

Avicenna as the Forerunner of Preventive Medicine: On the Occasion of 1032nd Birth Anniversary of Avicenna (22 August 980)

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Although the medical history of each country is closely related with that of other countries, Iranian medicine, along with the Greek and Arabic ones, provided a series of completing thoughts by virtue of “philosophy of history.” Always, the pioneers have attempted to transfer their thoughts and experiences to the next generation, and other people have attempted to add some issues and experiences to them, but without any doubt, all of the tribes, did not have the same share. Sometimes an important historical incident would bring a sudden change in the inner talents of nations; within the framework of this growth, they could advance in the field of global health and medicine for some time.^[1] The Islamic and Iranian thinking and belief along with the innate talent for innovation of this population advanced for several centuries.^[2] As a result, in the shadow of mixing cultures and civilization, dynamism and reality of acquiring science and knowledge, encouraging followers to conduct research about the phenomena of the world, mixing different cultures in the open lands, and existence of educational and research centers with record of Jondishapour, Horan, and Alexandria has created a situation wherein in the following centuries, a tree that was irrigated by mixing science and faith was grown; the enriched culture of ancient Iran, advanced history and culture of ancient Egypt

and other Islamic nations were developed; and scientists like Rhazes, Ahvazi, Avicenna, and Jorjani were presented to the world.^[3]

Avicenna is the writer of the third encyclopedia of traditional medicine called Canon of Medicine, and was the forerunner of Preventive Medicine. His corpus also includes writing on philosophy, astronomy, alchemy, geology, psychology, Islamic theology, logic, mathematics, physics, as well as poetry.^[4] He was born near Bokhara in ancient Iran. He was a born prodigy and is said to have mastered Quran by the age of 10. Aristotle’s ideas intrigued him, and he also studied about commentators like al-Farabi. The entire gamut of human knowledge was within his purview: grammar, poetry, geometry, astronomy, anatomy, physiology, materia medica, and surgery. In fact, until the mid-17th century, the medical curriculum of the Christian universities, including those in the British Isles, was based on Avicenna’s writings.^[5]

In the Canon of Medicine, Avicenna regarded the goal of medicine as keeping health and returning it while having disease; furthermore, he referred to the importance of sport health, environmental health, family health, housing health, and effect of different factors on human health, and has announced his society basis and his health orientation message in Public Health

and Series at Ancestors Medicine Book.^[6] Thus, he is well known as the forerunner of Preventive Medicine.^[7,8] In the second millennium, by wisdom and insisting on the ability within knowledge, he started working by insisting on nobility and priority of prevention to treatment and gave the slogan of medical social basis, “goal of medicine is keeping health and returning it while having disease.”^[9] By mixing science and faith and gaining privilege from science and faith, we can achieve the divine ranks and eternal global fame.^[10] Findings include writing style of monotheistic literature, and freeing from nihilism and affiliating diseases to Satan, jinn, and such issues. It is necessary that students in the course of Iranian and Islamic culture and civilization be more familiar with monotheistic thoughts and activities of scientists like Avicenna.^[1]

Therefore, at this point comes the story of one of the greatest men that this world has never seen. It is neither the court of caliphs nor one of the noble families of Baghdad that produced this prodigy. He was the son of a middle-class countryman in a far-away trans-Caspian province, and it is said that he was the son of a tax collector. Here is a man whose writings influenced the whole of Europe, although he died before he was 60 and never traveled outside the semi-desert of central Asia. His countrymen hailed him as the second teacher, the chief master; he has been included by Dante in Paradise, along with the greatest intellects of the non-Christian world; and William Harvey would say to his friend Aubrey 600 years after Avicenna’s death: “Go to the fountain-head and read Aristotle, Cicero and Avicenna.”^[11] “Avicenna is genius and rare person in which knowing him needs a whole life and introducing him needs a very thick book.”^[12] The present-day medicine is as a result of trials and errors and experiences of Islamic, Christian, Jewish, Zoroastrian, Greek, Indian, and Egyptian ancestors. Avicenna is a scientist belonging to all the people of the world; to those who follow his monotheistic thoughts and dynamic way.^[8] Avicenna’s Canon of Medicine is not only society based and health oriented, but also is research centered and always emphasized on prevention of diseases and health promotion. He has mentioned in the introduction of his encyclopedia that the goal of medicine is first of all, keeping health, i.e.

primary prevention, and finally returning health to patients (secondary and tertiary prevention). However, actually medical students are mostly trained for diagnosis and treatment of disease. It is necessary for them to become more familiar with activities of scientists like Avicenna to substitute the unfilled place of “preventive medicine” and spirituality in the current medical practice.

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