

Prayers and Healing by Shahid Athar, M.D., F.A.C.E. *

We the Physicians have now come to accept a fact known to our patients for centuries, that healing is from God, and we are just an instrument of the Healer. We give the same medication to two different patients with the same type of medical problem or perform similar operations on two patients otherwise at the same risk and one will survive and the other one doesn't. It is more than LUCK. As Socrates put it -"I dress the wound and God heals it." This is also acknowledged by Prophet Abraham "and when I am ill, it is He who cures me" (Quran 26:80). God himself attests to it by saying "If God touches thee with an affliction, no one can remove it but He" (Quran 6:17).

Healing from Quran

Quran, the Muslim revealed scripture is not a text book of Medicine but in it are some guidance, that if followed, will promote good health and healing. Thus Quran calls itself a book of healing.

"O mankind, there has come unto you a direction from your Lord and a healing for the heart and for those who believe in guidance and mercy" (Quran 10:57).

"We have sent down in the Quran that which is healing and a mercy to those who believe" (Quran 17:82)

Healing from Quran is of three types.

a. Legislative effect: This includes Faith (Iman) in God as not only Creator but the Sustainer and the Protector. This also includes medical benefits of obligatory prayers, fasting, charity and pilgrimage, details of which is beyond the scope of this article.

b. Health Guidelines: Health-promoting items from Quran and tradition of Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) include use of honey, olive, fruit, lean meat, avoiding excessive eating, and Prohibition of alcohol, pork, homosexuality, sexual promiscuity and sex during menstruation.

c. Direct healing effect of Quran: Recitation of Quran by the sick person or for the sick person (ruqya) has shown to have a direct healing effect on the sick person. This most likely uses medical benefits of Echo.

Echo of sound is such a powerful force that it has been used to blast

off mountains. Now the miniaturized version of Echo is used in medicine to break Kidney Stones (lithotripsy), gallstones, and even vegetations in the subendothelial bacterial endocarditis (SBE). Listening to the recitation of Holy Quran, in a study conducted by Dr. Ahmed E. Kadi and Associates, has been shown to lower blood pressure, heart rate, and to cause smooth muscle relaxation in Muslim Arabs, non-Arab Muslims and even in non-Muslims. It is postulated that Echo Target of Alif Lam Meem is in heart and that of Ya-seen is in the pituitary gland of the brain. Thus Prophet Mohammad (P) always stressed reading Quran (Quran-recitation) loudly and not silently by saying "The comparison between a silent reader and a recitor (Qari) is like a bottle of perfume when it is closed and when it is opened."

Use of Meditation (dhikr, Zikrallah) in Prayer and Healing

Dhikr (Zikr meditation) are acts of remembrance and communications with God as ordained to us.

1. "When my servant asks you (O Muhammad) about me, (tell them) I am close to them: I listen to the prayer of each supplicant when he asks Me. Let them listen to My call and believe in Me, that they may walk in the right way" (Quran 2:186).
2. "Your Lord says: "Call on Me and I will answer your call" (Quran 40:60).
3. "Those who believe and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of God, for in the remembrance of God do hearts find rest" (Quran 13:28).
4. "Remember Me, I will remember you; thank Me and reject Me not" (Quran 2:152).
5. "Remember thy Lord much and praise Him in the evening and morning" (Quran 3:41).
6. "Such as those who remember God standing, sitting and reclining" (Quran 3:191).
7. "and men who remember God much and women who remember God, God has prepared for them forgiveness and a vast reward" (Quran 33:35).
8. "O you believe! Remember God with much remembrance and

glorify Him in the morning and evening" (Quran 33:41-42).
Sayings of Prophet Muhammad (P)

Prophet Muhammad, like all other prophets of God, was engaged in the remembrance (dhikr) of God most of the time. He is known to have said

1. "There is a polish for everything that removes the rust and the polish for the rust-of- heart is the dhikr (remembrance) of God."

2. He was asked which people are most virtuous and most highly esteemed by God on the Day of Judgement. The messenger of God (P) replied "Those who remember God often."

3. It is narrated in a hadith Qudsi (direct revelation to Prophet Muhammad) "God Most High says I am as my Servant - think I am. I am with him when he makes mention of Me. If he makes mention of Me by himself, I make mention of him to Myself. If he makes mention of Me in an assembly, I make mention of him in an assembly better than his. If he comes closer to Me a hand span, I come closer to him arms-length, if he comes to Me walking, I come to him running."

Thus dhikr (meditation/remembrance) has been a practice of all Sufi sheikhs. In the words of Sheikh al-Mursi "dhikr pleases God, defeats and drives evil forces, increases livelihood, makes personality more prestigious, cleanses the heart, removes the faults and saves the tongue from lying, gossip, backbiting and hypocrisy while engaged in the remembrance of God."

Seeking Help with Prayers

According to Imam Ghazali (RA), illness increases faith and brings man closer to God. Knowing this nature, we are told in Quran - "O you who believe, seek help with patience and prayers, as God is with those who patiently persevere" (Quran 2:153). Prophet Muhammad (P) when he visited the sick, used to comfort him and say the following Prayer for the Sick

"O Allah remove the hardship, O Lord of mankind, grant cure for You are the Healer. There is no cure but from You, a cure which leaves no illness behind."

Transliteration

- "Allahumma Azhibil bas, Rabbannas, Ishfi wa anta Shafi, La Shifa illa Shafaok. Shifaal La Yoghadiro saqama."

He used to make following prayer for his own health –
"O Allah cure my body, cure my heart and cure my eyesight from any illness" (repeated 3 times).

Transliteration

- "Allahumma Afini fi badni, afini fi qalbi wa afini fi basari" (3 times).

Do Prayers Work?

Yes they do. Dr. Larry Dossey in his book "The Healing Words" has documented the healing effects of prayer. Citing one example from the research conducted by Dr. Byrd at San Francisco General Hospital in 1988, 393 critically ill heart patients admitted to the intensive care units over a 10-month period were divided in 2 groups. Group A were the patients who were prayed for by name till they left the hospital. Group B were not prayed for. The prayer makers were not told how to pray. The results were very interesting. Those who were prayed for left the hospital early, had less cardiac arrest, 2-1/2 times less incidence of congestive heart failure and needed 1/5th less antibiotics. They also observed that prayer combined with loving care worked even better. Men who had angina pectoris and a loving caring wife, reported 50% more reduction in angina than men who were single or divorced. Prayers work for us even while we are sleeping. Thus Prophet Muhammad (P) has advised us to say prayers from Quran (Surah Ikhlas, Al Falaq, Annas and/or last verse of Al Baqra (2:286) before going to sleep.

My Own Practice

I do dhikr in all my free time, especially while driving, and I pray for myself, my family, my friends and my patients by name, knowing that cure is only from God.

One time I visited a critically ill patient who had an adrenal tumor (pheochromocytoma) and was in hypotensive shock. I asked her what could I do for her and she, out of desperation (doctors had told her she wouldn't make it) asked me to pray. So I placed my hand over the site of the tumor and made the Prophetic Prayer and left. The next day when I came, I was surprised to see her sitting up in bed smiling. She told me that evening the radiologist x-rayed her again and found no trace of the tumor. He could not explain it but thought the arteriogram may have "infarcted the tumor."

The Sufi Practices

In the treatment of diseases, Sufis use prayers and the knowledge of specific verse of Quran and names of Allah (Asmae husna). This is called the Science of Tawidh (Taweez). They use science of numerology associated with Arabic alphabets. Some sample tawidh is given for illustration. One must know the healing is not in a piece of paper, words or numbers, but only from Allah. In my humble opinion, Tawidh is only a way to become God-conscious and receive His mercy as a result.

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