention an ordinary cold.

Finishing his description of raisins in the collection of prophetic medicine Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyya quotes the ḥadīṭ which says: *Who wants to cultivate the tradition of the Prophet, must eat raisins* (al-Ġawziyya, 1998:294).

### ***Grapes today***

In the prophetic medicine handbooks of today it is emphasized that the therapeutic action of grapes was referred to in their works by outstanding authorities

such as the already quoted Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyya and °Abd al- Laṭīf al-Baġdādī . Traditionally, the prestige of any medicine-related book goes up if the author quotes the opinion of the two most outstanding physicians of the Muslim cultural circle - Ibn Sīna or ar-Rāzī. Also, the authority of the Greeks is still well alive – *Dioscorides believed that grapes cure fever, hemorrhage and liver ailments* (Mūsa Ibrāhīm, 2007:9). He underlines the importance of grapes reminding that they were used by the ancient civilizations – the people of Mesopotamia, the Chinese, the people of India, the Egyptians, *among whom grapes occupied a unique position, to such an extent that they believed the grapevine tree to be sacred* (Mūsa Ibrāhīm, 2007:24). To the authors of the medical handbooks of today it is equally important that grapes are mentioned in the Quran but also in the Torah and the Gospels. As I have already said before, the very fact that grapes figure in the Holy Books is enough to make a conclusion about their particular role and function.

Present day prophetic medicine handbooks write a lot about the wide spectrum of the action of grapes in both treatment and prophylaxis. They describe their composition and properties drawing attention to the fact that grapes contain a substantial quantity of easily absorbable and digestible carbohydrates, glucose, known as grape sugar and fructose, known as fruit sugar, *both are easily absorbed, the organism need not make a great effort to digest them. The sugar content of grapes is stored by the liver to be made use of by man when the need arises, for instance when fasting* (Mūsa Ibrāhīm, 2007:24). For the same reason grapes supply the organism with energy necessary for its proper functioning and hence they are recommended to sportsmen. They contain large quantities of potassium, calcium, phosphorus, iron, vitamin B and fibre which prevents diarrhea, help stabilize the level of glucose and fructose in the organism, protect against intestinal tumors. Consumption of grapes is of importance in the prophylaxis of sclerosis because they significantly reduce the level of bad cholesterol (LDL) in the blood. In addition, grapes can be used in the case of digestive problems, gingivitis, tooth loss, relief of appendix-related pain, cold-relief, cough-relief as well as a sight-strengthening agent. They are invaluable in the treatment of calculi of the bladder and of the gallbladder. They also assist in the normal functioning of the liver, protect against renal problems, are recommended in the treatment of contagious diseases. (Mūsa Ibrāhīm, 2007:18-29). Any more effective panacea to think of? Any organ of the body not cured or strengthened by grapes?

There is a disease which grapes cope with best – osteoporosis. It is most common in postmenopausal women. As we can read in prophetic medicine handbooks, osteoporosis develops with the decline of the blood level of estrogen, the hormone which prevents the loss of calcium, the element being the main building constituent of bones. It is characterized by the loss of strength and resilience by bones (Muḥammad Mūsa, 2004:61).

Moreover, *grapes, by the will of God, are involved in containing cancers. Studies show that inhabitants of countries in which grapes cultivation is widespread hardly ever develop cancer. (...) Doctors have also noticed that applied in the treatment of cancer grapes contribute to relieving pain experienced by the patient within a few days so that sedatives or hypnotics are no longer necessary* (Mūsa Ibrāhīm, 2007:19). The author proceeds to attribute these properties of grapes to the presence of the already mentioned

elements – potassium and iron. It is believed that it is these two elements which are most deficient in people suffering from cancer. He writes that in consequence of grape therapy the patient may suffer from side effects which however subside in no time. The latter include elevated temperature, skin rash, increased perspiration. Once this stage is over, the first signs of recovery begin to appear. The skin colour improves, the patient regains energy and vitality, his eyes brightness. Obviously, grapes could not be called a panacea if they were not able to cope with the greatest problem afflicting the patient of today, the risk of cancer (Mūsa Ibrāhīm, 2007:20).

What is recommended is not only the consumption of grapes but also drinking of **grape juice** together with grape seeds. It is also important to drink it fast so as to not allow for its earlier fermentation (we must keep in mind the absolute ban on drinking alcohol in the culture of Islam). Grape juice accelerates convalescence, is used in poisoning and nephrolithiasis (Mūsa Ibrāhīm, 2007:22).

*Contemporary research confirms that grape juice, devoid of alcohol, is the most beneficial of all beverages for the health of the heart because it leads to raising the good blood cholesterol which in turn prevents the development of cardiac diseases and infarcts* (Mūsa Ibrāhīm, 2007:13).

Thus, grape juice helps in reducing arterial blood pressure, its drinking being also recommended in the case of cigarette addiction and sclerosis. It also improves peristalsis. The beneficial influence and action of grape juice is not limited to therapeutic applications only. It also concerns in beauty care: *Grape juice is applied to rinse and moisturize the skin – put on the skin of the face, the juice is rubbed in with the help of a piece of cotton and left to soak in for some ten minutes. After the lapse of this time the face should be rinsed with baking soda* (Mūsa Ibrāhīm, 2007:31).

**White grapes** are invaluable in the treatment and prevention of lung diseases which is confirmed by recent research. It has shown that the respiratory tract of people eating white grapes regularly in reasonable quantities works better. They are less prone to lung diseases, irrespective of their age. In addition, *white grapes are nourishing, relieve stomach problems and intestinal problems, cleanse the digestive tract* (Mūsa Ibrāhīm, 2007:31). Both in the description of Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyya and the description of <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdadī, enjoying particular esteem because of being a practicing doctor, **red grapes** are rated lower than white grapes. This does not change the fact that they have their permanent place in contemporary folk medicine.

*Red grapes play a particular role in the prophylaxis of heart diseases (...) help in the prevention of heart infarcts. Red grapes, both fresh, but also dried – raisins – (...) held in the fight of diseases of the colon. Their composition is characterized by the presence of substances which assist in the removal of toxins from the blood, being thus a fruit helpful in cleansing the blood and the liver* (Mūsa Ibrāhīm, 2007:31).

Grapes of this variety also support normal brain function. They are also used in the treatment and prophylaxis of lung diseases (Mūsa Ibrāhīm, 2007:26). Briefly speaking – red grapes treat and cure the whole organism.

### *Other fruits used in the prophetic medicine*

A contemporary author encourages to the use of fruits in the treatment and

prophylaxis with these words: *Increase the quantity of fruit consumes and you will draw a lucky ticket in the lottery* (ar-Rawāḡiba, 2007:44);

Dates – *Dates have a soothing influence on nerves because they contain vitamin A as well as vitamin B as they both strengthen nerves (...) containing a lot of phosphorus which is believed to be nourishment for the neurons of the brain* (Şālih, 2007:11);

Watermelon – *Eaten before a meal, water melon cleanses the abdomen and pushes away disease;*

Fig – *White figs of ripe skin help get rid of renal calculi and bladder calculi (...), they are good for sore throat, chest and bronchial pain, they cleanse the liver and the pancreas;*

Pomegranate – *This fruit is good for the stomach, strengthens it (...), is applied in sore throat, chest and lung pain, is good for cough (...), combats diarrhea, prevents vomiting, eases bowel emptying;*

Quince – *The quince eases thirst and vomiting, has a diuretic effect (...), is applied in the treatment of cholera and against nausea* (al-Ġawziyya, 1998:260-292);

Apple – *The apple is helpful in the treatment of digestive tract diseases and disorders as well as in the case of chronic diarrhea (...), it is recommended to people suffering from sclerosis, obesity, hemorrhoids, eczema and skin diseases;*

Apricots – *Apricots can be recommended to people doing brain work as they are rich in two elements essential for the proper functioning of the brain – phosphorus and magnesium; while the carotene they contain assists proper growth in children;*

Pear – *The pear is very good at lowering elevated blood pressure (...), in some diseases of the urinary tract, in particular in the inflammation of the urinary bladder;*

Strawberry – *To beautify the complexion of the face nourish the skin with crushed strawberry seeds extract prior to going to bed, leave it there through the night, in the morning wash the face with French parsley water to nourish the skin and get rid of wrinkles;*

Plum – *The plum acts as a diuretic, treats diarrhea, cleanses the blood;*

Banana – *Once called the ‘food of philosophers’ or ‘fruit of sages’ (...); their content causes that they are recommended to brain workers, people afflicted by ulcerative disease, colitis, diarrhea and nephritis;*

Mango – *This fruit contains a lot of vitamin A which is important in combating inflammatory conditions, particularly in children;*

Peach – *The peach is applied (...) in the treatment of worms, inflammatory skin conditions as well as respiratory difficulties;*

Guava – *Because of its low sugar content it can be eaten by diabetic patients. Guava leaves cooked in water are used in the treatment of cough and colds;*

Pineapple – *This fruit helps in easing diseases of the brain as well as in the treatment of throat diseases (...), strengthens the stomach and has a diuretic effect;*

Cherry – *With its vital role in cleansing the organism and getting rid of toxic substances from cells as well as liquidation of excess water in the organism and stimulation of the renal function, this fruit is considered one of the most important fruits for the human organism* (Mūsa Ibrāhīm, 2007:57-76);

In the canonic collections of traditions authored by al-Buhārī, Muslim, at-Tirmidī



and Ibn Māḡa we can find different variants of the same ḡadīṡ: *In the black seed is the cure to all diseases apart from the poison which is death* (an-Naḡḡār, 2007:388).

In his book commenting ḡadīṡ concerning science and medicine, Zaḡlūl an-Naḡḡār writes that those a ḡadīṡ speaks about a cure from all diseases, its words should not be taken literally. *Nigella sativa* is not able to cure all diseases to the same extent and much also depends on the patient's disposition. The author also believes that this ḡadīṡ points to a certain principal feature of the blessed seed – the fact that it strengthens the immune system. He continues to deduce that if the immune system is strong, it is able to fight off a disease – any disease. In this sense *nigella sativa* is to contain a remedy for all and any diseases. He also quotes the opinion of a certain Muslim doctor carrying out research into *nigella sativa* in the United States: *The seed which contains a cure for all diseases apart from death must have a direct link to the human immune system which our Lord, the highest and the blessed, shaped to protect our organism.*

In evidence of the effectiveness of the *black seed* in the treatment of different diseases Zaḡlūl an-Naḡḡār writes that it was known to ancient Egyptians, Persians and Arabs and widely used by them to treat respiratory and urinary tract problems. *However, they did not realize that it has any link to the human immune system which was explained to us only by the Prophet of God – let God pray for Him and grant Him peace – in His noble ḡadīṡ.* Thus they used *nigella sativa* unaware (although earlier he mentioned that they consciously used it in the treatment of, for instance, respiratory problems) as a food condiment not knowing anything about its impact on the immune system. The author believes that this *scientific precision* with which he spoke about *nigella sativa* Muhammad testifies to the inspiration of Heavens. (an-Naḡḡār, 2007:390-391). He bases this conclusion on a verse from the Quran: *Nor does he speak from [his own] inclination. It is not but a revelation revealed, taught to him by one intense in strength.* (Sūrat 53, The Star, vv. 3-5)

Another author, Ḥassāḡ Šamsī Baššār, speaks about the immune system in the following way: *It is like an army the task of which is to protect the country. (...) It is thus a defense line shielding man against infections and cancer. (...) Your are great God ... (...) Everything works in harmony and without fail ...* (Baššār, 1991:48). The author gives also the results of research into *nigella sativa* according to which its consumption two times a day in the quantity of one gram significantly strengthens the functions of the immune system. In addition, he foresees that the *blessed black seed* may play a significant role in combating neoplastic diseases as well as AIDS in the future (Baššār, 1991:54).

*The Prophet – let God pray for Him and grant Him peace – said: Use the black seed. In it is the cure of all diseases apart from one poison. This poison is death* (al-Ġawziyya, 1998: 274).

It is with this ḡadīṡ that Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyya begins the description of *nigella sativa* and continues to say: *The black seed: (...) is nigella sativa, called also Indian. Al-Ḥarbī said that He knew from Ḥasan – let God be satisfied with him – that it was a mustard seed. At the same time Ḥarawī said that it was the green seed, the fruit of pistacia terebinthus. Both were only guessing. (...) Nigella sativa (...), allows to get rid of flatulence, worms, helps in the treatment of albinism and fever (...), improves appetite, releases gases, dries stomach humidity. If the seed is crushed and mixed with*

*honey to be then drunk with hot water, it eliminates renal calculi as well as urinary bladder calculi. It has a diuretic action, regulates menstruation and increases milk production. Warmed up with vinegar and then placed on the abdomen, it kills worms. (...) It cures cold catarrh: if it is crushed (...) in a grinder and frequently inhaled allows to get rid of it.*

*The fat contained in its seeds is helpful in a snake bite , (...), if it is drunk with a miskal of water, it has a beneficial effect on respiratory difficulties (...). Nigella sativa poultices allow to cure (...) headache. (...) Boiled with vinegar (...) it protects teeth against the perception of colic. A bandage with nigella sativa and vinegar removes warts. (...) It helps in facial paralysis (...) Drunk with half a miskal or miskal of water, it helps ease the bites of Phalangium opilio. Fried, crushed and next soaked in oil and inserted into the nose – three or four drops – helps in combating rhinitis and sneezing. (...)*

*Nigella sativa is (...) a remedy of extraordinary effectiveness in the case of hemorrhoids (al-Ġawziyya, 1998: 274-277).*

Having read this description one can have no doubts as to the position of the black seed as a panacea in Muslim folk medicine.

Also <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī included a description of *nigella sativa* in his list of natural remedies and also this author began with quoting the ḥadīth saying that it can cure any disease apart from death. However this author seems to be more critical: *Benefits resulting from the application of nigella sativa are countless. That is why a rumour developed that it can cure any disease which is however an exaggeration. God the Highest said: Undoubtedly Allah doth know what they conceal, and what they reveal: verily He loveth not the arrogant. (Sūrat 16, The Bees, v. 23).* Next, the author points out that it was the Prophet who taught the Muslims to use *Nigella sativa* just as He taught them what follows: *Who has eaten seven dates for breakfast, will be resistant to any poison and any spell (al-Baġdādī, 2005:60).*

The author gives a list of the majority of diseases treated with the help of the *black seed* to be found in the description of Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyya. He adds that *Nigella sativa* accelerates the growth of hair and beard as well as prevents the development of gray hair. He sums things up as follows: *Helpful in the case of a dog bite (...), its vapours push away depressive thoughts, combined with bread it prevents bloating (al-Baġdādī, 2005:60).*

Contemporary handbooks describe in detail all the diseases referred to by classic authors of prophetic medicine collections. They discuss their course, causes as well as methods of treatment with the help of *Nigella sativa*. They also enrich their descriptions with the results of recent studies as well as presentation of their full chemical composition, this concerning not only the '*black seed*' but also any other natural remedies. Ḥassāġ Šamsī Baššār, the author of one of these handbooks, writes that

*Nigella sativa* was known already to the people of Ancient Rome and India. Being aware of the black seed-related benefits, the Romans would add it to meals and the people of India used it as an activity-stimulating agent as well as a menstruation and lactation- stimulating agent. In addition, it was known as a digestive-problems-easing agent (Baššār, 1991:19).

The author also refers to a dictionary of medicinal plants and cites its fragment

saying that *Nigella sativa* is used as a *strengthening and stimulating agent*. He also informs that a few drops of the oil made from the seeds of *Nigella sativa* added to coffee has a soothing effect on the nervous system. The oil also assists in the treatment of cough and cold. *Due to the oil content Nigella sativa is applied (...) in the treatment of chest ailments either by adding a few of its seeds or three, four drops of its oil to coffee or tea* (Baššār, 1991:19).

*It is believed that this oil has soothing properties (...), it is used in the treatment of asthma or whooping cough.* He also quotes the opinion of the pharmacist Muslim Ġāzī to be found in his book *Secrets of Health: Research shows that Nigella sativa is useful not only in treating asthma. It also proves that it does not exert any negative influence of the organism when consumed in adequate quantities and within reason. Among its properties we can also find (...) the ability to cure some allergy-related diseases.* (...)

*Another issue is the fact that bacteria cannot develop in an environment containing the blessed seed which seems to indicate that it must contain some type of an antibiotic, it must also have other properties to be discovered by medicine in the future* (Baššār, 1991:20).

Ḥassāğ Šamsī Baššār continues to refer to the opinion of another physician, Aḥmad ar-Rašīdī who believed that *Nigella sativa* was known and used in treatment of diseases already in very remote times as evidenced by its being mentioned in holy books as well as by Hippocrates (Baššār, 1991:20). It can be seen that the authority of the ancients still holds. Traditionally, also the books of revelation, first of all the Quran, constitute a nobility-endowing instance. The author cites the words of the outstanding Andalusian physician Ibn Bayṭār: *The black seed stimulates menstruation (...), if it powdered and then mixed with vinegar, it is useful in the treatment of albinism* (Baššār, 1991:59) and Ibn Sīna who says, among others, that the black seed terminates phlegm, is good in the treatment of warts and ulcers when mixed with vinegar – placed on a patient's forehead this mixture is effective in the case of chronic headaches and paralysis. In addition, brought to the boil in vinegar, the black seed relieves toothache. Ibn Sīna recommends *Nigella sativa* in the treatment of rhinitis, as a menstruation-stimulating agent, and mixed with honey and water for renal calculi and calculi of the urinary bladder (Baššār, 1991:59).

Another author of a contemporary handbook, Muḥammad Mūsa, lists six ailments most commonly treated with *Nigella sativa*, adding to each of them a short recipe (Muḥammad Mūsa 2004:21,60):

ulcers – *mix Nigella sativa with vinegar, do it in the evening and leave till the morning, next rub it into the site of pain and it will be cured;*

headache – *fry Nigella sativa in olive oil and then wrap up in a piece of silk cloth, then place the cloth on the patient's forehead and the headache will go away;*

chronic headache – *mix Nigella sativa with vinegar and leave for one night, (...) in the morning give it to the patient to be inhaled and he will be cured if this will be the will of God;*

toothache – *cook Nigella sativa with vinegar, rinse the teeth and toothache will be relieved;*

calculi of the urinary bladder and the kidneys – *take the blessed seed, mix it with*

*honey, add hot water and drink, it is a very effective mixture;*

*stopping gases – fry one hundred grams of the blessed seed, powder it with seventy five grams of plant sugar and drink half a teaspoonful of this mixture in the morning and in the evening – water can be added to make swallowing easier.*

What is of essential importance is the fact that *Nigella sativa* is recognized as a panacea by both theologians and lawyers following the tradition of the Prophet and also, to almost the same extent, by qualified and outstanding Muslim doctors. The conviction of contemporary authors of medical handbooks about the role to be played in the future by *Nigella sativa* in the treatment of tumors and AIDS completes the picture of the ‘blessed seed’ as a remedy against absolutely any ailment.

Prophylaxis has always played an important role in Arabic medicine. All and any attempts have been made to prevent disease. If, however, this proved impossible, the disease was treated in accordance with the assumptions of ancient Greek medicine, aiming at the restoration of the disturbed balance between the four humours, that is body fluids. A surplus of one of them was attempted to be offset through the removal of some of its quantity from the organism. *In the case of a disease, certain humours could be offset with food or drugs of opposite properties or such which cause the elimination of certain substances from the organism. This can explain the use in therapy of laxatives and emetics or the application of bloodletting* (Rashed, 2005:172).

The three techniques aimed at getting rid from the organism of undesired substances applied in Arabic medicine comprise cauterization, bloodletting and cupping. Listing six basic medical disciplines of the Arabic middle ages, J. Ch. Bürgel mentions a specialist in bloodletting and a specialist in cupping next to a physician dealing with the four humours, an ophthalmologist, an orthopedist and a surgeon (Bürgel, 1977:49).

These methods are sanctioned with the words of Muhammad: *The Prophet – let Allah pray for Him and grant Him peace – said: The secret of recovery rests in three things: drinking honey, cupping and cauterization* (al-Ġawziyya, 1998:51).

Other words of the Prophet tell us: *Cupping is effective against any ailments apart from death – so treat yourselves with cupping* (as-Sayyid, 2007:143).

*Archangel Gabriel announced to them that cupping is the most effective among the remedies applied by people* (as-Sayyid, 2007:144).

*The Prophet – let God pray for Him and grant Him peace – had cups put in the hip region* (al-Ġawziyya, 1998:57).

Other accounts related to the Prophet say that He used cupping also against headaches and foot aches (an-Nağğār, 2007:407). What we can witness here is the same process which we could see analyzing Muslims views concerning the application in therapy of grapes and *Nigella sativa*: Muhammad’s statements speaking about the curability of all ailments apart from death cause that also cupping is recognized as a panacea in Muslim medicine. This belief is further reinforced by statements speaking about the Prophet himself applying the practice He recommended because all and any of His actions are considered to be Allah blessed and inspired.

The practice of cupping is a widespread method of combating diseases due to abnormal blood circulation. This approach has its roots in ancient Greek medicine – aberration from the initial qualitative or quantitative state of one of the four elements:

blood, phlegm, bile or black bile causes the development of a disease.

The essence of this procedure is explained in a contemporary prophetic medicine handbook in the following way: *The aim of cupping is to get rid from the organism of bad blood which has caused a given disease or may lead to it in the future due to the accumulation in it of unhealthy components (...). Cupping cleanses the blood of these unhealthy components which are erythrocytes – red blood cells and leucocytes – white blood cells which are no longer capable of performing their proper role in the organism – nourishing it and providing it with protection against infection. Cupping allows to get rid of these ineffective blood cells and replace them with new ones* (as-Sayyid, 2007:224).

There is a specific form of this procedure consisting in the use of leeches (*hirudo medicinalis*). Prior to the procedure the leeches should be kept for a day or two in sweet water so as to starve them. At present leeches are bred with extreme care in sterile conditions at special farms. In spite of it, the use of leeches does not belong to the safest methods because of a possibility of infection, Leeches are most commonly applied to places where cups do not fit or inconvenient in use – on the nose or in the ears (as-Sayyid, 2007:160).

The method was also known to the ancient Arabs though it was not commonly used. However, since the coming of the Prophet of Islam, the practice of cupping has found its permanent place in therapy. The great medical authorities of Islam followed with their recognition. In his monumental work *al- Hāwī fī aṭ- ṭibb*, ar-Rāzī wrote: *If a headache is located in the anterior part of the head, then its cause lies in an excessive amount of blood, consequently treatment should consist in the removal of part of the blood from the organism either through cupping or through bloodletting* (as-Sayyid, 2007:141). In addition, ar-Rāzī devotes to cupping a separate chapter and discusses the benefits resulting from it and its course. He also believes that it can be successfully applied in the prophylaxis of smallpox and measles (as-Sayyid, 2007:157).

On the other hand, in his famous work *al-Qanūn fī aṭ- ṭibb*, Ibn Sīna gives a lot of attention to this therapeutic practice, explains its influence on the blood and indicates places on the body where it is best to apply it. Simultaneously, Ibn Sīna makes it clear that cupping can only be used with a patient of over two and under sixty years of age (as-Sayyid, 2007:141).

The outstanding Andalusian physician, az-Zahrāwī, distinguished two types of the procedure of bloodletting – one with the use of a cut and thus with a visible outflow of blood and another without it. The latter is used in cases when the pain-generating organs are the liver, the spleen, the kidneys and the abdomen. az-Zahrāwī was also in favour of the use of leeches (as-Sayyid, 2007:147,157).

Another outstanding Arab physician, adherent of the cupping procedure was Baḥtīšū<sup>c</sup> ibn Ġibrīl who wrote a separate book about it (as-Sayyid, 2007:157). All this is of major importance as the authors of these collections of prophetic medicine, both medieval and contemporary, often refer to the outstanding authorities in medicine thus proving that conventional medicine has come to confirm and sanction the Prophet-recommended methods.

***The right timing of the procedure***

Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyya devotes a separate chapter to the timing of the cupping procedure discussing the question of the most adequate time of the day, week or year for performing it. Obviously, he invokes the authority of the Prophet, his statements found in the canonic collections of traditions.

In the collection of at-Tirmidī we can find the following information: *The best day for cupping is the seventeenth, the nineteenth and the twenty first day of the month.* In the same collection we can find the ḥadīth which says: *The Prophet – let Allah pray for Him and grant Him peace – had the habit of having cups placed (...) on the upper part of his back on the seventeenth, the nineteenth and the twenty first day of the month.* A confirmation of these dates can also be found in the collection of Ibn Māḡa: *Should any of you want to have a cupping procedure, he should do it on the seventeenth, the nineteenth and the twenty first day of the month.* In the collection of Abū Dāwūd we can read: *He who has the procedure of cupping on the seventeenth, the nineteenth and the twenty first day of the month, shall be cured of any disease.* Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyya adds that the latter applies to any disease the cause of which is an excessive quantity of blood but not to any disease in general. He also claims that the above ḥadīth are consistent with the opinions of physicians. Also according to them the procedure should be carried out in the second half of the month and the third of its four parts as it is then most effective. However, if an urgent need or an evident necessity arise to carry it out, it will also produce effect in the case of less convenient and favourable timing. Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyya bases his position on the ḥadīth saying that *Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal underwent the procedure of cupping each time his blood was disturbed, at any time it might happen.*

Writing about the selection of the best time of the day, the author of *Prophetic Medicine* involves the opinion of Ibn Sīna: *Afternoon hours – between two and three – are the time for cupping. It should be done directly after a bath unless the blood of the patient who is to undergo the procedure is disturbed – then the patient should take a bath, then warm up for an hour and only then have the procedure.*

The hours of meals should be adjusted to the hour of the procedure – it is not good when the patient is full during the procedure, it is best to have it on an empty stomach. *Cupping performed on an empty stomach brings recovery, on a full stomach – disease.* Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyya tackles also the question of the choice of the day of the week. Invoking pertinent ḥadīth he declares that the worst days to choose are Wednesday and Saturday because then one can develop albinism. Friday is not the best day, either. More information can be found in another ḥadīth : *I have heard that the Prophet of Allāh – let Allāh pray for Him and grant Him peace – say: (...)cupping a wise man adds to his wisdom; place cups in the name of God the Highest; don't do it on Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays; do the cupping n Monday. Albinism on cupping can be developed only on Wednesdays.* According to the above information only two days – Monday and Tuesday were good for the procedure of cupping. The Prophet was said to prefer Tuesday: *The Prophet – let God pray for Him and grant Him peace – said: Tuesday is the day of the blood: there is an hour in this day when blood does not stop flowing.*

The last issue discussed by Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyya in relation to the timing of the procedure of cupping is the possibility of applying this therapy in the course of fast. He resolves this dilemma quoting the ḥadīth: *The Prophet – let God pray for Him and grant Him peace – fasted and had cupping during that time.*

### **Adequate body place for the procedure**

(as-Sayyid, 2007:145-186)

Contemporary prophetic medicine handbooks indicate places where the cupping can be done and specify which diseases can be combated with it. The descriptions given in the handbooks permit to qualify cupping as a panacea of Muslim medicine.

If cupping is done in the upper part of the back, it will have a beneficial effect on patients with bone as well as lung and heart diseases. It is also the best place for people suffering from unilateral headache.

Another place on the body is at the bottom of the skull but it is dangerous and cupping is not recommended to be done there unless in special cases such as hormonal disturbances due to an abnormal functioning of the pituitary gland. After making this statement the author proceeds to further considerations: *The pituitary gland controls seventy two hormones and this is consistent with what the Prophet said – let God grant Him peace – that it treats seventy two diseases.*

Cups can be put between the lower part of the skull and the upper part of the neck in the case of eye diseases, headaches and also mental disorders.

The procedure of cupping can also be carried out at the top of the head. It helps in mental diseases, loss of memory, unilateral headache and chest diseases. It is however recommended that the skin not be incised because in this part there is a large number of capillaries which can produce a massive loss of blood.

Another place is the upper part of the forehead next to the hair line. Cupping in this place is recommended in the case of frequent nosebleeds.

The procedure can also be performed in the place located between the lower jaw and Adam's apple. It is then effective in the treatment of vocal cords, voice loss, chronic hoarseness and toothache. In some cases it can also help in asthma.

Cupping the chest helps in cough, pneumonia and asthma. It is recommended in women whose menstruation lasts longer than seven days as it stops bleeding.

A procedure carried out in the region of the umbilicus helps fight chronic diarrhea and in the lower part of the abdomen it is beneficial in urinary bladder pains, menstrual pains, hemorrhoids and urinary incontinence.

The cupping procedure on the thighs helps in cancer, pain in the hypogastrium, urinary bladder, small of the back or hemorrhoids.

Cupping can also be applied right over the knees, on their internal side. This prevents any allergies irrespective of the type and cause.

Cupping on the external part of the foot is recommended to women in order to shorten the duration of menstruation and bring relief in women's diseases.

Contemporary handbooks of prophetic medicine speak also about the treatment of lethargy and laziness with the help of cupping, along with headaches, muscle cramps, joint pains, arterial hypertension, gout. As regards more serious diseases such as

semiplegia and other diseases of the nervous system, cupping can only serve as an auxiliary procedure.

Zaġlūl an-Naġġār writes that since the practice of cupping was carried by the Arabs via Andalusia to Europe, it has been used till today in the treatment of insomnia, headaches, addictions and numerous other physical ailments due to its soothing and relaxing effect as well as positive impact on the immune system. He also writes that: *The Prophet – let God pray for Him and grant Him peace – recommended the application of cupping in the case of (...) an increased number of red blood cells (...) Contemporary research has confirmed the effectiveness of cupping in this case* (an-Naġġār, 2007:406). It is hard to say what studies exactly were to confirm the effectiveness of the procedure because the author does not specify it.

Obviously, Muslim authors, even physicians, deny that Muḥammad could know about the existence of red blood cells or the pituitary gland. This testifies to the great attachment of the Muslims, even those professionally involved in natural sciences, to the tradition and words of the Prophet which most western orientalist believe to be in their majority unauthentic. To the Muslims the 'universal knowledge' of Muḥammad surpassing the state of knowledge of his times comes as no surprise as they explain it in terms of divine inspiration the latter being taken for granted as an obvious fact not to be undermined. On the other hand, it often happens that many very general statements placed in the collections of traditions and also many verses of the Quran are extended and interpreted as indicating as evidence of the extensive knowledge of the Prophet in practically all domains.

Prophetic medicine is not merely a theoretical phenomenon. Handbooks of prophetic medicine are published and find reader who are ready to implement their recommendations and indications. They thus became an extremely interesting study material. The aim of my article was to present selected aspects of the phenomenon.

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