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# **Resolving the Conflict Between Medicine and Theology: When Does Medicinal Practice Contravene Islamic Beliefs?**

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"الأراء في هذا البحث تعبر عن رأي الباحث وليس بالضرورة عن رأي أمجا"  
Opinions in this research are solely those of the author and do not represent AMJA.



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الحمد لله وحده والصلاة والسلام على من لا نبي بعده

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Health is one of the greatest blessings Allah has bestowed on mankind, as the Prophet (SAW) himself remarked.<sup>1</sup> Many of the laws of the Shariah work to protect good health, such as the prohibition of ingesting harmful substances, and the discouragement of being overweight. As well, the Shariah recognizes that the absence of good health impairs the quality of life and hence it allows concessions when good health is absent. In multiple verses, the Quran specifies exemptions or forgiveness for ‘...those who are sick.’<sup>2</sup>

It is therefore within the goals of the Shariah that health be maintained, and sickness eliminated. The Quran explicitly mentions that honey contains a cure for mankind [Surah al-Nahl; 69], thus indicating that some substances have within them inherent properties that directly counteract the effects of disease and cures it. The Sunnah as well is replete with references to medicine and medicinal practices. Abu al-Dardā reported that the Prophet (SAW) said, “Allah is the one who has sent down the disease and the cure, and He has made for every disease a cure. So take medicines, but do not take anything that is *ḥarām*.”<sup>3</sup> Another important hadith in this genre is that of ‘Awf b. Mālik, who narrated, “We used to do *ruqya* during the days of Jāhiliyyah, so we asked the Prophet (SAW) what he thought of that. He replied, “Show me your *ruqyas*, for there is no harm in *ruqya* as long as there is no *shirk* in it.”<sup>4</sup> And in a *mursal* narration, a person fell sick and he called two people to help him, so the Prophet (SAW) asked them “Which of you two knows more medicine?” (*ayyukuma aṭabb*). They said, “And is there any benefit in medicine?” The Prophet (SAW) was reported to have replied, “The one who sent down the disease also sent down the cure.”<sup>5</sup>

Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 751 AH/1350 CE) points out that the Quran references genres of medical treatments. He writes:<sup>6</sup>

The foundational premises of medicine are three: protection, and preserving health, and eliminating harmful elements [from the body]. And Allah has gathered these three [foundations] for the Prophet (SAW) and his Ummah in three places in His Book. [Firstly,] He has advised the sick person to be protect himself from water in case it is harmful: “But if you

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1 As in the tradition, “Two are the blessings many people are cheated out of [appreciating]: good health, and free time.” Al-Bukhārī in his *ṣaḥīḥ*, hadith 6412.

2 See for a partial list of examples: Surah al-Baqarah: 184 and 196; Surah al-Nisā: 43 and 102; Surah al-Ma’idah: 6 and 43; Surah al-Tawbah: 9; Surah al-Muzammil, 20.

3 *Sunan* of Abu Dawud, hadith 3874.

4 *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim, no. 2200.

5 *Muwatta* of Mālik, no. 1760.

6 Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād al-Ma’ād*, vol. 1, p. 158. Note that Ibn al-Qayyim is taking from medicinal theories prevalent in this times, such as the notion of ‘humors’ and miasmatic theory which held that a noxious form of ‘bad air’ caused diseases.

are ill, on a journey, or have relieved yourselves, or been intimate with your wives and cannot find water, then purify yourselves with clean earth, wiping your faces and hand,” [4:43] thus allowing both the sick person and the one who doesn’t have water to perform *tayammum*. [Secondly,] He said with respect to preserving one’s health “...so whoever amongst you is sick or traveling may fast another set of days” [2:184]. Thus, He permitted the one who is traveling to not fast during Ramadan, in order to protect his health, and so as not to burden his ability with both fasting and the difficulties of travel as this would weaken his strength and his health. [Thirdly,] regarding eliminating harmful substances, He mentions shaving the hair of the pilgrim, “But if any of you is ill or has a scalp ailment ‘requiring shaving’, then compensate either by fasting, charity, or a sacrificial offering” [2: 196] thus allowing those who are sick and have an ailment in their scalps during the state of *iḥrām* to shave their hair off and discard the harmful substance and putrid airs because of which lice are born...

That is why our scholars understood the importance of medicine and the nobility of those who practice it. Imam al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 204 AH/820 CE) remarked, “There are really only two types of knowledge: the knowledge of fiqh for one’s religion, and the knowledge of medicine for one’s body - everything else is merely useful for entertainment at gatherings!”<sup>7</sup> And he lamented the fact that in his time, Muslims were not the primary practitioners of this science, for he once remarked to his students, “They [*viz.*, the people of Islam] lost a third of knowledge and gave it to the Christians and Jews!”<sup>8</sup>

It is because of these texts that the default majority position throughout Islamic history is that taking advantage of medicinal practices is permissible (*mubāḥ*), and many have said it is encouraged (*mustaḥab*). No reputable scholar ever considered medical treatments as being impermissible, although the Ḥanbalī school did say on spiritual grounds (in their *mashhūr* position) that it was *makrūh*, as they argued that it was better to rely directly on Allah rather than utilize the causes (*asbāb*).<sup>9</sup> As well, the position that medicine is obligatory (*wājib*) is also not a mainstream one, and only some scholars, with some conditions, held this minority view. As Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728 AH/1328 CE) summarizes, “Availing oneself to medicines is not obligatory according to the vast majority of scholars. But they did differ - is it better to avail oneself to it or to leave it as a manifestation of *tawakkul*?”<sup>10</sup>

To summarize this section, and in particular keeping the hadiths of Abu al-Dardā’ and ‘Awf b. Mālik in mind, we can extract the following principles (*qawā‘id*):

-the source for medicinal practices can be supra-religious (meaning: emanating from outside

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<sup>7</sup> *Manāqib al-Shāfi‘ī* of al-Bayhaqī, vol 2, p. 114.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 116.

<sup>9</sup> Al-Bahūti, *Kashshāf al-Qinā’*, vol. 1, p. 551. This is a well-known position in the Ḥanbali school; as is usually the case in that school, there are multiple opinions on this issue and other authorities contested it.

<sup>10</sup> *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 24, p. 276. Also see *al-Mawsū‘ah al-Kuwaytiyyah*, vol. 12, p. 135 onwards.

of religious texts). In fact one may go so far as to say that as a *default* the source for this information will not be our religious texts, as the science of medicine is not of the primary purposes of Revelation (just like all of the other natural and physical sciences). In both of these narrations, the Prophet (SAW) is outsourcing this information - the one physical and the other *ruqya*-based - to other sources.

-a *faqīh's* job *qua faqīh* is not to prescribe a specific course of treatment or weigh in on the efficacy of a particular remedy, but to make sure that such medicinal practices are permissible in the Shariah. This is especially important in our times when medical procedures and even the overarching philosophies of medicine are far more diverse than they have ever been, "...and may Allah have mercy on the one who knows his own status."

- the default with regards to all medicine and medicinal philosophies is permissibility (*ḥill*), unless the substance is *ḥarām* (hadith of Abu al-Dardā'), or the practice involves *shirk* (hadith of 'Awf). In all other cases, the base ruling of permissibility will apply.

## 2. PROPHETIC MEDICINE

The genre of 'Prophetic medicine', or *al-ṭibb al-nabawī*, is a well-known one, and many sections and books have been written exclusively on this topic. Al-Bukharī (d. 256/807 CE) in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* has an entire chapter dedicated to this topic, as does almost every major hadith collections. And a number of our classical scholars wrote specific treatises on it, such as al-Ḥafidh Abu Nu'aym al-Asfhani (d. 430 AH/1039 CE), Ḍiya al-Dīn al-Maqdisi (d. 646 AH/1249 CE) and al-Dhahabi (d. 748 AH/1348 CE). Perhaps the most famous work is by Ibn al-Qayyim, who wrote one of the largest such encyclopedic works entitled *al-Ṭibb al-Nabawī*. The work has also been translated into English.

For these authors, and perhaps the majority opinion not just of our scholarship but of laity, the presumption that they followed was that these prophetic medicinal injunctions were Divinely Sanctioned and inspired by Allah. Hence, in this paradigm, 'prophetic medicine' would be considered the best and most effective type of medicine. Ibn al-Qayyim writes, "The medicine of the Prophet (SAW) is a definitive certainty emanating from Divine Revelation, and the spring of prophethood, and perfect intelligence."<sup>11</sup> Recently, some Muslim researchers have even attempted to undertake scientific experiments in order to prove the efficacy of examples found in the prophetic medicine genre (such as the treatment of drinking camel urine).<sup>12</sup>

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11 Ibn al-Qayyim, *al-Ṭibb al-Nabawī*, p. 15.

12 See, as examples regarding the alleged efficacy of camel urine as medicine: Salamat N, Idrus RBH, Kashim MIAM, Mokhtar MH, *Anticancer, antiplatelet, gastroprotective and hepatoprotective effects of camel urine: A scoping review*, Saudi Pharm J. 2021 Jul; 29 (7):740-750; and Alhaidar A, Abdel Gader AG, Mousa SA, *The antiplatelet activity of camel urine*, J Altern Complement Med, 2011 Sep;17(9):803-8.

However, there have been dissenting voices in this regard, and their opinion is definitely worth looking at and examining, especially in light of some concerns that have been raised about the lack of actual medicinal values in some of these prescriptions. An alternative opinion is that such advice, even if stemming from the Prophet (SAW), is not actually *prescriptive* (viz., *tashrīʿī*), but rather *descriptive* of his time and place, and not in any way binding on later generations. According to this view, it would be similar to the famous 'date-palm pollination' hadith, or the tactical decision of the location of Badr, or his observation of other cultures that caused him to change his opinion about *ghaylah*, or his acknowledgement that an argument of one plaintiff might appear stronger and he might be persuaded by it even though it is false, and so forth.

Al-Qāḍī Iyād (d. 544 AH/1150 CE), the writer of one of the best books ever written on the rights and blessings of the Prophet (SAW), *al-Shifā*, writes regarding the Prophet's (SAW) advice in worldly matters:<sup>13</sup>

So these types of narrations, and others like them, regarding matters of this world which have nothing to do with religion, or beliefs, or teaching people - it is possible that the Prophet (SAW) experienced what we have mentioned (i.e., to be factually incorrect), as there is no deprecation (of his character) or denigration (of his status). This type of knowledge is gained from experience and culture, and those who specialize in them are the most knowledgeable of them, and as for our Prophet (SAW), his heart is ever-occupied by knowing his Lord, and his soul is ever-busy with the knowledge of the Shariah, and his mind is always involved with wanting what is best for his Ummah..."

Ibn Khaldūn (d. 809 AH/1406 CE) writes in his *Muqaddimah* on the medicinal practices of the Bedouins which was based on their limited experiences, and then adds:<sup>14</sup>

And the medicinal techniques that have been mentioned in our religious texts is from this genre: it is not at all coming from Divine Revelation, but rather from matters that were customarily known to the Arabs. Essentially, these [texts] are similar to what has been narrated about the customs and personal habits of the Prophet (SAW), and not from [that knowledge] which is intended for legislation and acting upon. This is because the Prophet (SAW) was sent to teach us the Shariah; he was not sent to teach us medicine or other such matters. Indeed, the issue of the cross-pollination of the date-palms happened as it did, and he himself told us, "You are more knowledgeable about the affairs of your religion." Therefore, the hadith narrations that mention medicinal matters should not be understood as being

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It should be noted that journals in which such type of research is published (based on a quick search by this author) typically do not have a high JIF (Journal Impact Factor: a factor used in academic settings to see how reputable a journal is).

13 Al-Qāḍī `Iyād, *Al-Shifā*, vol. 2, p. 189.

14 Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* (tr. N. J. Dawood), p. 568.

legislated for us, for there is no evidence to suggest this.

This position was held by many scholars throughout history, including Shah Wali Allah al-Dehlawī (d. 1176 AH/ 1762) in his *Hujjat Allah al-Bālighah*. Many scholars in our times are also opining this, perhaps one of the more prominent being Dr. Omar Sulayman al-Ashqar, who has written specifically about this issue.<sup>15</sup>

Of the evidence that would seem to support this position is the narration of our mother Aisha (r), in which `Urwah asks his aunt about how she acquired such knowledge of medicine. She replied, “O Urwah, the Prophet (SAW) would occasionally fall sick towards the end of his life, and delegations would come [from all over], and they would prescribe for him cures, so I would treat him with those cures.”<sup>16</sup> From this narration, it is clear that her medicinal advice is coming from the cumulative experience of other tribes.

To summarize this section:

- There are two opinions regarding the genre of ‘prophetic medicine’, and whichever opinion one follows has scholarly precedent.
- If one does follow the position that such traditions are not legislative in nature, one should be careful to not extrapolate this notion to theology or rituals, or to mock such practices (as that is potentially *kufir*).
- We should also acknowledge the possibility that those who engaged in such medicinal therapies purely out of a motivation of prophetic love might be spiritually blessed for their sincerity (and Ibn Khaldūn himself mentions this); however, this does not justify prescribing such practices for all people.

### 3. A BRIEF EXCURSUS REGARDING ANCIENT GREEK AND MEDIEVAL MUSLIM MEDICINE

It is prudent, before we move on to modern alternative medicines, to briefly survey pre-modern Islamicate medicinal practices and their origins from and association with ancient Greek medicinal theories. Obviously, this paper is not meant to be exhaustive, and seeks to highlight the more

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<sup>15</sup> He delves into this topic in detail in his doctoral dissertation on the actions of the Prophet (SAW), and in a number of articles that may be found online. Also see:

- 1) <https://islamonline.net/archive/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AB-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%A8%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B7%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9/>
- 2) <https://islamonline.net/archive/%D8%A3%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AB-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B7%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%A8%D9%88%D9%8A-%D9%87%D9%84-%D9%8A%D9%8F%D8%AD%D8%AA%D8%AC-%D8%A8%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%9F/>
- 3) [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1d8kiVrJ0\\_up4A-eV-dnM0xhJbkqRI5x/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1d8kiVrJ0_up4A-eV-dnM0xhJbkqRI5x/view)

<sup>16</sup> *Musnad* of Ahmad, hadith 23859.



pertinent information that will be needed for our next section.<sup>17</sup>

Modern, conventional, evidence-based medicine, or EBM (at times called by the antiquated term 'allopathic medicine'), is based on the belief that illnesses and diseases have a physical cause: most disease is understood to be caused by microscopic organisms called pathogens (such as bacteria and virus). In contrast to this, polytheistic peoples in ancient antiquity assumed that all diseases were the results of Divine actions of gods, or demons, or ghosts, or evil spirits, against humans – humans must have done something to deserve this ailment. Due to the fact that disease was thought to be caused by supernatural agents, it was only natural that magic and the occult was an integral part of any diagnosis and treatment.

### **3.1 Hippocrates, Galen and Their Key Theories**

It is generally assumed that some philosophers in Ancient Greece were the first to attempt to find non-mythological explanations for disease. It was this research and experimentation that is credited as being the birth of modern medicine. The Greek physician Hippocrates (c. 460- 377 B.C.E.), widely considered the 'founder of modern medicine', believed that bad air (which he labeled as 'miasma', from the Greek word for 'pollution') could be the cause of any fatal epidemic or disease. Hippocrates attempted to reject the supernatural explanation of diseases and came up with the idea that the illness was caused by the patient's environment. He also popularized a concept known as 'pneuma', often translated as "breath" or "vital air," which was a life-force that circulated throughout the body via a network of channels. According to Hippocrates, an equilibrium of pneuma was crucial for well-being, and imbalances could lead to disease. He attributed various bodily functions to the movement and distribution of pneuma, emphasizing its significance in maintaining physiological harmony. (To understand the difference between the two terms, 'miasma' was seen as an external environmental factor that could contribute to disease, whereas 'pneuma' was an internal vital force essential for life and health.) Hippocrates believed that understanding and managing both miasma and pneuma were key aspects of maintaining well-being and treating illness.

Although Hippocrates did try to find causal connections between the physical world and disease, he was far from being a monotheist, and, like most people of his era, he believed in the ancient Gods. In fact the Hippocratic Oath, which is one of the most famous oaths that all doctors to this day adhere to – albeit in modified form – begins with a list of especially prominent pagan gods:

*"I swear by Apollo Healer, by Asclepius, by Hygieia, by Panacea, and by all the gods and goddesses, making them my witnesses, that I will carry out, according to my ability and judgment, this oath and this indenture."*

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<sup>17</sup> For this section, see the relevant portions in: *Greek and Roman Medicine*, Helen King (Bristol Classical Press, 2001); *Greek Medicine: From the Heroic to the Hellenistic Age*, James Longrigg (Routledge Press, 1998); *Trick or Treatment: The Undeniable Facts About Alternative Medicine*, Simon Singh and Edzard Ernst (Bantam Books, 2008).

These four gods were all associated with health, hygiene, healing, and cures. Hippocrates envisioned that, rather than random acts of illness, the gods had structured the world in fashion, harmony, and perfect equilibrium. This equilibrium was manifested in the balancing of 'opposites', or 'humors'. Disease, he opined, was the result of an imbalance in these opposites. He writes:<sup>18</sup>

The Human body contains blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. These are the things that make up its constitution and cause its pains and health. Health is primarily that state in which these constituent substances are in the correct proportion to each other, both in strength and quantity, and are well mixed. Pain occurs when one of the substances presents either a deficiency or an excess, or is separated in the body and not mixed with others.

Thus began the theory of the 'Four Humors', which would continue to shape the entirety of Greek, Roman, and Islamic thought, and is still utilized in modern Unani (Ḥakīm) medicine. Hippocrates' ideas became popular across the world and spread between multiple cultures: variations of this belief continued until the advent of modern medicine in the 19th century.

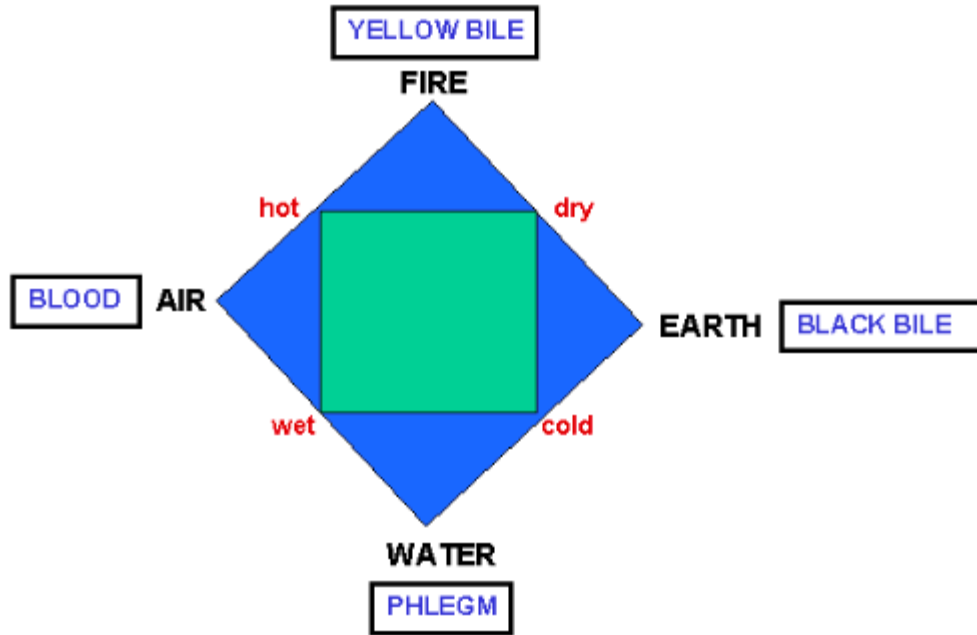
A few centuries later, Galen (d. 216 CE), another seminal figure in the history of medicine, developed the ideas of Hippocrates and refined them, adding aspects of his own understanding and taking from ideas current in his time. Galen was one of the first to attempt to develop a comprehensive theory of medicine and disease that greatly influenced medical thought for over a millennium. His system was a synthesis of earlier Greek medical traditions, particularly those of Hippocrates, as well as elements of Roman and Eastern medical practices. Central to Galen's theory was the concept of 'humoral theory', which posited (based on earlier Hippocratic notions) that the human body's health was determined by the balance of four vital fluids or humors: blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile. Each humor corresponded to specific qualities (hot, cold, wet, and dry) and elements (air, water, earth, and fire), and an imbalance among them was believed to lead to illness.

Galen asserted that these humors were produced by various organs, and that their regulation was crucial for maintaining bodily equilibrium. He emphasized the importance of proper diet, exercise, and environmental factors in preserving this balance. Furthermore, Galen's theory incorporated the idea of the "natural faculties" which encompassed the innate capacities of various bodily organs and their interactions. He believed that the body possessed inherent healing mechanisms and that understanding these faculties was vital for diagnosis and treatment.

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<sup>18</sup> Mann, W. N. (1983). G. E. R. Lloyd (ed.). *Hippocratic writings*. Translated by J Chadwick. Harmondsworth: Penguin. p. 262

#### 4 ELEMENTS and HUMORS/PROPERTIES



Treatment strategies aimed to restore the balance of humors, often involving a combination of dietary adjustments, medicinal compounds, and surgical interventions. All types of food, weather, and other ambient conditions were considered as somehow being directly related to this delicate balance; hence disease (which was the result of 'imbalance') had to be countered with specific aspects of treatment that would restore the perfect balance.

Additionally, Galen attributed great significance to the theory of the 'pneuma'. This concept linked respiration, circulation, and the nervous system, anticipating some modern physiological understandings. As with many such ideas, 'pneuma' was intrinsically linked to religious beliefs and even Greek gods.

Mark Alstchule writes,<sup>19</sup>

The notion that there is a principle called 'pneuma' that is responsible for various psychological phenomena was a cornerstone of ancient Greek religion, philosophy and medicine...ancient Greek scientific thought required that there should be one primary substance...Anaximander gave the name Theos, or 'God', to the undifferentiated substance out of which everything in the world was formed...the scientific thinking of the time required that the primary substance not only must pervade the entire universe but also must be responsible for all motion. The philosophers therefore believed that since this substance imparted motion to all things that

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<sup>19</sup> Altschule, M. D. (1965), *The pneuma concept of the soul*, Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences, 1(4), 314-5.

moved, it must be alive; also, since motion was everlasting, the substance must have eternal life.

In its highest form, the Greeks felt that the pneuma constitutes the human soul, which also contains the soul of the god Zeus.<sup>20</sup> This concept of pneuma, therefore, like most such ancient concepts, had both theological and medical manifestations and functionalities. However, when Galen wrote about 'pneuma' it was almost exclusively from the belief that this vital force within the body was necessary for good health, and that an imbalance or blockage of pneuma was the primary cause of illness.

Galen recommended various techniques to restore balance to the pneuma. This included dietary recommendations, exercise, rest, and medicinal treatments like bloodletting and purging to correct perceived imbalances. Given the association of pneuma with breath, he also developed respiratory therapies (for instance, introducing controlled breathing exercises to promote well-being and treat certain health conditions). Galen, along with other ancient Greeks, believed that plants contained pneuma, which could be harnessed for medicinal purposes. He developed an extensive system of herbal medicine, with specific plants believed to contain healing properties related to the balance of pneuma.

Galen's influence transcended antiquity, with his writings becoming foundational texts in both Islamic and European medieval medicine. His theories remained largely unchallenged until the Renaissance, when advances in anatomy and experimental physiology led to critical reassessment of such ideas.

### **3.2 Ibn Sīna And Islamicate Medicine**

Greek medicine was introduced to Arabic thought during the era of the so-called Islamic Golden Age (8th to 14th centuries).<sup>21</sup> The translation movement, centered in Baghdad's House of Wisdom, played a pivotal role. Arab scholars like Hunayn ibn Ishaq (d. 873 CE), Thabit ibn Qurra (d. 901 CE), and Abu Bakr al-Razi (d. 935), avidly translated Greek texts, particularly those of Hippocrates and Galen, into Arabic. This allowed Arabic-speaking scholars to access the wealth of knowledge on anatomy, physiology, humoral theory, and medical practices developed by the Greeks. These translated works formed the basis for Islamic medicine, which combined Greek knowledge with contributions from Persian, Indian, and Islamic scholars.

Of course, the single most influential medical doctor in the history of the Muslim world is without a doubt Abu Ali Ibn Sīna (d. 1037). Much work has been done on his writings and influence, and there is no need to go into such detail here. For our purposes, it is especially pertinent to mention that the bulk of medicinal practices in his iconic work *al-Qānūn fi-l-ṭibb*, were based on and developed from

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<sup>20</sup> Quin, C., *The soul and the pneuma in the function of the nervous system after Galen*, *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, (1994) 87, pp. 393-395.

<sup>21</sup> CHISTI, *IBID*, pp. 12-18. ALSO SEE WHAT IS CONSIDERED TO BE A PRIMARY REFERENCE ON THIS TOPIC: *GREEK THOUGHT, ARABIC CULTURE: THE GRAECO-ARABIC TRANSLATION MOVEMENT IN BAGHDAD AND EARLY 'ABBASID SOCIETY*, DIMITRI GUTAS (ROUTLEDGE, 1995).

his Greek precursors. Perusing this work,<sup>22</sup> one finds that most remedies he prescribed stem from the theory of the four humors. Of course, bloodletting (*ḥijāmah*) is a common treatment he prescribed for a wide variety of conditions, as it was believed to help restore the balance of the humors. As well, depending on the perceived imbalance of the humors, Ibn Sīna recommends various dietary changes: for example, if a patient had an excess of 'hot' humors (yellow bile and blood), he might suggest a diet with cooling foods like cucumbers and melons, herbal remedies (certain herbs might be recommended to help expel excess phlegm or to stimulate the production of a particular humor), purging and vomiting (again, to remove what he considers the excess humor), and fasting and abstinence from specific substances that were believed to help restore equilibrium.

Ibn Sīna also adopted and modified the ancient theory of 'pneuma'. Most significantly for our purposes, he refashioned the concept of pneuma using the Quranic term '*Nafs*' (نفس). In his medical writings, Ibn Sina discussed the concept of *Nafs* as the vital spirit or breath that plays a crucial role in sustaining life and maintaining health. Like Galen before him, he considered the inhalation of air to be essential for the introduction of this *nafs* into the body, the presence of which was necessary for life and health. The act of breathing was seen as a means of replenishing this vital force. The heart also produced this vital force and circulated it throughout the body, nourishing and sustaining the organs and tissues. Furthermore, like Galen before him, he posited that the stomach and liver were involved in the transformation of food into pneuma, which was then distributed throughout the body to support its functions.

Ibn Sīna's influence, in particular via his book *The Canon of Medicine*, is well-known, and helped spark a renewed interest in medicinal practices and theories in Europe which eventually led to the birth of modern medicine. However, it must be mentioned that while some aspects of his thought are still considered valid, the bulk of his prescriptions, and the underlying philosophy of his medicine (such as the theory of humors, pneuma, and miasma taken from earlier sources) is largely discredited and viewed as being concepts of interest only to those specializing in the history of medicine.

While modern medicine has moved on from such ideas, Unani medicine (also known as the Ḥakīm tradition) is still widely practiced in the Indian subcontinent, and is the direct descendant of Ibn Sīna's views and writings.

To summarize this section: Islamicate medicine, exemplified by the writings of Ibn Sīna, clearly developed from and owes much to earlier philosophies and ideas propagated by Galen and Hippocrates. Most of these ideas (such as the theory of the 'four humors' and the notion of 'balancing' opposites) are now viewed as being completely outdated and without scientific merit, and some

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<sup>22</sup> See relevant sections in: *Avicenna's Medicine: A New Translation of the 11th-Century Canon with Practical Applications for Integrative Health Care*, Mones Abu-Aseb (Healing Arts Press, 2013).

concepts (such as the concept of 'pneuma') had theological implications in early Hellenistic thought that were excised of those connotations by Ibn Sīna and Muslim authors, and adopted into a Quranic framework.

#### **4. SOME EXAMPLES OF ALTERNATIVE MEDICINES**

There are many distinct systems of medicine around the world, each with its own philosophy, principles, and practices. Some of the major types of medicinal schools or systems are:<sup>23</sup>

1. Conventional or Western Medicine (also known as 'Allopathic Medicine'): This is the dominant system of medicine in most of the world, including the United States and much of Europe. It is based on the principles of using pharmaceutical drugs and surgical interventions to treat diseases and alleviate symptoms.
2. Osteopathic Medicine: Osteopathic physicians (DOs) practice a form of medicine similar to allopathic medicine but also emphasize the musculoskeletal system and may incorporate osteopathic manipulative treatment (OMT) into their practice.
3. Unani Medicine: Unani, also known as Yunani or Greco-Arabic medicine or the Ḥakīm tradition, has roots in ancient Greek and Islamic medicine. It uses herbal remedies, dietary advice, and various therapies to restore balance in the body. It is based on and an extension of earlier Islamic medicine.
4. Ayurvedic Medicine: Originating in India, Ayurveda is one of the world's oldest holistic healing systems. It emphasizes balancing the body's energies (*doshas*) through diet, herbal remedies, yoga, and lifestyle practices.
5. Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM): TCM is an ancient system of medicine that includes practices like acupuncture, herbal medicine, cupping therapy, and qigong. It is based on the concept of balancing the body's vital energy (qi) and yin and yang.
6. Traditional Japanese Medicine: Traditional Japanese medicine includes practices like *kampo* (herbal medicine), acupuncture, and moxibustion. It combines elements of TCM with Japanese cultural influences.
7. Tibetan Medicine: Tibetan medicine, or Sowa Rigpa, combines Buddhist principles with traditional Tibetan healing practices. It includes herbal medicine, dietary guidelines, and pulse diagnosis.
8. Energy Medicine: This category includes various approaches that work with the body's energetic systems, like Reiki, Therapeutic Touch, and other modalities.

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<sup>23</sup> This is of course a partial list that the author compiled during the course of his research. Unfortunately in my limited time I was not able to find a special monograph dedicated to comparing and contrasting these systems in a holistic manner, however almost all works dealing with the history of medicine allude to multiple schools.

9. Homeopathy: Homeopathy is a system of medicine developed in the late 18th century by Samuel Hahnemann. It is based on the principle of 'like cures like' and uses highly diluted substances to stimulate the body's innate healing abilities.
10. Naturopathic Medicine: Naturopathy combines modern scientific knowledge with traditional healing practices. Naturopathic doctors (NDs) focus on holistic wellness, nutrition, herbal medicine, and lifestyle modifications.
11. Chiropractic Medicine: Chiropractic medicine focuses on the musculoskeletal system and its impact on overall health. It primarily involves spinal adjustments and manipulation to treat various conditions.
12. Traditional African Medicine: Various indigenous cultures in Africa have their own healing traditions, which often involve herbal medicine, divination, and spiritual practices.
13. Siddha Medicine: Siddha is a traditional system of medicine originating in South India. It emphasizes the use of minerals, metals, and herbs to maintain health and treat diseases.
14. Native American Medicine: Native American tribes have their own healing traditions, often involving herbal remedies, ceremonies, and rituals passed down through generations.

As a sample of some of these alternative systems, let us examine a few of these schools and mention pertinent aspects to allow us to make a more informed judgment on them, along with a summary of other *fatwas* where available.

#### **4.1 Acupuncture: A Cute Puncturing System?**

Acupuncture is an ancient system first developed in China that is based on the notion that health and wellbeing relate to the flow of a life force (Qi or Ch'i)<sup>24</sup> through specific pathways (or 'meridians') in the human body, and the claim that placing needles into critical points along those meridians removes blockages and encourages a balancing of the life force. The needles are strategically placed to address imbalances in Qi, either by dispersing excessive energy or by replenishing areas with deficient Qi. This process is believed to unblock energy stagnation, encourage circulation, and harmonize the body's systems. Additionally, acupuncture is thought to influence the nervous system, triggering the release of neurotransmitters and endorphins, which may alleviate pain and promote a sense of well-being. Practitioners also consider the mind-body connection, recognizing that emotional and mental states can impact the flow of Qi. Therefore, acupuncture aims to not only address physical

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<sup>24</sup> It is now understood that the Chinese notion of 'qi' stems from the same ancient notion of 'pneuma' that the Greeks derived (mentioned above). And from this same ancient belief, the basis of the notion of the fundamental opposite humors permeated throughout the ancient world, and while it manifested itself in a particular way in ancient Greece (via the 'Four Humors'), in the Far East it gave rise to the notion of 'Yin-Yang', while in India the practitioners of Ayurvedic medicine believed that the entire universe was composed of five elements: Vayu (Air), Jala (Water), Aakash (Space or ether), Prithvi (Earth) and Teja (Fire). These five elements (referred to as '*Pancha Mahabhoota*' in Ayurveda) are believed to form the three basic humors of the human body in varying combinations.

symptoms but also to restore overall vitality and balance within the individual. While the scientific understanding of acupuncture's mechanisms is evolving, traditional practitioners emphasize its effectiveness in treating a wide range of conditions, from pain management and stress relief to digestive disorders and hormonal imbalances, by restoring the body's innate capacity for self-healing and maintaining holistic well-being.

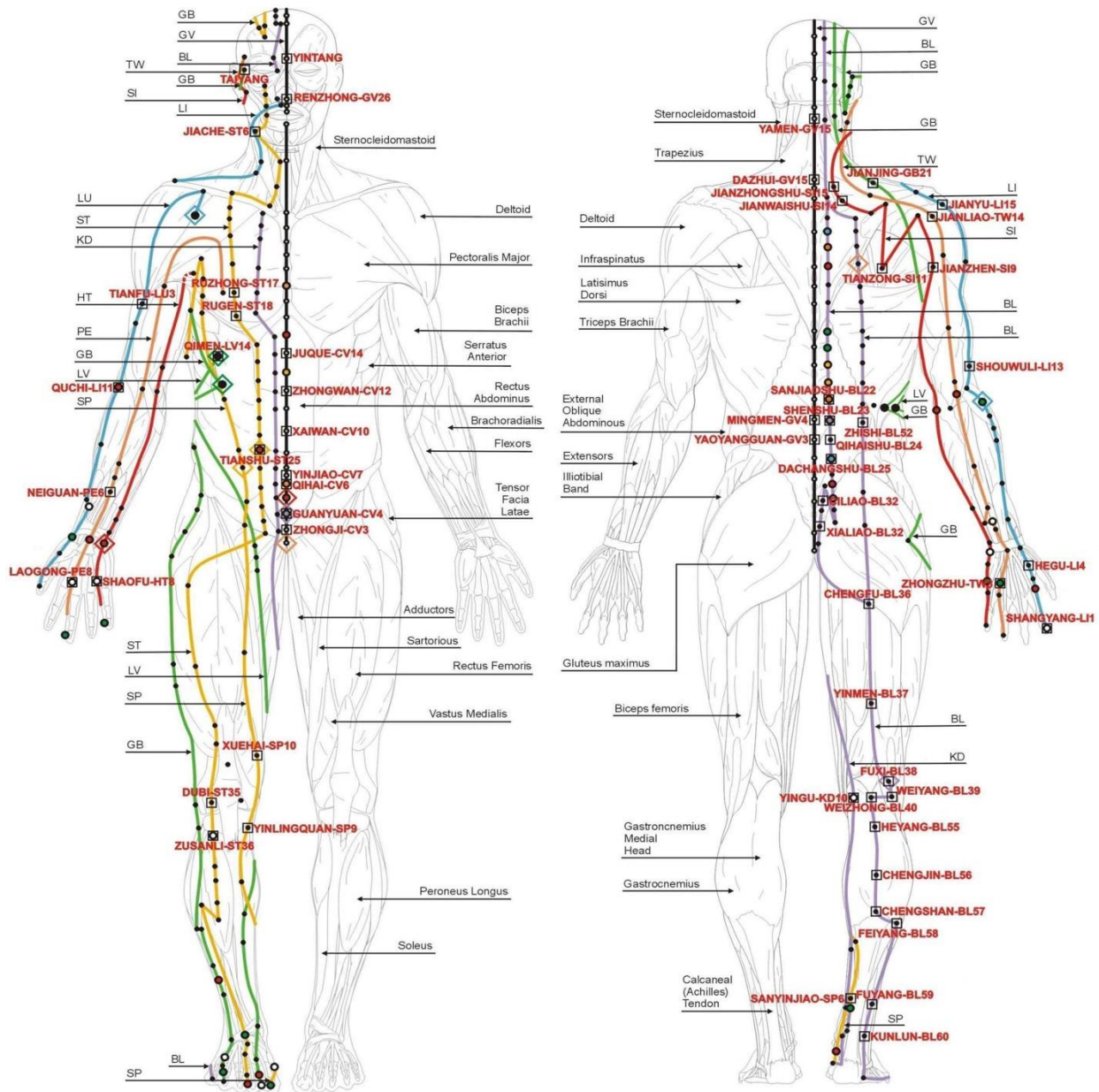


Table One: A Chart of the 'Meridians' According to Acupuncturists

According to Chinese beliefs, there isn't a specific entity or deity credited with creating Chi. Instead, Chi is seen as an inherent aspect of the cosmos, existing in everything. It is thought to flow through



the body along specific pathways known as meridians, and its balance and flow are considered essential for health and well-being. There are many different schools within this philosophy, and they differ on the mapping out of these meridians and which meridian should be tapped into for which symptoms/diseases.

Most practitioners of modern medicine are highly skeptical of the efficacy of acupuncture, and multiple tests and experiments that have been done have generally not shown a much higher effectiveness for the treatment of pain than any placebo.<sup>25</sup>

With respect to its Islamic verdict, it appears that almost all scholars who have commented on it have considered it to be permissible, including Sh. Ibn Jibrīn,<sup>26</sup> Sh. Šāliḥ al-Luḥaydān,<sup>27</sup> and many modern councils and websites.<sup>28</sup>

It is particularly pertinent to note that none of these scholars seem to have been concerned about the relationship of acupuncture to ancient Chinese religions, or the notion of 'energy' (Qi) that it relies on. This point will become especially pertinent in our next section.

## 4.2 Tai Chi, Qi Gong, and Reiki: Exotic Takes and Raking Fakes

While acupuncture seems to have been given a green light by many jurists, the same cannot be said for systems that can be viewed as 'cousins' to it. In this section, let us examine three such systems. Tai Chi, Qi Gong, and Reiki are ancient practices rooted in Eastern philosophies that aim to cultivate physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. Tai Chi, originating in China, is a martial art that has evolved into a gentle form of exercise emphasizing flowing movements and balance. Its foundation lies in Taoist principles, seeking harmony between Yin and Yang energies. Qi Gong, also from China, predates Tai Chi and encompasses a broader range of practices aimed at cultivating and balancing the body's vital life force, known as "Qi" or "Chi." It draws from Taoist, Confucian, and Buddhist

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25 For an overview of some of these meta-research papers, and the challenges presented with them, see: *Trick or Treatment*, pp. 85-93.

26 See: <https://islamqa.info/ar/answers/11956/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B1>

27 See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WaKrfSBPf48>

28 See:

- 1) <https://www.islamweb.net/ar/fatwa/7793/%D8%B7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%A8%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D9%8A%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B5%D9%8A%D9%81%D9%87%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%B1%D8%B9%D9%8A>
- 2) <https://islamqa.info/ar/answers/114176/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AC-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D9%8A%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%8A%D8%AA%D9%87-%D9%88%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%85%D9%87>
- 3) <https://ar.islamway.net/fatwa/38617/%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%A8%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D9%8A%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B1%D9%85%D8%B6%D8%A7%D9%86>
- 4) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vw9I7-CVT08>
- 5) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MhecfxbYpFo>

philosophies, focusing on breath control, meditation, and gentle movements to promote health and vitality. Reiki, on the other hand, has its roots in Japan and was developed by Mikao Usui (d. 1926) in the early 20th century. It is a form of energy healing that revolves around the concept of channeling universal life force energy through the practitioner's hands to promote healing and balance. Reiki is influenced by Shintoism and Buddhism and is built upon the belief in the interconnectedness of all living beings.

Despite their distinct origins and applications, Tai Chi, Qi Gong, and Reiki share several fundamental similarities. One of the key commonalities is their emphasis on the flow of vital energy within the body. In Tai Chi and Qi Gong, this energy is referred to as "Qi" or "Chi," while in Reiki, it is known as 'universal life force energy.' All three practices aim to harmonize and balance this energy for improved health and well-being. Another shared principle is mindfulness and presence. Each practice encourages practitioners to be fully present in the moment, fostering a state of mental clarity and relaxation. This mindfulness allows individuals to let go of stress, anxiety, and distractions, promoting a sense of inner peace. Additionally, these practices all serve as holistic approaches to health, addressing not only physical well-being but also mental and spiritual aspects. They promote a sense of unity within the individual, aligning mind, body, and spirit in a harmonious manner.

While Tai Chi, Qi Gong, and Reiki share common ground, there are distinct differences that set them apart in their application and techniques. Tai Chi, for instance, is primarily a physical practice with a focus on slow, deliberate movements. It is often practiced in a specific sequence of forms, and its movements can be intricate and demanding, requiring a degree of physical fitness and flexibility. Qi Gong, on the other hand, encompasses a wider range of practices, including breathwork, meditation, and static postures in addition to flowing movements. It offers more flexibility in terms of intensity and can be tailored to individual needs and abilities. Reiki, unlike Tai Chi and Qi Gong, does not involve physical movement but is centered on the laying on of hands to channel energy. According to Reiki theory, life energy flows through channels or pathways in the body, similar to the concept of meridians in traditional Chinese medicine. It is believed that physical or emotional distress can be caused by blockages or imbalances in the flow of this energy. These blockages are thought to manifest as physical or emotional symptoms. Practitioners undergo specific training and receive attunements to become conduits for this healing energy. The recipient typically lies fully clothed while the practitioner's hands rest lightly on or near the body. This energy transmission is believed to stimulate the body's natural healing abilities.

These systems are widely practiced all around the globe, sometimes even as alternatives endorsed by mainstream medicine. Harvard Medical School's website lists the health benefits of Tai Chi, and adds that one does not need to subscribe to the ideas of 'qi' energy and the existence of yin/yang in

order to benefit from it.<sup>29</sup> Reiki is offered as a legitimate alternative therapy in many dozens of reputable hospitals and clinics across the country, including some top-notch ones like the Cleveland Clinic, John Hopkins Center, the Mayo Clinic, MD Anderson Cancer Center, and Stanford Health Care.<sup>30</sup> All of these systems are practiced by large segments of society, of various social and religious backgrounds. Those who practice such philosophies generally do not view them as being 'religious' in nature. However, some Christian clerics have expressed concern in particular over Reiki, and claimed that it is 'inappropriate' for believers to engage in it.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, other Christians, including some ordained ministers, claim that there is no spiritual component to this practice that contradicts belief in God, and therefore deem it to be permissible.<sup>32</sup>

It appears that the majority of modern scholars who commented on this issue have declared these practices to be impermissible, based on the claim that it is paganistic, or requires belief in Buddhism, or employs demons.<sup>33</sup> Dr. Abd al-Azīz al-Fawzān, on the other hand, opined that if such treatment does not contain any impermissible elements, then the base ruling of permissibility shall apply, and he believes that some forms of this treatment are effective and permissible.<sup>34</sup>

In the opinion of this author, while it is no doubt best to avoid such ambiguous treatments, in light of the way that it is practiced in the Western world, and given its usage in segments of Western healthcare, to claim that it is inherently paganistic or involves belief in supernatural entities does not seem accurate. The same principles that undergird acupuncture also are found in all of these practices; if the former is permissible, then so too should these latter ones. A strong argument that demonstrates the complete lack of any specific theological paradigm is that these practices are endorsed by mainstream institutes that would never allow for faith-based practices, hence these healing methods are used by people of all different faiths.

In our conclusion, we shall return to this point and elaborate further on it.

### **4.3 The Curious Case of Chiropractic Cures: Crack Addicts?**

Chiropractic Therapy is a controversial medical technique that has many supporters and detractors. In most Western countries, it is an established part of mainstream healthcare practices and covered by many insurances, yet its detractors claim that it is a form of 'alternative medicine' that has no demonstrable benefits, but does in fact have a track record of palpable harm (many deaths and permanent injuries have been reported as a direct result of its pressure techniques on the neck and

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29 See: <https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/the-health-benefits-of-tai-chi>

30 See: <https://planetmeditate.com/full-list-hospitals-that-use-reiki-us/>

31 See: <https://www.thecatholictelegraph.com/qa-what-does-the-church-teach-about-reiki/22105>, and

32 See: <https://weta.org/watch/shows/religion-ethics-newsweekly/religion-ethics-newsweekly-reiki-and-catholic-church#:~:text=Advocates%2C%20including%20some%20Catholic%20nuns,Reiki%20is%20incompatible%20with%20Christianity>.

33 See: *al-Madhāhib al-Falsafiyya al-Ilhādīyha al-Rūḥīyya wa Taṭbīquhā al-Mu`āšira*, Dr. Fawz Kurdi (Ta'seel Publications, 2015), pps. 73-76, and other relevant sections in this work.

34 See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O2E3qYPd8Hs>

spinal cord – chiropractic treatment is notorious for stretching the neck, turning the spine and jabbing the back in manners that many would deem unnatural).<sup>35</sup>

What is of special relevance to us here is that the founder of this method, D. D. Palmer (d. 1913) was a self-taught spiritual healer who propagated a quasi-religious mystical vision of life in which he compared himself to Jesus, Muhammad (SAW), and other religious figures. Palmer, after a seance in which he claimed to be in communication with the spirit of a dead man, claimed that all poor health was due to slight misalignments of the vertebrae in the spine (for which he invented a term, 'subluxations'), and that these misalignments interfered with the innate life-force that kept the body in check. This life force was called *innate intelligence*; God Himself was called 'Universal Intelligence', and this so-called *innate intelligence* represented God's guiding influence on and within mankind. Palmer explicitly wrote that he considered this philosophy as a type of religion, and that he had received this knowledge from 'the other-world'. Some interesting facts about Palmer include the fact that he was arrested for practicing medicine without a license; that the sale of his books and his training to other 'chiropractic doctors' to give them licenses made him fairly wealthy; and that his own son 'accidentally' killed him by running him over and took over the family business of licensing other 'doctors'.<sup>36</sup> Despite these murky origins, the technique continues to gain traction and is now a thriving multi-billion dollar industry (the industry itself is estimated to be worth around twenty billion dollars).

While many practitioners swear that they have achieved great results via this practice, critics of this philosophy<sup>37</sup> allege that its origins are completely mystical, with occult influences. Additionally its results remain unverifiable, with documented risks. They question the scientific basis of many chiropractic treatments, particularly spinal adjustments, arguing that the evidence supporting their efficacy is limited and often anecdotal. As well, some critics argue that chiropractors may overstate their ability to treat a wide range of medical conditions beyond musculoskeletal issues, such as asthma or allergies. Safety concerns have also been raised, particularly in cases where aggressive spinal manipulations have led to injuries or exacerbation of existing medical conditions. Moreover, the lack of standardized education and training across the field is a notable critique, with some practitioners receiving varying levels of instruction, potentially leading to disparities in quality of care. Lastly, critics express reservations about the financial aspects, citing instances of unnecessary or prolonged treatment plans that can be costly for patients.

Today, the quasi-religious mythical beliefs of the founder are completely ignored by its practitioners, and chiropractic techniques do not involve any aspect of theology. In fact the vast majority of people

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<sup>35</sup> For one of the more thorough meta-studies of a number of previous research papers published in this regard, see: Ernst E. *Adverse effects of spinal manipulation: a systematic review*, J. R. Soc. Med. 2007 Jul;100 (7) : 330-8.

<sup>36</sup> See: *Tricks and Treatment*, pp. 147-151.

<sup>37</sup> See: *Tricks and Treatment*, pp. 166-188.

who avail themselves to such treatments are actually surprised to learn of its origins, and believe that there is a mundane, non-mystical, relationship between the vertebrae and good health.

One would imagine, given the explicit claims of its founder, its mystical view of *life force*, and the pseudo-science behind this alternative medicine, that scholars might have found chiropractic treatments Islamically problematic. However, this techniques does not seem to be prohibited by any scholar or council to the best of this researchers knowledge. In fact, Muslim questioners and scholars all seem more concerned about the gender issue of a male on female interaction rather than the core issue of permissibility, which seems to be a given in all that this researcher has come across.<sup>38</sup> There is even an online group of Muslim chiropractitioners.<sup>39</sup>

All of this seems to underscore the sentiment that there is a lack of consistency amongst some scholars who prohibit some types of treatment while allowing others that might share the exact same *'illah*. In the opinion of this researcher, chiropractic treatment should at the very least be considered questionable, not due to any spiritual reasons, but due to the demonstrable physical harm that its practice has caused. Aggressive spinal manipulations (*viz.*, hard blows to the neck and spine) have led in quite a few instances to serious complications, including nerve compression, herniated discs, or even strokes and death in extremely rare cases. No other alternative healing philosophy has caused more physical harm than this technique. This is not to claim that the entire treatment is dangerous, but merely that since the Shariah teaches *'la ḍarar wa lā ḍirār'*, it is our job as legal jurists to point out the potential harms of this treatment and advise those who choose it to be extra cautious. Still, given the negligible percentage of times such harm occurs, one cannot pass an Islamic verdict of *taḥrīm* based on it.

#### 4.4 Homeful Healings Or Pathetic Panaceas: Homeopathic Treatments

Homeopathic medicine<sup>40</sup> was founded by Samuel Hahnemann (d. 1843), a German physician, in the late 18th century. Disenchanted with the harsh and often ineffective medical practices of his time, Hahnemann sought a gentler alternative. His experiments with cinchona bark, used to treat malaria, led him to the principle of 'like cures like' - the idea that a substance causing symptoms in a healthy person could alleviate similar symptoms in a sick individual. Hahnemann's groundbreaking work, "*Organon of the Healing Art*," published in 1810, laid the foundation for homeopathy's principles and practice.

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38 See:

- 1) <https://www.al-islam.org/ask/topics/71899/questions-about-Chiropractor>
- 2) <https://aboutislam.net/counseling/ask-the-scholar/health-science/can-a-muslim-woman-go-to-a-male-chiropractor/>
- 3) <https://islamqa.org/hanafi/daruliftaa-birmingham/136388/can-i-pursue-the-path-of-becoming-a-chiropractor/>

39 See: <https://www.facebook.com/muslimchiropractors/>

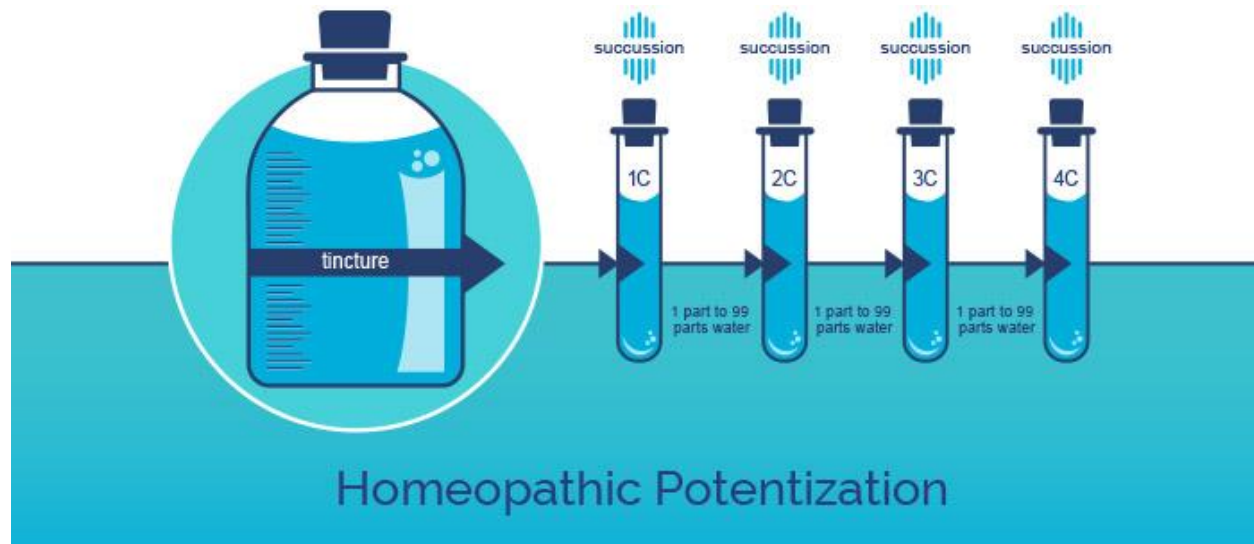
40 For this section, for a sympathetic view, see: *Discovering Homeopathy* by Dana Ullman (North Atlantic Books, 1993)), and for a critical view: *Homeopathy: The Undiluted Facts* by Edward Ernst and Singh Simon

Initially met with resistance from the medical establishment, homeopathy gained popularity due to its purported effectiveness during outbreaks of infectious diseases like cholera and scarlet fever. The practice spread across Europe and reached the United States in the early 19th century, where it flourished and became a prominent form of medical treatment. Homeopathy especially gained popularity in India primarily due to its perceived successful response to epidemics and its alignment with traditional Indian medical philosophies. Its introduction is credited to Dr. John Martin Honigberger, a French physician, who treated the ruler of the Punjab region, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, in the mid-19th century. Honigberger's successes in treating cholera and other diseases with homeopathy garnered attention and led to its spread. Another reason why this practice found fertile ground in India was due to its resonance with the principles of Ayurveda, a traditional Indian system of medicine. Both systems share the belief in the vital force and the holistic approach to health. Moreover, homeopathy's emphasis on individualized treatment and minimal invasiveness aligned with Ayurvedic principles. The Calcutta Homeopathic Medical College, established in 1881, played a pivotal role in formalizing and popularizing homeopathy in India. Additionally, prominent Indian leaders, including Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore, advocated for and endorsed homeopathy, further boosting its acceptance. Today, India has one of the largest homeopathic communities globally, with numerous colleges, hospitals, and clinics dedicated to its practice. It remains an integral part of the country's healthcare landscape, coexisting alongside conventional medicine and traditional systems like Ayurveda and Unani.

Homeopathic medicine asserts that it works through the principle of 'like cures like' and the law of infinitesimals. According to homeopathy, a substance that causes symptoms in a healthy individual can, in highly diluted form, stimulate the body's vital force to heal similar symptoms in a sick person. The process of potentization involves serial dilutions and succussions (vigorous shaking) of the original substance, purportedly leaving behind an energetic imprint that enhances the remedy's healing potential while minimizing any potential toxicity. Homeopaths believe that the more a substance is diluted, the more potent it becomes. They argue that this energetic resonance between the remedy and the body's vital force triggers a self-regulatory response, promoting healing and restoring balance in the individual.

Homeopathic dilutions are a hallmark of homeopathic practice, involving a process known as potentization. This process begins with a mother tincture, which is a concentrated extract of a substance, typically a plant, mineral, or animal product. The mother tincture is then serially diluted and succussed (shaken vigorously) at each step. Common dilution scales include "C" (centesimal) and "X" (decimal), denoting the number of times the substance has been diluted and succussed. For example, a 6C dilution involves diluting the original substance one part in a hundred, six times. By contrast, a 6X dilution involves diluting it one part in ten, six times.

In homeopathic practice, dilutions can reach extremely high levels. For instance, a 30C dilution, a common potency, involves diluting the original substance one part in a hundred, thirty times. At this level of dilution, it is highly improbable that even a single molecule of the original substance remains in the solution. Nevertheless, homeopathy maintains that the water retains an 'energetic memory' of the original substance, which is believed to impart healing properties to the remedy.



**Table 2: Homeopathic Potentization**

All the key concepts that homeopathy claims to function on fall outside the realm of conventional scientific understanding of physics, chemistry, biology and medicine (or, to be more blunt, scientists would say that the notion that such a mixture might be efficacious is closer to being a figment of one's imagination and an assertion of a belief without a shred of evidence to back up this claim). Science-based medicine criticizes homeopathic medicine for several reasons.<sup>41</sup> First and foremost, it points out that homeopathy relies on principles that directly contradict established scientific understanding, such as the 'like cures like' concept and extreme dilutions that often leave no trace of the original substance. Both these principles contradict the basic principles of pharmacology and chemistry. Secondly, clinical trials and systematic reviews consistently show that homeopathic remedies are no more effective than placebos, calling into question their efficacy as legitimate treatments. Thirdly, homeopathic remedies are often marketed as substitutes for evidence-based medical interventions, potentially delaying or preventing individuals from receiving proper, effective treatments for serious or life-threatening conditions. Lastly, critics also highlight the lack of standardization and quality control in homeopathic preparations, leading to inconsistent formulations and potentially unsafe products. Overall, science-based medicine argues that homeopathy lacks

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<sup>41</sup> See: *Tricks or Treatment*, pp. 131-145.

empirical evidence to support its claims, and its theoretical framework stands in stark contrast to well-established principles of biology, chemistry, and pharmacology. This leads to skepticism regarding its efficacy and safety as a form of medical treatment.

From an Islamic perspective, since the tincture that is used to preserve the chemical in generally contains alcohol, almost all questions pertaining to the permissibility of homeopathy that this researcher came across dealt with the subsidiary issue of whether alcohol is permissible in medicines or not, and if so, under which conditions.<sup>42</sup> That topic is, of course, outside the scope of our paper, hence will be overlooked for our purposes. To the best of this researcher's knowledge, no scholar seems to have raised problems based on contested efficacy of this system, and its acceptance in many Muslim cultures seems to suggest there is little to no resistance against it from any theological perspective.

To conclude this section: these are just some samples out of the many dozens of non-evidence based philosophies of medicine, most of which originate in non-Western lands. All of these systems are practiced by large segments of the global population, of diverse backgrounds and faiths and beliefs. If one wanted to, it would be extremely easy to extrapolate 'theology' into almost all forms of such alternative medicines, and it is possible to find only a few degrees of separation between some of them and blatant paganism.

For example, all Ayurvedic paradigms emanate from ancient India, and stem from a Hindu worldview that incorporates spiritual and religious elements with the physical world. The underlying philosophy of this paradigm is the belief that a balance between three doshas (the *vata*, the *pitta*, and the *kapha*) is necessary for good health, and that a balance is also needed between the mind, body and spirit. Almost every single practice, including herbal prescriptions, can be found manifested with other spiritual prescriptions involving aspects such as ritualistic yoga and meditation.

As another example, almost all philosophies emanating from Chinese traditions (the 'Traditional Chinese Medicines', or TCM), are deeply influenced by Chinese philosophical and religious beliefs that shape all Far Eastern religions. Concepts central to Chinese medicine, like yin and yang, and qi (the life force energy), and meridians - all concepts that are also central to Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. Even homeopathy can be seen to incorporate spiritual or metaphysical beliefs about the energetic properties of substances without any shred of actual physical or chemical proof. While in homeopathy there is no explicit belief in 'god' or 'demons', the mystical powers given to the ever-

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<sup>42</sup> Most scholars allowed the ingestion of such medications; once again little to no attention was paid with respect to the underpinning philosophy behind it. See, for example:

- 1) <https://www.islamweb.net/en/fatwa/306379/taking-homeopathic-medicine-that-contains-alcohol>
- 2) <https://islamqa.info/en/answers/111004/ruling-on-homoeopathy>
- 3) <https://darulifta-deoband.com/home/en/qa/58557>
- 4) <https://seekersguidance.org/answers/halal-and-haram/homeopathy-animal-products/>
- 5) <https://islamqa.org/hanafi/daruliftaa-birmingham/19749/homeopathic-medicine/>
- 6) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p9dHay4Lkg>
- 7) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_zyYODNQh74](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_zyYODNQh74)



increasing dilutions borders on religious beliefs. In fact, one can even point out that pre-modern American medicine is directly influenced by Native American traditional beliefs and healing practices. The European settlers did take specific herbal remedies from the indigenous peoples, but they adopted these prescriptions while simultaneously discarding their theological underpinnings, shamanistic rituals, and other superstitious beliefs about them.

The question that we need to ask, therefore, is: does such a linkage, in which one can verify a few degrees of separation between medicinal paradigms and various theologies, make such medicinal prescriptions *haram*, or do these degrees of separation act as a type of spiritual *isitihāla* that would render the final product pure even if its initial manifestation was impure? This is the question we shall turn to in our final section.

## 5. THREE MAXIMS AND CONCLUSION

In this final section, let us summarize this paper into three maxims, and then formulate a conclusion.

***Maxim 1: It is not the role of the faqih to weigh in on and adjudicate between the medical efficacies of various treatments.***

This is a self-evident point, and '*...each person should be given his rights*'. Just as a *faqih* should not comment on the most effective architectural plans or the most profitable mechanisms of maximizing a supply-and-demand scenario, so too it is not the job of a jurist to weigh in on the efficacies of medical treatments. Even if a jurist, in his personal opinion as an educated reader, believes a treatment is not effective, or emanating from a paradigm that is not proven, he must separate his personal opinion from the *fiqh* ruling regarding such treatments.<sup>43</sup>

To illustrate this maxim, both Homeopathy and Unani medicine are widely practiced by large segments of the Muslim world. In the personal opinion of this author (and the almost *ijmā'* of the modern evidence-based practitioners of medicine), these alternative paradigms are as effective as placebo treatments: meaning, they are completely ineffective in any chemical or biological sense, but helpful for one's imaginative power of recovery if one believes in them. But *the personal opinion of this author means nothing in pronouncing a verdict on these systems*, for that is a separate matter altogether. Hence, there is nothing to declare these treatments impermissible and they remain on their base ruling of permissibility. A personal judgment on a course of medication being ineffective, or foolish, or equivalent to a placebo, is a separate issue altogether and has no implication on the Islamic ruling of this treatment.

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<sup>43</sup> The only time a jurist should weigh in on the efficacy of a treatment is if there is evidence of *physical* harm, and even then, a jurist should merely point out this reality and leave it to the practitioner to weigh the pros and cons and seek the advice of actual medical experts. This is because disease itself is a type of 'harm', and almost all cures also have harmful side-effects (for example, radiation to cure cancer). It is up to the individual to decide which of these two harms is, in his eyes, the lesser one.

***Maxim 2: All medicinal treatments that emanate from a paradigm of causal, natural and mundane correlations, as judged by its practitioners, are permissible.***

Thinkers, theologians, scientists, philosophers and lay-people since the beginning of time have conceived of aspects of the creation that are beyond our sense-perceptions. The Quran and the teachings of our faith are clear in specific aspects of metaphysical thought, such as the Oneness of God, the existence of angels, and the belief in resurrection. Beyond this, if someone believes something that does not contradict or clash with the Quranic message, as long as one does not make this a fundamental aspect of theology, he would not be sinful to do so. Being *wrong* about a belief in a world-view does not equate to being *sinful*, much less being guilty of *shirk*.

Here, we need to explain the Islamic ruling on cause-and-effect, and when would such a belief be Islamically problematic.<sup>44</sup> Mainstream Sunnī belief is that causal relationships are created by Allah, and as long as one acknowledges this, there is no inherent *shirk*.

A cause-and-effect that is not verifiable by the observer, or believed to be imaginary by others, or based in other cultures, does not intrinsically have any bearing on whether such a practice is *shirk*. As well, being *mistaken* about a causal relationship cannot, in itself, be *shirk*. Homeopathic medicines, if one takes modern scientific understandings of chemistry into account, generally are diluted to such an extent as to make any effect completely impossible. Scientists would dismiss the claim that the water molecules somehow retain a 'memory' of the original chemical (the effectiveness of which itself is not verified). Nonetheless, this belief, even if deemed 'imaginary' by most people, does not in any way infringe Islamic beliefs.

In the case of homeopathy, the alleged 'causation' is physical (meaning: its practitioners believe that infinitesimally small molecular effects of a chemical somehow result in a reaction in one's body that acts as a cure). However, the same ruling applies if the 'causation' is deemed to be non-physical, such as energy. The practice of acupuncture is an example of this, for the underlying philosophy of this practice is the notion of the existence of a universal 'qi' that runs through one's body and affects one's health. The fact that qi is also associated with ancient Taoist beliefs does not affect the paradigm of modern practitioners of acupuncture. We must judge a system by the beliefs of those who follow it, and not by our own pre-conceived notions of that system.

Most of what we now know about 'energy' is the result of centuries of experimenting and theorizing. And many scientists would acknowledge that there are other types that we have yet to discover. Perhaps a modern example that would illustrate their world view is how we understand the concept

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<sup>44</sup> This, of course, is the well-known and oft-studied issue of *al-sabab wa-l-musabbāb*, or *al-asbāb wa-l-ṭabā'ī*. For Atharīs, Allah has created certain properties in substances and has allowed these properties to act on other substances; for Ash'arīs, Allah has created illusory causal connections (*'adāt*) in which cause-effect is deemed to have occurred but Allah is the only actual 'cause'. For a theological discussion of this reality, one is referred to: Ibn al-Qayyim, *Madārij*, vol. 1, p. 242-5; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Shifā al-'Alīl*, p. 189-191; Abd al-Rahmān Maḥmūd, *Mawqif Ibn Taymiyyah min al-Ashā'irah*, vol. 2, p. 625-628.

of gravity, or electromagnetic waves. Modern science views the world as operating within and abiding by a set system of laws and casual connections. At times, we can physically observe and detect these connections (as, for example, a moving object that collides with a stationary one causing the stationary one to start moving). And at other times, we can infer them but not quite 'prove' them (in some sense), such as gravity.

In the medical field, we are understanding more and more about why diseases occur, although of course we are far from understanding everything and there remains much that is beyond our current comprehension. Many medical and technological breakthroughs came about without fully understanding the paradigm from within which they emanated, such as the 'discovery' of X-rays or the 'invention' of microwaves. In both of these cases, a vague understanding of some type of energy along with constant tinkering brought about accidental results which went on to change the course of history and shape every aspect of our medicine and our personal lives. The more we understood these realities, the more we were able to utilize them, to the point of actually harnessing some, like electromagnetic waves, and creating technology that directly utilizes them (such as our cell-phones). From the perspective of a person who has never been taught natural science, there is little to separate how radiation is used in cancer treatment from harnessing qi in order to heal a patient: both appear to be unobservable phenomenon that one must just 'believe' in.

No reasonable scholar would claim that tinkering with and experimenting in a new form of unknown energy would constitute a theological problem. In a similar manner, those who believe in a type of cosmological or dynamic infrastructure, and who then wish to use that type of infrastructure to cure sicknesses, are not committing any theological infraction even if some religions posit a theological underpinning to that infrastructure, or if that infrastructure's very existence is contested by others. As long as the belief and paradigm of that infrastructure is not inherently theologically linked to false gods, the Shariah's stance will be the default of neutrality, or *ibāḥa*. The fact that **some** groups also have false theological beliefs around a paradigm or infrastructure does not necessarily mean that **all** who use that paradigm also have that false belief, as so many of our previous examples have demonstrated.

This author has interviewed a number of Muslims who practice such alternative medicines, including those who practice acupuncture. They all claimed that these medical philosophies did not contain within them a belief in any other God or religious power, and that the origins of these philosophies, and terminologies found in those origins, were incidental to their realities, and an example of how other societies understood these 'facts' of nature.<sup>45</sup>

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45 One Muslim whom I interviewed, 'S.S.', had actually studied in China and was licensed by Chinese medical schools to practice various forms of alternative medicine. He wrote a lengthy email to me, part of which I believe is useful to quote:  
"I studied Chinese medicine for 4 years, and I can tell you that while official Chinese medicine textbooks

The question then arises: what makes a medical treatment impermissible?

***Maxim 3: Treatments that are necessarily associated with the beliefs and rituals of another religion, or which require belief in or praying to another deity, or which the Shariah has explicitly forbidden, are not allowed.***

The only system of medicine that a *faqih* can prohibit on theological grounds is one that *necessarily and intrinsically* involves aspects of *shirk*.

Examples of such treatments would be: invoking deities other than Allah for healing; the usage of 'holy' waters and oils upon which a religious clergy has allegedly conferred healing powers; rituals that involve summoning entities from the spiritual world, such as aspects of Vodun (commonly referred to as 'voodoo'); the usage during the healing process of sacred symbols or objects of reverence that members of a faith-community would recognize and give respect to; participating in rituals that are known to be exclusively faith-based; and of course any treatment that the texts of the Shariah have explicitly prohibited (for example, the usage of astrology).

Here, it is important to note once again that a verdict on whether a paradigm is 'religious' or not must be based on the intent of and key characteristics associated with the people practicing it, and not on how an outsider perceives it. Otherwise, *many aspects of a foreign culture can easily be linked to its religion if one chooses to do so*. This is why the maxim states that a treatment must be *'...necessarily associated...'* with another theology. It is essential to include this condition because the same treatment can be done from an alternative paradigm in which the original theology is excised and made superfluous.

To underscore this point, it is beneficial to once again go back to some of the beliefs and practices common in medieval Islamicate treatments. Ibn Sīna, and through him an entire trajectory of Arab and Muslim medicine, believed in the efficacy of the '*nafs*' in healing the body from disease. As mentioned earlier, this concept was directly imported from the Greek concept of '*pneuma*', which itself was a semi-mythical notion with explicit links to Zeus and the Divine Gods. If one wanted to, it would be fairly easy to decry the obvious pagan elements of this notion, and to add to it salacious quotes from earlier Greek writings that discuss *pneuma* and its relationship with the gods, to then

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printed in China and Taiwan teach the concepts of Qi, Yin & yang and the five elements and the shen (the mind or spirit), never once do any of them relate Qi to any Taoist gods or deities.

In modern practice, practitioners of Chinese medicine mostly fall in one of two camps: (1) belief in Qi as an energy that is an intermediary between the spirit and the physical body and is the primary driving force behind the physical body and can be manipulated, (2) belief that Qi, Yin-Yang and five elements were part of terminologies used over 2000 years ago to try to explain the observed effects of acupuncture, exercise, and herbal medicine. These terminologies have been replaced by modern research and terminology to explain these effects. Although I can understand potential Muslim analogies with the Quranic concept of Allah blowing into human beings from the Divine Spirit, I don't know of a single practitioner who believes that Qi is something that is literally transferred from Taoist deities to humans.

The main point, though, is that it is completely unfair to judge the whole body of Chinese medicine or acupuncture based on some Taoist conceptions of God from over 2000 yrs ago that have negligible relevance today. Doing so would be like judging modern Germans based on the actions of Nazis from the 1930's."

pronounce a verdict of *shirk* on this belief and *tahrīm* on its fairly frequent usage in Unānī medicine. But common sense dictates that we must overlook this origin and long trajectory, because by the time Muslims acquired this concept and transformed it into '*nafs*', it had been completely shorn of any paganistic connections and absorbed into an 'Islamic' ethos and framework. The mere overlap of a belief or treatment in which in one paradigm there is belief in a different god does not make the treatment inherently paganistic when practiced in another paradigm - otherwise the belief in the 'four humors', and the concept of 'pneuma', and even many herbal treatments, would intrinsically be paganistic.

Taking this further, those same sentiments that inspired the Greeks to think of 'pneuma', and which were then adopted by our tradition and 'Islamicized' with the notion of *nafs*, also inspired the Far East to understand the concept of 'chi'. Just as Muslims could cut off their version of medicine - which many doctors of modern medicine in our times would acknowledge merits little actual physical or chemical truth within the conventional medicine paradigm - from its paganistic roots, we must acknowledge that practitioners of other alternative medicines can cut off their understanding of medicine from its paganistic roots. If one wishes to problematize Tai Chi for its alleged Taoist origins, or Western Yoga due to its obvious Indian origins, or chiropractic medicine due to the religious beliefs of its founder, then one should be consistent and also problematize the entirety of pre-modern Muslim medicine in light of its obvious Hellenistic and paganistic roots. Those who find aspects of Chinese medicine problematic because it is based on a belief in an 'energy' permeating through the body should then also find the entirety of medieval Islamic medicine equally problematic, as it was based on a belief in the 'balancing of the humors' and the returning of the balance of the 'pneuma'.

The process of acclimatization or syncretization of a medicinal treatment from one culture to another is a lengthy process. Between the initial introduction of a practice into an originally 'foreign' culture and its eventual adoption and acceptance, there will inevitably be a gray area of ambiguity. During this time, it is possible for the same technique to be considered religious in some subcultures and/or eras and non-religious in others. Perhaps a modern-day example of this is the practice of yoga: it is not unrealistic to posit two mutually exclusive opinions as both being correct: if a *faqīh* in California deems it permissible for mothers in Malibu to sign up to their local yoga classes because no one there has ever heard of the concept of *dukkha* nor are they actively engaged in achieving *moksha*, while a *mufti* in Mumbai says it is *ḥarām* because everyone in his vicinity is aware that these postures and the way they are performed are quintessential rituals practiced solely by practitioners of Hinduism, they are both coming from a solid paradigm and can justify their respective opinions in their cultures. In other words, both of these *fatwas* are simultaneously reasonable and valid, as each is following the general rule, but applying it in a different context which results in a different verdict. It is also possible for there to be a different verdict on a *treatment* and the *individual* who practices it. Perhaps

the default of a paradigm in some cultures is the belief in some supernatural power, but a specific person might individually be excused if he believes it is 'natural'. An example of this might be Reiki as practice in some segments of Japanese culture versus Reiki as practiced in clinics in America.

Of course, there are a small number of techniques that our Shari'ah has explicitly forbidden – any treatments involving such matters shall always be *haram* because of the specific texts regarding them. Examples of such treatments would include astrology or *sihr*.

From all of the above, we conclude that it is essential to look beyond simplistic commonalities between the faith and theology of a culture, and its medicinal philosophies. History, anthropology, and lived reality teaches us that it is possible that the medicinal philosophies and remedies emanating from within a particular theological paradigm can be adopted by people outside of that religious paradigm and shorn from their theological associations.

A *faqih* who wishes to pass a verdict on an alternative medicinal paradigm should be consistent in the application of these principles. If one wishes to claim that a particular treatment is not allowed because it is based on a cause-effect that is imaginary, he should then extend the same ruling of prohibition on homeopathy, or chiropractic cures, both of which are alleged by its detractors to be based on fanciful notions that do not actually exist. And if one wishes to claim that a particular treatment is *shirk* because in some cultures it is associated with aspects of other theologies, he should then also consider acupuncture as an example of *shirk*, because that too is based on the notion that Qi flows through the body and is linked to Daoist theology. Even more explicit, the entirety of pre-modern Muslim medicine should then also be deemed *shirk*. Medieval Muslim medicine is based on ancient Greek understandings of science and medicine, which at some point were also linked with Hellenistic thought and pagan philosophers. ***The historical fact that Greek medicine, and not Chinese, influenced Muslim doctors in the tenth century does not give Greek paganism any privilege over its Chinese counterpart.*** If Ibn Sina is to be excused for his concept of *nafs* and appropriation of the 'Four Humors', modern practitioners of alternative medicines should also be excused.

Therefore, the safer, and more consistent, methodology will be for a *faqih* to separate his own biases from the *fiqh* ruling, and to be consistent in contextualizing and separating medical practices from past theological underpinnings or origin myths. What is important is how a treatment is perceived by those who resort to it, and as long as there is no belief in a false supernatural entity or obvious association with religious rituals, the default of *ibāḥa* remains, and Allah knows best.

وآخر دعوانا أن الحمد لله رب العالمين وصلى الله وسلم على رسوله الكريم

وعلى آل بيته الطاهرين ومن اتبعهم بإحسان إلى يوم الدين