

Scholars of Preventive Medicine and Their Impact on Preserving Human Health in the 3rd Hijri Century (9th Calendar Century) with Abu Zayd Ahmad Ibn Sahl al-Balkhi (d. 322 AH / 934 AD) as a Model: A Historical Cultural Study

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ABSTRACT

This study sheds light on scholars of preventive medicine and their impact on preserving human health in the context of Islamic history and civilization during the 3rd Hijri century (corresponding to the 9th Calendar century), focusing on a single, significant example among the scholars who distinguished themselves in this vital field of human health: the scholar Abu Zayd Ahmad al-Balkhi (d. 322 AH/934 AD). Among the areas in which al-Balkhi excelled and demonstrated great creativity was his concise style, which was in the form of a reminding, simple, guiding and counseling method, which simultaneously elucidates the critical link between the body and the mind. He extensively demonstrated the interconnectedness of the mind and the body, illustrating how the state of one profoundly influences the other. He explained that when the body falls ill, the mind becomes incapable of learning, engaging in other cognitive activities, or performing tasks effectively.

Conversely, when the soul suffers, the body loses its natural capacity for enjoyment, rendering one's life miserable and turbulent. He defined the true nature of psychosomatic illness, stating that it is "a psychological pain that may lead to physical illness." This definition, which was subsequently adopted by the Persian physician Ali Abbas in his works, did not enter the consciousness of Western psychologists till the time when Sigmund Freud began to explore this very concept nearly a full millennium later. Al-Balkhi also offered cognitive solutions and therapeutic interventions. The most impressive aspect of his methodology is perhaps his early application of a pioneering form of cognitive therapy. Through his writings, he advocated the "talk therapy", a method employed to modify an individual's thoughts, thereby leading to a desired improvement in the individual's behavior. His prescribed treatment for depression underscores the concept of psychotherapy, as he recommended the use of "gentle, encouraging conversation to restore a measure of happiness." Furthermore, he advocated the use of music therapy and other activities that can improve a person's psychological state.

The study sheds light on the attention paid by the scholars of preventive medicine within the Islamic tradition and their unwavering commitment to serving humanity, assisting individuals

in overcoming both physical and psychological health challenges, and producing a vast body of scholarly literature. In this regard, a debt of gratitude is truly owed to Western libraries, which have preserved for us systematic manuscripts in this field that have profoundly served humanity in the realm of preventive medicine.

KEYWORDS: Medical Scholars, Preventive Medicine, Al-Balkhi, 3rd Century AH, 9th Century AD.

1. INTRODUCTION

This study sheds light on the distinctive features of Islamic civilization across numerous fields, particularly in the realm of human health; specifically in the domain of preventive medicine. The latter is regarded as one of the most vital sciences within the health sector, focusing on how individuals can safeguard themselves against deadly diseases. From the very earliest centuries of Islamic civilization, medical scholars recognized the paramount importance of human health, viewing it as an integral and inseparable component of both one's religious and worldly life. In doing so, they drew upon the Holy Quran and the Prophet's Sunnah, which explicitly called for self-care and protection against all forms of illness. Distinguished scholars emerged within this scientific discipline, including the scholar Abu Zayd Ahmad al-Balkhi (d. 322 AH / 934 AD), who played a prominent role in the advancement of both preventive and therapeutic medicine and upon whom this study focuses. Al-Balkhi made significant contributions to physical health and the well-being of the soul, in which he connected psychological disorders and mental illness, establishing a clear link between the body and the mind. Al-Balkhi extensively elucidated the intricate relationship between the mind and the body, demonstrating how the state of one profoundly influences the other and proposed innovative cognitive solutions and therapeutic approaches. Perhaps the most impressive aspect of Al-Balkhi's methodology is his pioneering and early application of a form of cognitive therapy.

Through his writings, he advocated "talk therapy"; a method utilized to modify an individual's thoughts, thereby leading to a desired improvement in their behavior. His prescribed treatment for depression underscores the concept of psychotherapy; he recommended the use of "gentle, encouraging conversation to restore a measure of happiness." Furthermore, he advocated the use of music therapy and other activities designed to uplift a person's psychological state. The Greeks had recognized and documented depression prior to Al-Balkhi's era, but what distinguishes Al-Balkhi's approach is that he was the first author to differentiate between depression stemming from environmental or circumstantial factors and depression resulting from internal biological or chemical causes. As for Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Al-Balkhi's descriptive criteria align closely with the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) a text often regarded as the definitive authority on mental illness.

The DSM describes OCD as: "Recurrent and persistent thoughts, urges, or images that are experienced as intrusive and unwanted, and cause marked anxiety or distress." This diagnosis bears a striking resemblance to Al-Balkhi's own description, who characterized the condition as "disturbing and irrational thoughts that hinder an individual from enjoying life and engaging in daily activities. They impair concentration and impede the ability to perform various tasks, allowing fears to take hold at any moment." Moreover, there are evident commonalities between the two texts regarding their descriptions of patients' attempts to suppress these unwanted obsessions; the DSM notes their efforts to "ignore or suppress such thoughts, urges, or images." Al-Balkhi, for his part, described a state in which the individual felt "unable to

employ his mental faculties to engage with anything else, due to his intense preoccupation with looming dangers conjured in his imagination; consequently, he could neither find enjoyment nor focus on what was being said to him, nor could he fully integrate with others. Indeed, whenever he attempted to disregard these thoughts and engage socially, intrusive ideas would surge forth to seize control of his mind." It is worth noting that Al-Balkhi authored more than sixty books; the most significant and renowned among them particularly in the field of preventive medicine was *Masalih al-Abdan w-al-anfus* (The Welfare of Bodies and Souls).

Any reader of Al-Balkhi's works would readily observe the nature of his medical discourse: the language he employs is accessible and easy to comprehend. This was the result of a conscious decision Al-Balkhi made to render his writings intelligible to readers of all backgrounds and levels of understanding. Al-Hamawi his most prominent biographer notes that this quality distinguished him from his peers, as many scholars of that era were prone to excessive verbosity. Commenting on this, Al-Hamawi remarked: "He adopted a concise style, one that serves as a simple mnemonic aid, offering guidance and counsel." This approach garnered his work widespread acceptance and popularity within scholarly circles.

2. Research Significance

The significance of this study lies in uncovering the role of Islamic civilization and that of its scholars across various scientific disciplines, particularly in the fields of human health and preventive medicine during the 3rd century AH (9th century AD). Furthermore, it aims to shed light on a pivotal scholar who played a prominent and significant role in this scientific domain: Abu Zayd Ahmad al-Balkhi (d. 322 AH/934 AD). The study seeks to delineate the scholarly legacy he bequeathed, the accolades he received from subsequent scholars and the scope of his scientific activities and intellectual output, through which he rendered invaluable service to humanity.

3. Research Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to demonstrate the impact of Muslim scholars on the field of preventive medicine. It focuses specifically on one of the most prominent Muslim scholars of the 3rd century AH (9th century AD) in this domain: Abu Zayd Ahmad Ibn Sahl al-Balkhi. The study aims to elucidate his influence within the field of preventive medicine, highlight his most notable works, and examine his scholarly methodology, thereby revealing the true extent of the contributions he made in the service of humanity throughout history.

4. Research Questions

The research will answer a major question, which is:

What was the impact of Muslim scholars on the field of preventive medicine during the 3rd century AH (9th century AD), and who were the most prominent figures of that era? Branching from this central inquiry are several sub-questions: What was the conceptual understanding of preventive medicine during the early periods of Islamic civilization? Who was the scholar Abu Zayd Ahmad al-Balkhi, who rose to prominence during this era? What was his specific impact on the field of preventive medicine? What constituted his most significant scholarly output in this domain? Finally, what were his scientific methodology and stylistic approach to authorship within this vital scientific discipline?

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopted the historical, analytical, critical and descriptive research method in which scientific material is collected from the most reliable sources and then arranged, classified and presented in the form of a descriptive, analytical and critical study, by comparing it with the scientific material contained in the contemporary sources.

6. Research Structure

This study is divided into an introduction which outlines the significance of the research, the scholarly gap it addresses within its specialized field of Preventive Medicine, and the figure of Abū Zayd Aḥmad Ibn Sahl al-Balkhī, one of the most prominent scholars and physicians of Preventive Medicine during the 3rd Hijri century/ 9th Calendar century along with an exposition of his enduring scholarly legacy. The introduction was followed by a statement of the research questions and objectives, as well as a description of the methodology employed in the study. The work is further structured into four main sections and concludes with a summary highlighting the most significant findings reached by the study.

Section One: Abū Zayd Aḥmad Ibn Sahl al-Balkhī: His Personal Life and Death

Abu Zayd Ahmad al-Balkhi was a polymath Muslim scholar of Persian origin. He was born in the town of Shamistiyan located in the vicinity of the city of Balkh (present-day Afghanistan) in the year 235 AH (849 AD).[1] In his early youth, he traveled to Iraq in pursuit of knowledge, where he resided for nearly eight years. During this time, he studied under the philosopher Yaqub Ibn Ishaq al-Kindi, delving deeply into preventive medicine and psychiatry, and establishing the foundational principles of psychosomatic medicine. He excelled in various disciplines, including the natural sciences, philosophy, geography, and mathematics. [2] Upon returning to Balkh, he declined the ministerial position offered to him by the city's then-ruler, Ahmad Ibn Sahl al-Marwazi. He chose instead to distance himself from politics and its affairs, dedicating his attention to scholarship, scholars, and students. [3]

He authored more than sixty books and manuscripts; however, most of his written works were unfortunately lost over the centuries, and only a small fraction of his work has survived into the modern era. Among the few surviving remnants of his intellectual legacy are his development of the "Al-Balkhi School of Terrestrial Cartography" and his work on the "Nourishment of the Soul." Both works demonstrate the immense intellectual prowess of this scholar, leaving us to ponder over the magnitude of the valuable studies and other works that have been lost to history. In his book *Al-Fihrist*, Ibn al-Nadim listed many of al-Balkhi's works, including *The Virtues of Mathematical Sciences*, *The Validity of Astrological Judgments*, and *Forms of Climate*. Such titles attest to his status as a genius of his time, having distinguished himself across a wide spectrum of both the humanities and the applied sciences.[4]

Regarding the death of Abu Zayd Ahmad Ibn Sahl al-Balkhi, the historian Kahhalah notes that most historical sources agree that al-Balkhi died in the city of Balkh at the age of eighty-eight, in the year 322 AH (934 AD).[5]

Section Two: The Concept of Preventive Medicine

Preventive medicine or "health preservation" is concerned with maintaining existing health rather than restoring it. Medical scholars in the Islamic tradition paid close attention to this concept; indeed, Ibn Abi Usaybi'ah defined preventive medicine as the medical discipline

dedicated to "preserving existing health and restoring lost health." [6] Muslims prioritized the preservation of health over its restoration, asserting that safeguarding something already possessed is a nobler endeavor than seeking to recover something lost. Muslim scholars excelled in authoring works on preventive medicine, as exemplified by the book *Masalib al-Abdan w-al-anfus* (The Interests of Bodies and Souls) by Abu Zayd al-Balkhi a work considered to be among the earliest treatises to dedicate a comprehensive study to the preservation of both physical and mental health. [7]

Section Three: The Key Foundations and Principles of Preventive Medicine in Islamic Civilization

1. Purity and Cleanliness: These constitute some of the most fundamental principles of preventive medicine a domain to which Islam accorded immense priority. The Prophet (peace be upon him) stated: "Purity is half of faith." [8] Were we to examine the system of purity within Islam, we would find that it encompasses several key foundations, foremost among them:

Cleanliness includes the removal of filth and impurities from clothing, body, and all other spaces both through the use of water and other substitutes that serve the same purpose, such as earth, leaves, or tissues, as well as the daily washing of the limbs designated for Wudu (ritual ablution) with water, performed by Muslims multiple times throughout the day, along with the washing of the entire body (Ghusl), with particular emphasis placed on frequently and thoroughly washing the hair and skin in various areas, where the purity of water used to remove impurities and to lift both major and minor states of ritual impurity, is stipulated.

The commandment to strictly avoid impurities and filth, whether originating from oneself or from others, such as urine, feces, blood, pus, discharge, vomit, and the saliva of dogs and swine. Were we to compare all of this with modern hygiene systems, we would find that the system of ritual purity (tahara) within Islamic law is broader, more comprehensive, easier to practice, and less costly.

Integral to the concept of purity in Islam is the prescribed practice of rinsing the mouth, inhaling water into the nose, and expelling it during both ablution (wudu) and the ritual bath (ghusl) as well as wiping the ears. These acts serve to reach areas that ordinary external cleaning typically cannot reach. Furthermore, there is a strong emphasis on the use of the siwak and what a remarkable thing the siwak is! It is a cleanser for the mouth and a means of pleasing the Lord. [9] Indeed, oral health is the key to physical health, and the cleanliness of the mouth and nose constitutes one of the most vital means of protection against various diseases.

Among the practices stemming from this concern for general cleanliness is the command to keep homes and courtyards clean. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "Indeed, Allah is Good and loves goodness; He is Clean and loves cleanliness; He is Generous and loves generosity; He is Munificent and loves munificence. Therefore, clean your courtyards." [10]

There is also the command to keep public roads clean; the Prophet (peace be upon him) stated: "Removing a harmful object from the road is an act of charity." [11] A notable example of this is Abu Musa al-Ash'ari; upon his arrival in Basra, he addressed its inhabitants, saying: "The Commander of the Faithful has sent me to you to teach you your Sunnah [Prophetic tradition] and to ensure the cleanliness of your roads." [12]

Another aspect of the system of purity in Islam is the Prophet's (peace be upon him) instruction regarding the "traits of fitrah" (innate human nature). He said: "There are ten traits of fitrah: trimming the mustache, letting the beard grow, using the siwak, inhaling water into

the nose, clipping the fingernails, washing the finger and toe joints, plucking underarm hair, shaving pubic hair, and using water for cleansing after relieving oneself." [13]

2. Prevention of Infectious Diseases and Elimination of Sources of Infection: Islam mandated the eradication of the primary vectors of disease, such as insects, rodents, and other creatures. The Prophet (peace be upon him) stated: "There are five noxious creatures that may be killed both within and outside the Sacred Precincts (al-Haram): the mouse, the scorpion, the crow, the kite (a type of hawk), and the rabid dog." [14]

3. Quarantine: Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) established the foundational principles of quarantine (specifically regarding plague) by instituting the rule that one must neither enter a land afflicted by an epidemic nor leave it. This practice is known today as "quarantine" and serves to prevent the spread of epidemics. This is clearly evident in the Prophet's (peace be upon him) sayings: "An owner of sick livestock should not bring them to graze alongside the livestock of a healthy owner"; [15] "Flee from a leper just as you would flee from a lion"; [16] and "If you hear that the plague has broken out in a land, do not enter it; but if it breaks out in a land while you are already there, do not leave it." [17] Modern medicine confirms that the principle of quarantine is indeed the most effective means of containing and eradicating epidemics.

4. Balanced Nutrition: This involves the directive "Do not be excessive," the regulation of food intake, and the prohibition of certain foods due to the potential harm they pose to human health, while simultaneously emphasizing foods that are beneficial and conducive to human well-being.

This is achieved through dietary discipline and the avoidance of excess in eating and drinking. Allah the Almighty says: "And eat and drink, but be not excessive." [18] The Prophet (peace be upon him) also stated: "A human being fills no vessel worse than his own stomach. A few morsels are sufficient for a human being to keep his back upright (maintain his strength); yet, if he must eat more, then let one-third be for his food, one-third for his drink, and one-third for his breath." [19] This principle serves as a fundamental basis for protection against various digestive disorders, as well as for avoiding lethargy and physical flaccidity.

Furthermore, Islam has prohibited certain foods and beverages that are harmful to the human body as well as to one's psychological and mental health. Almighty states: "Forbidden to you are carrion, blood, and the flesh of swine." [20] Carrion is prone to rapid decay and abounds with toxins, while blood serves as a breeding ground for germs and a reservoir for poisons. As for the various diseases caused by the consumption of pork, these have been conclusively substantiated by modern science, not to mention the pernicious psychological traits that such foods particularly pork tend to instill in those who consume them.

Islam has also prohibited the consumption of intoxicants, narcotics, and substances that induce lethargy. The Almighty declares: "Indeed, intoxicants, gambling, idols, and divining arrows are an abomination of Satan's handiwork; so avoid them that you may succeed." [21] Intoxicants inflict severe harm upon the intellect and the body's vital organs specifically the brain, heart, liver, and kidneys; thus, their prohibition serves as a safeguard for both the mind and the soul. Likewise, gambling was prohibited due to the psychological, social, and economic detriments it entails.

Furthermore, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) recommended starting the day with dates as a safeguard against poison and sorcery, stating: "Whoever starts his day with seven Ajwa dates will not be harmed on that day by either poison or sorcery." [22] He also recommended the use of Ithmid (antimony kohl) for eye care, saying: "The best substance with which you may adorn your eyes is Ithmid, for it sharpens the vision and promotes the

growth of eyelashes." [23] Moreover, Allah the Almighty drew attention to honey and the healing properties it contains declaring: "There emerges from their [the bees'] bellies a drink of varying colors in which there is healing for people." [24] It is also narrated in a Hadith: "Whoever licks a spoonful of honey on three mornings each month shall not be afflicted by any grave calamity." [25]

5. Environmental Hygiene: This entails preventing the contamination of water sources with impurities and filth, as well as refraining from using contaminated sources; for these are the origins of many diseases and epidemics. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "Let none of you urinate in stagnant water." [26] Furthermore, Islam prohibits performing ritual purification (ablution) using impure water or drinking from it. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) also forbade urinating in one's bathing area, out of concern that it might lead to obsessive doubts regarding ritual purity; he said: "Let none of you urinate in his bathing area, for most obsessive doubts [regarding purity] stem from that." [27] It also involves taking preventive measures against domestic accidents and environmental hazards. Examples of this include the Prophet's (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) warning: "Do not leave fire burning in your homes when you go to sleep." [28] Another example is his statement: "When the night falls or when you enter the evening restrains your children [from going out], for the devils roam about at that time. Once an hour of the night has passed, you may let them go. Close your doors and mention the Name of Allah, for Satan does not open a closed door. Tie the mouths of your water skins and mention the Name of Allah; cover your vessels even if only by placing something across them and mention the Name of Allah; and extinguish your lamps." [29] All these measures serve to prevent vermin and harmful creatures from entering the home, to avert fires, and to protect food and drink from contamination by diseases and epidemics.

6. Maintaining Sexual Health: This is achieved by commanding marriage as a means to channel and fulfill sexual desire. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "O young people! Whoever among you is able to bear the responsibilities of marriage let him marry; for it helps one lower his gaze and guard his chastity." [30]

7. Expelling Substances Harmful to Retain: Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) stated: "The substances whose retention and suppression cause harm are ten: blood (when it surges), semen (when it becomes aroused), urine, feces, gas, vomit, sneezes, sleep, hunger, and thirst." [31] Among the most significant remedies prescribed by Islam for the elimination of corrupt humors is cupping (al-hijamah). Regarding this practice, the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) stated: "On the night of my Ascension, I did not pass by any assembly [of angels] without them saying: 'O Muhammad, command your nation to practice cupping.'" [32] He also said: "Indeed, the most excellent remedies with which you treat yourselves are cupping and sea costus." [33] Furthermore, Ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated: "The Messenger of Allah underwent cupping while in the state of Ihram [ritual consecration], due to an ailment he suffered in his head." [34] Cupping involves the extraction of corrupt blood when it becomes agitated and excessive; this process stimulates the generation of fresh blood, rich in immune-boosting white blood cells, to combat and destroy cancerous cells and other invaders attacking the human body. Ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated: "The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) underwent cupping while in the state of Ihram (ritual consecration for pilgrimage), as a result of eating a morsel from a poisoned sheep poisoned by a woman from the people of Khaybar." [35]

Furthermore, Islam instituted marriage as a means to facilitate the discharge of semen and to soothe the agitation of sexual desire. Consequently, it strongly encouraged a wife to accede to her husband's request when he calls upon her, as this serves as a greater catalyst for the enduring affection between them. It drew attention to this sensitive aspect of the marital relationship, recognizing it as a key to resolving many issues and a remedy for various other problems. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "If a man calls his wife to his bed [for intimacy] and she refuses, and he spends the night angry with her, the angels curse her until she wakes up." [36]

Moreover, Islamic law provides guidance that if a Muslim senses the need to expel a harmful substance retained within his body he should proceed to expel it. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) forbade performing prayer while one is *ḥāqīn* (holding back urine), *ḥāqīb* (holding back feces), or *ḥāziq* (holding back flatulence). He stated: "There is no prayer in the presence of food, nor while one is struggling to suppress the 'two impurities'" [37] referring to urine and feces. Ibn Muflīh remarked: "Physicians have stated that suppressing flatulence when the urge to expel it arises leads to urinary retention, dimness of vision, and pain in the heart and head. Suppressing urine leads to all these symptoms, in addition to the formation of urinary stones. Suppressing feces, likewise, leads to all of these complications." [38]

Section Four: Establishing the Foundations of Preventive Medicine within the Islamic Medical Heritage through the Book of “Maṣāliḥ al-Abdān w-al-Anfūs” by Abu Zayd al-Balkhi

The foundations of preventive medicine within the Islamic medical heritage can be firmly established through the examination of the book *Maṣāliḥ al-Abdān w-al-Anfūs* (The Well-being of Bodies and Souls) by Abu Zayd al-Balkhi. This work serves as an exemplary model of preventive medical authorship during the early era of Arab and Islamic civilization, given that al-Balkhi lived during the second half of the 3rd Hijri century and the beginning of the 4th Hijri century. [39]

Furthermore, this book is considered to be among the earliest among Arabic medical works that devoted a specific treatise to the subject of "preserving health". The text of the book addresses the preservation of both physical and mental well-being; as for the restoration of health, according to al-Balkhi, it falls within the domain of healing (i.e., therapeutic medicine). [40]

The book is divided into two treatises: the first addresses the "Interests of the Body," and the second, the "Interests of the Soul."

In this work, Al-Balkhi clarified that discussing the interests of both the body and the soul, i.e. the preservation of bodily health, and the treatment of physical ailments, was a subject that physicians prior to him were not accustomed to mentioning or incorporating into the books that they authored on medicine. This was because such discourse did not fall within the scope of their professional craft, and because the treatment of psychological maladies did not belong to the same category as the procedures they typically practiced such as phlebotomy, the administration of medicinal draughts, and similar therapeutic interventions. Furthermore, there is no indication in the book that it was authored at the behest of a prince or in response to a student's inquiry.

Rather, it appears evident that Al-Balkhi composed it in response to a perceived need to compile such a work a point he explicitly affirmed in the introduction to the second treatise.[41]

Consequently, we observe that Al-Balkhi frequently employed terminology related to "health preservation" (preventive medicine) rather than therapeutic terminology, given that he did not delve into the subject of specific diseases. Among the terms he utilized are: *tadābir* (regimens/measures), *ta'ahhud* (care/maintenance), *ṣiyānah* (preservation), *maṣāliḥ al-abdān* (interests of the body), *maṣāliḥ al-anfūs* (interests of the soul), *ḥifẓ al-ṣiḥḥah* (health preservation), *salāmah* (well-being/safety), and *ḥusn al-ā'idah* (beneficial impact) upon the body and soul.

We also find that, within the medical literature of Arab-Muslim scholars, the subject of health preservation was addressed in one of two ways: either through standalone volumes dedicated specifically to health preservation as their primary subject matter, or as a distinct chapter or section within the broader organizational structure of a medical treatise. Prominent among the scholars who adopted the latter approach was Abu Zayd Ahmad Ibn Sahl al-Balkhi, in his seminal work *Maṣāliḥ al-Abdān w-al-anfūs* (The Interests of the Body and the Soul).

Indeed, it can be asserted that Abu Zayd al-Balkhi's book offers a broad and comprehensive coverage of the subject of health preservation. I shall therefore provide a concise overview of this work specifically the edition titled *Maṣāliḥ al-Abdān w-al-anfūs*, edited by Dr. Mahmoud Masri (2002) which, as previously noted, comprises two treatises: the first addressing the "Interests of the Body," and the second, the "Interests of the Soul." The First Treatise comprises fourteen chapters, as follows:[42]

Chapter One: On setting forth the extent of the need to attend to the body, and the benefits and returns thereof.

Chapter Two: On describing the origins of things, the inception of human nature, human constitution, and the structure of the body's organs.

Chapter Three: On the management of dwellings, water, and air.

Chapter Four: On the management of shelters and clothing that provide protection against heat and cold.

Chapter Five: On the management of food

Chapter Six: On the management of drink

Chapter Seven: On the management of scents and inhalations

Chapter Eight: On the management of sleep

Chapter Nine: On the management of sexual activity

Chapter Ten: On the management of bathing

Chapter Eleven: On the management of physical exercise

Chapter Twelve: On the management of practices following physical exercise, such as body

Chapter Thirteen: On the management of listening to music and sounds

Chapter Fourteen: On the management of restoring physical health

The Second Treatise comprises eight chapters, as follows:

Chapter One: On setting forth the extent of the need to attend to the well-being of the soul

Chapter Two: On the management of preserving the health of the soul

Chapter Three: On the management of restoring the health of the soul should it be lost

Chapter Four: On enumerating and listing psychological states and symptoms

Chapter Five: On the management of dispelling and suppressing anger

Chapter Six: On the management of calming fear and panic

Chapter Seven: On the management of warding off grief and distress

Chapter Eight: On the strategies of dispelling inner turmoil and intrusive thoughts

The significance of this book stems from its status as one of the earliest works dedicated entirely to the subject of health preservation emerging at the very dawn of the era of scholarly authorship within the Arab-Islamic civilization as well as from the comprehensiveness of its themes, the richness of its scientific content, and the excellence of its organization.

Furthermore, the work distinguished itself by incorporating topics of mental health alongside those of physical health, addressing them in a distinct and detailed manner. This approach effectively established psychiatry as an independent medical specialty. Al-Balkhi observes: "Discussion regarding this particular domain is a matter that physicians have not customarily included or addressed in the books they authored on medicine, bodily well-being, or the treatment of physical ailments. This is because such discourse does not fall within the scope of their professional craft; moreover, the treatment of psychological disorders does not align with the therapeutic interventions they typically employ such as bloodletting, the administration of medicinal potions, and similar physical treatments." [43]

Among the subjects Al-Balkhi addresses in his book regarding the preservation of health is, for instance, the proper management of diet (nutrition).

In the fifth chapter of the first treatise, he states: "The foremost duty incumbent upon anyone concerned with the well-being of their body is to devote their utmost attention to the matter of nutrition, ensuring that its management is conducted with absolute correctness. For neither humans nor any other living creatures can possibly survive in this world without sustenance. Should a living being be deprived of food, it will perish and its physical constitution will disintegrate; conversely, should it consume food that is incompatible with its inherent nature and bodily constitution, it will fall ill. Indeed, for many, such illness leads ultimately to death particularly if the condition becomes chronic or protracted, and if the individual fails to seek prompt medical treatment. However, should one manage their diet correctly consuming precisely the quantity required by the body, neither depriving it of its necessary sustenance nor exceeding that limit one may, by the permission and will of God Almighty, remain free of the majority of ailments and diseases throughout the entirety of one's life." [44]

Among Abu Zayd al-Balkhi's medical counsels for maintaining health were those concerning drink. In the sixth chapter of this treatise titled "The Management of Drink" al-Balkhi discusses beverages in general, stating: "The need for drink is inextricably linked to the need for food; neither can suffice on its own, nor can its function be fully realized without the other. This is because food is, for the most part, a solid substance that requires a fluid medium to bind its constituent parts together." [45]

Regarding the management of physical exercise, Abu Zayd al-Balkhi addresses the subject in the eleventh chapter, noting: "Among the necessities for preserving health is the practice of walking and riding undertaken with measure and moderation for these activities serve the same purpose as the most noble and beneficial of medical treatments. This is because God blessed and exalted be He created human beings, as well as all other animals, with a constitution that renders them utterly dependent upon the interplay of movement and stillness to sustain their lives, facilitate their daily existence, and maintain a balance between the two." [46]

The most effective form of movement for preserving health is walking, for in the act of walking, every single part of the body is set in motion, thereby receiving its full share of physical stimulation. Riding, conversely, falls far short of walking in terms of the benefits it confers; this is because the rider moves only through the motion of his mount, while his own body remains largely inert devoid of the physical exertion specific to human locomotion.

Consequently, a walker experiences a degree of physical exertion and fatigue that a rider would attain only after a significantly prolonged period.[47]

Among the other topics al-Balkhi addresses in his book is the management of the health of the soul. In the second treatise titled "The Management of Preserving the Health of the Soul" he outlines the means of safeguarding the soul against both external and internal afflictions. This involves shielding it from external stimuli those elements within the surrounding environment that engage the human senses and thereby stir the psychological faculties as well as protecting it from internal imbalances. As he states: "The body's health is preserved in two primary ways: first, by shielding it from external afflictions such as excessive heat or cold and second, by shielding it from internal afflictions; that is, by ensuring that none of the four bodily humors are allowed to become agitated or thrown into disequilibrium." [48]

Among the significant examples addressed by Al-Balkhi in his book is the management, suppression, and containment of anger. This topic is covered in the second treatise, specifically in the fifth chapter. Anger is a psychological affliction to which humans are susceptible due to the various vicissitudes and personal hardships they encounter in life, and afflictions that may befall an individual with frequent regularity, driven by the circumstances of daily existence. Consequently, a person requires the means to suppress this emerging malady of anger and to understand its manifold causes. The most crucial virtue in eradicating anger is the refusal to yield to it by exercising self-restraint and prioritizing the virtues of pardon and forgiveness. Al-Balkhi elucidates the benefits of such conduct, both in this life and in the hereafter, emphasizing the immense divine reward bestowed by God.[49]

Conversely, in the second treatise, specifically the sixth chapter, Al-Balkhi discusses the alleviation of fear and panic. He characterizes fear and panic as psychological afflictions that inflict physical harm upon the body; indeed, one must guard against their detrimental effects, particularly when they become excessive. Panic, in this context, represents an extreme manifestation of fear; for not every object of human apprehension escalates to the level of panic. Rather, panic is triggered by a specific fearful stimulus such as something one contemplates, hears about, or visually encounters which overwhelms the individual to the extent that it drives them into a state of panic.[50]

Furthermore, such panic typically arises only in response to something one is currently witnessing or something one anticipates that it will befall them in the immediate future. As for an event whose occurrence is feared only in the distant future after a considerable lapse of time, contemplating it may indeed induce sorrow, but it does not typically generate within the individual that overwhelming intensity of fear, which is capable of utterly consuming their mind and senses. An example of this is a person contemplating the inevitability of aging and mortality. Indeed, whenever a person brings these matters to mind, he feels a sense of distress; yet, this apprehension does not reach a level that causes him acute agitation or terror. Similarly, if a person hears of a potential danger situated far away, it does not instill fear in him unless that danger is in close proximity, specifically, within his immediate line of sight. The objects of human fear are numerous and diverse in nature: for instance, the fear of a person in authority of being deposed, the fear of a wealthy individual of falling into poverty, and various other circumstances into which one fears being thrust. However, no fear affects a human being as profoundly as the fear for one's own self, specifically, the apprehension of an imminent calamity expected to befall one shortly, such as physical destruction or excruciating pain. This is the specific type of fear that causes acute agitation and terror, altering a person's demeanor so visibly that the distress becomes plainly evident in his outward appearance.[51]

Al-Balkhi further clarified that human temperaments vary in terms of the degree of fear and terror they experience. Some individuals, by virtue of their robust constitution, remain undaunted by sudden adversities that confront them; others, due to a weaker constitution, are thrown into a state of severe panic and shock when suddenly struck by such events. The most effective remedy for this condition lies in training, disciplining, and conditioning the self to cultivate endurance and acceptance. This is achieved through practice, acceptance, and crucially by confronting and living with dangers, in order to master them; through this process, the soul finds tranquility and relief from the threat.[52]

Al-Balkhi also noted that one of the factors contributing to the elimination of fear and terror is drawing lessons and wisdom from the experiences of the forerunners who lived before them and whom adversities befell, yet they bore them with fortitude, finding that which one should draw an analogy from this; for contemplating such matters aids a person in warding off the afflictions of fear. Al-Balkhi noted that the most effective strategy for mitigating fear and dread of fearful experiences is to acquire an abundance of knowledge and understanding about them. This is to be followed by habituating one's senses of sight and hearing, and to observe whatever appears terrifying to the eye and to listen to whatever is unpleasant to the ear. One must also compel oneself to endure these hardships repeatedly until they become familiar and habitual; thereafter, one's apprehension and concern regarding them will diminish. Enduring such hardships serves as a form of discipline for the soul much in the same way an animal is trained by being urged with a whip to approach an object from which it instinctively shies away. As its gaze repeatedly falls upon that object, it eventually becomes accustomed to it, and the instinct of aversion along with its attendant affliction vanishes.[53]

To avoid undue length, we conclude with a final example drawn from the important and fundamental principles of preventive medicine articulated by Al-Balkhi in his work, *Masalih al-Abdan w-al-anfus* (The Interests of Bodies and Souls). This example appears in the second treatise, under the seventh chapter, titled "The Management of Repelling Grief and Despair." Al-Balkhi explains that grief and despair give rise to psychological symptoms that exert a negative influence on human life, inflicting significant harm upon an individual if they succeed in taking hold of one's heart. This is clearly evident in the observable state of a person consumed by despair and their appearance transforms into a most wretched form, and then they inflict upon themselves numerous afflictions when patience fails them and despair gains complete mastery over them. Al-Balkhi further clarifies that despair (*al-jaza'*) constitutes an excess and intensification of "grief" (*al-huzn*). Thus, despair is akin to a blazing fire, whereas grief resembles the smoldering embers that remain after the flames have subsided. It is the most potent force for physically debilitating the body, altering the soul's vital energies and appetites, and stripping away its radiance and vitality. It is as if the human soul which serves as the very light and illumination of the body becomes, in moments of overwhelming sorrow and grief, like a sun eclipsed: its light extinguished, and its brilliance utterly lost. In short, grief produces effects diametrically opposed to those of joy; for we observe the face of a joyful person laughing, beaming, radiant, and bright whereas we observe the face of a sorrowful person to be the exact opposite.[54]

Al-Balkhi notes that grief falls into two categories: The first is that which stems from a known cause such as when a person is afflicted by grief due to the loss of a loved one (whether a member of a family or a friend), the loss of wealth, or the loss of anything else of profound personal significance. The second category is that which stems from an unknown cause; this manifests as a pervasive gloom that a person feels weighing upon their heart at all times a state that inhibits their vitality, prevents them from outwardly expressing joy, and renders them

incapable of truly deriving pleasure or enjoyment from any of life's delights or desires, without being able to identify any specific external event or circumstance to which they might attribute this sense of lethargy and brokenness.

As for sorrow of unknown origin, it stems from physical symptoms; its genesis lies in a lack of blood purity, or in the blood becoming cold or vitiated. The remedy for it from the standpoint of physical treatment involves purifying, warming, and thinning the blood through the consumption of foods and medicines known to effect such changes. From the standpoint of psychological treatment, the remedy lies in gently coaxing joy into the soul through conversation, companionship, and the enjoyment of whatever delights the spirit specifically, those things that stimulate the faculty of joy within it, such as pleasant music and similar experiences through which a person finds cheer and dispels gloom from the self.[55]

As for the sorrow we described as having a known cause which arises from dwelling upon the loss of a beloved person or the unattainability of a desired object (and this is the specific affliction whose treatment is the primary focus of this chapter), it should be remedied by two distinct strategies: one external, and the other internal. The external strategy consists of the admonition of counselors and the reminders who offer guidance; for this constitutes the true medicine for psychological ailments, serving as the direct counterpart to the potions and remedies a physician uses to treat physical maladies.[56] The internal strategy, conversely, involves specific avenues of thought through which a person disciplines the self, forging them into a weapon and a defense to ward off gloom and sorrow should they be assailed by such feelings that result from the loss of a loved one or the unattainability of a desired goal.

Foremost among these avenues of thought is to reflect upon the physical ailments and afflictions that excessive sorrow is liable to precipitate, which could also inflict the gravest harm upon one's health. Consequently, armed with this knowledge, one should refuse to allow the self which is, in truth, one's most cherished and beloved, to be sacrificed for the sake of any other object of affection, be it family, wealth, or any other possession; for to do so would be to inflict injury upon oneself and to squander one's most precious asset. He may, perhaps, desire every object of affection solely for the sake of that supreme beloved, which is his own self. Consequently, he acts with excessive grief, thereby bringing about the very destruction of that self; and in doing so, he forfeits the very foundation of which the lost object was merely a branch. He thus resembles one who trades away a potential profit, only to lose his entire capital in the process and that is the greatest of deceptions and the most manifest of losses.[57]

Another consideration is to reflect upon the true nature of this world and the pursuit of its establishment: namely, that life within it never remains pure for anyone, nor does it ever fully align with one's desires and affections that make one never loses a beloved object, nor finds any desired goal unattainable. Given this reality, whatever one does manage to acquire in this world whether a beloved object or a moment of pure contentment, should be regarded as a bonus and a windfall. For once a person adopts this perspective, he finds true enjoyment in whatever pleasures remain unblemished for him; his regret over unfulfilled desires ceases to be overwhelming; and his life remains pleasant throughout his entire sojourn in this world. Furthermore, one should reflect on the fact that whenever one lacks the inner strength to endure a particular calamity, that very lack of endurance becomes, in itself, the greater of the two calamities. For this world is replete with unforeseen events and misfortunes; thus, if a person lacks the inner fortitude to bear the weight of such occurrences, he will remain perpetually mired in a succession of compounding misfortunes. Conversely, if he disciplines his soul to abstain from panic and despair, he effectively severs the bitterness of future

calamities from his being. He refuses, therefore, to allow a single misfortune to multiply into many simply because of a lack of patience; rather, he strives to transform a multitude of misfortunes into a single, manageable trial, thereby attaining the fullness of true happiness.[58] A third consideration is to reflect upon the fact that surrendering oneself to grief and despair in the face of calamities and misfortunes is the conduct of the faint-hearted ones and those of weak resolve and fragile nature, such as women and children. Conversely, demonstrating fortitude and patience in the face of such mishaps is the path of the resolute and the accomplished ones who have left behind a legacy of enduring renown by virtue of the steadfastness they imposed upon themselves during adversity, meeting it with patience and acceptance. Consequently, beautiful tales of their conduct have survived, becoming enduring legacies for their successors to recount in their praise. Thus, a person of dignity should not consent to choose that reprehensible path the way of the incapable and the deficient over this noble path: the way of the resolute, the virtuous, the accomplished, and the noble.[59]

Furthermore, one should reflect that for every sorrow born of a specific calamity, the passage of days inevitably brings about its aftermath and engenders solace. The most arduous moment of any affliction is the very instant of its occurrence; every subsequent moment becomes progressively easier to bear, and the burden of that calamity grows lighter. Thus, one finds relief in the hopeful anticipation that this affliction will eventually pass; indeed, as the days go by, its intensity is in a constant state of decline. Reflecting upon the eventual lifting of an affliction yields immediate solace. These concepts we have outlined drawn from the realm of contemplative thought serve as beneficial aids in dispelling grief and despair during times of calamity and misfortune. They constitute the strategies one may employ to navigate such trials; and in their application lies manifest benefit, God Almighty willing.[60]

CONCLUSION

Based on this study, a set of findings has emerged for the researcher, which are fitting to present here as the conclusion to this work, while praying to God Almighty that He may grant us benefit through them. These findings are outlined in the following points:

The study has demonstrated that Muslim scholars of preventive medicine during the early Islamic eras played a significant role in safeguarding human health by prioritizing prevention before the onset of disease, of the kind that is presented by the physician-scholar Abu Zayd Ahmad al-Balkhi (d. 322 AH / 934 AD), who lived during the 3rd Hijri century (9th Calendar century). He served as a prominent exemplar, dedicating himself to preventive medicine and the preservation of health prior to the occurrence of illness or physical infirmity. This achievement is clearly evident in the scientific and preventive medical legacy he bequeathed through his book, “Masalih al-Abdan w-al-anfūs” (The Interests of Bodies and Souls) a work regarded as one of the earliest texts to devote a comprehensive inquiry specifically to the preservation of both physical and mental health.

- Furthermore, “Masalih al-Abdan w-al-anfūs” stands as one of the earliest Arabic medical treatises to dedicate an entire, standalone volume exclusively to the subject of health preservation. Prior to this, most medical texts typically subsumed topics related to health preservation within broader medical encyclopedias alongside other medical disciplines. Thus, while historians of science generally regard “Firdaws al-Hikmah” (The Paradise of Wisdom) as the first encyclopedic Arabic medical compilation, we may rightfully consider al-Balkhi’s work to be the first specialized Arabic treatise dedicated specifically to the preservation of

health. Another distinguishing feature of this book is that it represents the first compilation to gather research on mental health and integrate it within the framework of a medical text.

- The study has demonstrated that the book of “Masalih al-Abdan w-al-anfūs” will aid in shedding light upon a significant historical period that has hitherto received insufficient scholarly attention. Furthermore, it facilitates an understanding of the historical evolution of the science of preventive medicine, thereby contributing to the bridging of a gap observed between the preventive medicine of the Greeks and that of scholars such as al-Razi, al-Majusi, and Ibn Sina; a gap for which no scientific explanation has yet been found.
- This study establishes that al-Balkhi is rightly considered the first scholar to view the body and the soul collectively as an integrated, unified entity, arguing that the practice of preventive medicine should address them as a single, indivisible whole. Indeed, in the first chapter of the second treatise of his work, he states: "Discussion of this particular subject, is a matter that physicians have not customarily addressed, nor have they typically included within the books they authored about medicine, the preservation of bodily health, or the treatment of physical ailments."
- The study further affirms that al-Balkhi was the first to discuss organic symptoms of psychosomatic origin. Moreover, it highlights his attainment of numerous insights that reveal the profound depth of his perspective within his research, specifically regarding environmental health and mental well-being.
- The study also casts light upon the scientific, social, and political milieu in which this scholar was raised, as well as his interactions with that environment. It also uncovers his scholarly connections particularly his influence on the writings of his student, al-Razi, in the field of preventive medicine and examines critical points of inquiry, such as al-Balkhi's relationship with the medical sciences, whether he did, in fact, practice medicine, and whether he authored other works within this discipline.
- The study demonstrated that, in his book “Masalih al-Abdan w-al-anfūs”, the author revealed numerous concepts of health science that remain relevant and applicable in our modern era.
- One of the book's notable merits is that it highlights the necessity of integrating humanistic aspects with the advancements of material civilization within the methodologies of applied sciences, thereby elevating contemporary civilization to its rightful stature.
- Our examination of the works of health preservation through preventive medicine authored by Arab Muslims revealed that maintaining health constitutes the very foundation of human existence rather than being merely a subsidiary branch of medical care. Consequently, their guidance and directives consistently emphasized preserving health when it is present, and striving to restore it using the simplest means possible should it be lost. Indeed, the majority of these physicians advocated for dietary therapy as superior to pharmaceutical intervention; or, should medication become necessary, they recommended the use of simple (single-ingredient) remedies rather than compound ones, so as to avoid inflicting any harm upon human health.
- During the early Islamic eras, Arab Muslims were pioneers in the fields of health preservation and the promotion of both personal and public hygiene. Their commitment was driven by the texts and teachings of Islam, as embodied in the Holy Quran and the Hadiths (sayings and traditions) of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).
- Muslim scholars such as Abu Zayd al-Balkhi, Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Al-Razi, Al-Zahrawi, Ibn al-Baitar, and Al-Ghassani made significant contributions to the advancement of medical sciences, laying the groundwork for numerous health and preventive protocols. In their

writings, they addressed topics pertaining to nutrition, hygiene, and the critical importance of maintaining the body's equilibrium between dietary intake and physical activity a theme explored by scholars such as Abu Zayd al-Balkhi and other luminaries of Islamic medicine.

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