

Al-Ḥārith ibn Kaladah, the Physician of the Arabs

Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘ah said in his book ‘Uyūn al-Anbā’ fī Ṭabaqāt al-Aṭibbā’ as follows:

Al-Ḥārith ibn Kaladah al-Thaqafī was from Ṭā’if. He traveled through various lands and learned medicine in the region of Persia, where he trained and gained experience. He came to know diseases and their treatments, and he was known as the Physician of the Arabs. It is narrated from Sa‘d ibn Abī Waqqāṣ (may Allāh be pleased with him) that he fell ill in Mecca with an illness, and the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ visited him and said: “Call for al-Ḥārith ibn Kaladah, for he is a man who practices medicine.” When al-Ḥārith visited him, he examined him and said: “There is no serious harm upon him. Prepare for him a farīqah made from some ‘Ajwah dates and fenugreek, to be cooked and then sipped.” He drank it and was cured.

Al-Ḥārith had many treatments and possessed knowledge of what the Arabs were accustomed to and needed in terms of medical care. He also had commendable statements regarding medicine and other matters.

The Words of al-Ḥārith with Kisrā

Among these is that when he came as a delegate to Khosrow I Anushirvan, he was granted permission to enter upon him. When he stood upright before him, Kisrā said to him: “Who are you?” He replied: “I am al-Ḥārith ibn Kaladah al-Thaqafī.” He said: “What is your profession?” He replied: “Medicine.” (After some conversation between them,) Kisrā said: “Upon how many foundations is this body composed?” He replied: “Upon four natures: black bile, which is cold and dry; yellow bile, which is hot and dry; blood, which is hot and wet; and phlegm, which is cold and wet.”

Kisrā said: “Summarize for me the hot and the cold in comprehensive expressions.” He replied: “Everything sweet is hot; everything sour is cold; everything pungent is hot; everything astringent is moderate; and in bitterness there is both hotness and coldness.”

He said: “What is the best treatment for yellow bile?” He replied: “Everything that is cold and wet.”

He said: “And black bile?” He replied: “Everything that is hot and wet.”

He said: “And phlegm?” He replied: “Everything that is hot and dry.”

He said: “And blood?” He replied: “To remove it when it increases, and to calm it when it overheats with cold, dry substances.”

He said: “And winds?” He replied: “With gentle enemas and hot, soft oils.”

He said: “Do you recommend enemas?” He replied: “Yes.”

Conclusion

Humoral medicine is a communal obligation (*farḍ kifāyah*). Its foundations are revelation bestowed upon our master Adam, peace be upon him, and he taught some of its principles to some of his children. Prophets practiced it, such as our master Idrīs and our master Sulaymān. I have mentioned the story of al-Ḥārith ibn Kaladah, the Physician of the Arabs, with *Kisrā* because it contains a concise summary of medicine in brief expressions, and to demonstrate that the Prophet's belief regarding medicine was in accordance with that of the prophets before him.

This is also so that it becomes clear to those who fight against this medicine and disparage it—among some who studied contemporary medicine—that they are mistaken and have deviated from what is correct. Likewise, it should become clear to those who claim that this medicine no longer exists in our present time that they are also mistaken, because what al-Ḥārith summarized for *Kisrā* represents the foundations of medicine that were taught in the past and remain to this day. None denies them except an ignorant, biased person who does not observe the Islamic Law, by opposing one of the communal obligations.

My advice to everyone who has studied contemporary medicine is to study humoral medicine, for it is part of our distinguished scientific heritage, and not to follow Westerners blindly. Rather, one should proceed with insight: whatever contradicts the foundations revealed through divine revelation should be rejected and denounced, and whatever agrees with them should be accepted. In order to clearly distinguish truth from falsehood, it is necessary to learn humoral medicine.

An example of this in humoral medicine is cupping (*ḥijāmah*), which has many benefits mentioned by physicians in their books and which the Messenger of Allāh encouraged. In contemporary medicine, however, it is regarded as pointless bloodletting. I personally favor combining the old and the new, by returning modern medical facts to ancient foundations and abandoning theories that contradict the Islamic Law and humoral medicine, so that medicine may be sound and people may benefit.

(1) Al-Ḥārith ibn Kaladah al-Thaqafī was an Arab physician renowned for his excellence in medicine. He was known in his time as “the Physician of the Arabs.” He lived in the pre-Islamic era and lived to witness Islam. He was a skilled physician, knowledgeable of disease and treatment, wise, eloquent, and sincere in counsel. The authors of medical biographical works wrote about him. He was originally from the tribe of Thaqīf, from the people of Ṭāʾif in the region of al-Ḥijāz. He traveled to the land of Persia and learned medicine from the people of those regions, such as Jundaysābūr and others, during the pre-Islamic period and before Islam. Ibn Juljul mentioned that al-Ḥārith learned medicine in the regions of Yemen and Persia, excelled in this profession, practiced

medicine in Persia, treated patients, and gained wealth there. The people of Persia who saw him testified to his knowledge, and he treated some of their notables who were cured. Thereafter, he longed for his homeland and returned to Ṭā'if, where his medical practice became well known among the Arabs. Shaykh 'Abdullāh al-Harārī said: "Al-Ḥārith ibn Kaladah (al-Thaqafī) is the Physician of the Arabs; he lived in the time of the Messenger."

(2) He is Muwaffaq al-Dīn Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad ibn Sadīd al-Dīn al-Qāsim ibn Khalīfah ibn Yūnus al-Khazrajī al-Anṣārī, known as Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'ah, a Muslim physician and historian, born in Damascus in the year 600 AH and who died in 680 AH. Among his most famous works is his book on the history of medicine, 'Uyūn al-Anbā' fī Ṭabaqāt al-Aṭibbā'.

(3) He is Abū Ishāq Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ Mālik al-Zuhrī al-Qurashī, one of the ten Companions promised Paradise.

(4) Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā by Ibn Sa'd (3/147), narrated from Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ, who said: "I fell ill, and the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ came to visit me. He placed his hand between my breasts, and I felt its coldness upon my heart. Then he said what it means: 'You are ma'fūd, so go to al-Ḥārith ibn Kaladah, the brother of Thaqīf, for he is a man who practices medicine. Tell him to take seven dates of the 'Ajwah of Madinah, crush them with their pits, and administer them to you.'"

(5) Tāj al-'Arūs: al-farīqah—a soup prepared for a severely ill patient.

(6) Kisrā Anūshirwān, one of the kings of Persia.

(7) Kitāb al-Ta'rīfāt by al-Jurjānī: ṭab' (nature) is that which occurs to a person without choice; it is also said that ṭab' refers to the innate disposition upon which a person is created.

(8) Al-Ḥāfiẓ Ibn al-Jawzī mentioned in his book *Talbīs Iblīs* that Allāh, Exalted and Glorified, created the children of Adam upon hotness, coldness, dryness, and wetness, and made their health dependent upon the moderation of the humors: blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile.

(9) Ḥarīf: with kasrah and emphasis—something that has sharpness and pungency in taste that burns the tongue; it is said, “onion is ḥarīf,” meaning it stings the tongue.

(10) Muzz: that which is between sweet and sour.

(11) Bitter: that which is dominated by a dry, earthy substance—hot when its taste moves from sweetness toward bitterness, and cold when its taste moves from bitterness toward sweetness.

(12) That is, wet.

(13) That is, by cupping (ḥijāmah) or phlebotomy (faṣḍ).

(14) That is, treating disordered temperament by its opposite: the sanguine condition with cold, dry foods and medicines of a black bile-dominant or phlegmatic nature; the phlegmatic condition with hot, dry foods and medicines of a yellow bile-dominant nature; the hot and dry-dominant condition with cold, wet foods and medicines of a phlegmatic nature; and the black bile-dominant condition with hot, wet foods and medicines of a sanguine nature.

(15) In medical terminology, al-ḥuqnah (enema): any medicine administered by injection to a patient who is constipated or retaining what should be expelled.