

ORIGINAL ARTICLE


A study of Afzal Kermani's Medical Views (The Treatise of "*Salah al-Sahah fi Hafiz al-Sahah*")

Abstract

Afzaluddin Abu Hamed known as Afzal Kermani, in addition to his profession of historiography, has also had a prominent status in medical sciences. However, in works related to the history of medicine in Iran and Islam, his works and views have been neglected. In the present study, an attempt has been made to examine his views concerning his written works or those attributed to him, especially those left with an emphasis on the medical treatise. The research findings indicate that he was a competent and trusted doctor at that time and was appreciated by the people and local governors of Kerman and Yazd. In Kerman, he has also left a valuable contribution to medical science: in practical and theoretical medicine, especially in writing books. To the extent that he can be considered one of the pioneers of theorists and practice in the principles of personal and public health and preventive medicine.

Key words: Afzal Kermani, Medical Perspectives, Principles of Prevention, *Salah al-Sahah* Treatise

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Introduction

Afzal-ud-Din Abu Hamed, known as “Afzal Kermani”, is one of the most well-known people from Kerman in the field of medicine, historiography and literature in the sixth and first half of the seventh century AH, and is among great men, secretariats and agents of local governors of Kerman and Yazd in that historical context. In connection with the life and scientific record of Afzal Kermani, several books, dissertations and articles have been published. However, the authors’ main focus is on introducing and describing his historical works and the method of historiography and correction of historical and medical works. However, concerning his scientific status, knowledge, resume and medical views on the surviving works - especially the medical treatise in Persian, no independent and coherent research has been conducted to investigate this, and hence there is a research gap in this area.

In the present study, we are faced with the following fundamental question: what are the achievements of and theories proposed by Afzal Kermani in the practical and theoretical dimensions of medical knowledge? In response to this question, employing library and documentary methods, an attempt has been made to describe and analyze his position and archives in this field. The collection of findings and data are discussed within the article’s scope and in several sections, as described below.

Afzal Kermani and Medical knowledge

Historical documents indicate that Afzal Kermani, the oldest local and renowned physician of Kerman province in medical sciences, enjoyed a knowledgeable and scientific reputation in the geographical area and beyond (Yazd city). (Beig Babapou, 2006, p. 44) Although in his historical works, he never provided a detailed explanation of his medical activities, in describing historical events during his life, he, more or less, mentioned his position and scientific role in this regard, as well as educational measures, the establishment and management of hospitals in Kerman and Yazd. He spoke of the financial support, encouragement and trust of local authorities. (Afzal Kermani, 1977, pp. 161-160, 154, 89-88)

The most important medical work of Afzal Kermani, known as “*Salah al-Sahah fi Hafiz al-Saha*”, is one of the important documents that clearly express and introduces his knowledge, experiences and skills in medical sciences and related topics, focusing on the features of that historical period. (Malek Mohammadi, 2013, p. 553; Basiri, 2004, p. 44) This work is considered the first independent treatise in the Persian language in the field of personal and public health education, emphasizing the principles of disease prevention. Regarding the priority of prevention over treatment, the author emphasizes that: “In medicine, maintaining health and treatment of patients are of equal importance.” (Afzal Kermani, 1977, p. 43).

Several copies of the treatise are available in Iranian libraries and even in France (Paris). In Iran, it is found in Tehran, in the Central Library of the University of Tehran No. 5188 / Medical 238/10, the Islamic Parliament Library, No. 7865-10 (Figure 1). It is also available in the list of manuscripts and treatises published in Nastaliq script. It is worth mentioning that no remarkable differences were found in these copies, indicating their faithfulness to the original manuscripts. The existing copy was rewritten by an Iranian calligrapher named Abolhassan Ibn Mohammad Gholi Jarbadghani in 1033 AH. In the



recent period, in 1977, Mr Mohammad Ali Ameri, has corrected the appendix of one of the author's historical works (Aqd al-Ali Lalmufq al-'Ali), and published it.

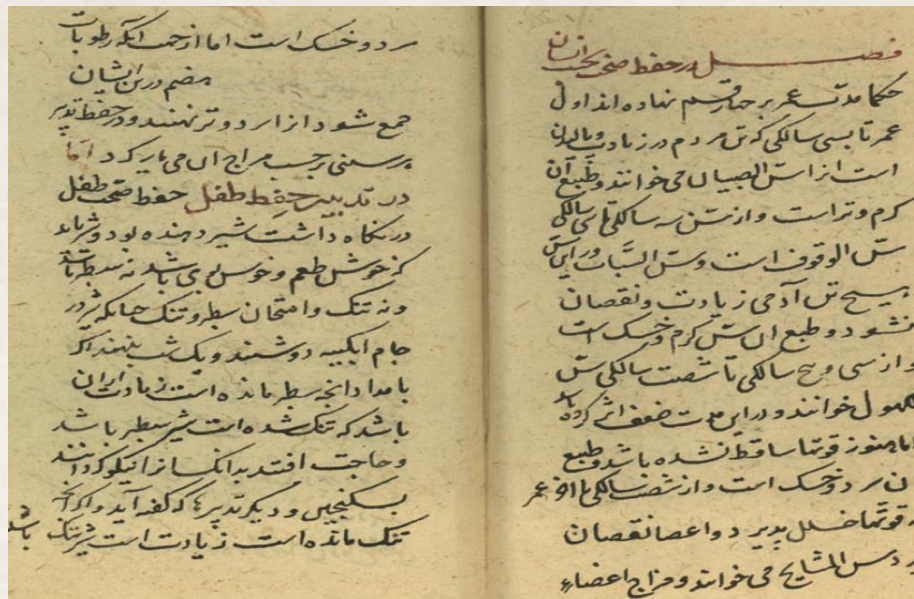


Figure 1. Manuscript of *Salah al-Sahih in the Preservation of Health* (Afzal Kermani, n.d., p. 125)

The Content of the Treatise

The “*Salah al-Sahih fi Hafiz al-Sahh*” treatise comprises an introduction, several chapters and the main topic. The introduction begins with a quotation from the Holy Prophet (PBUH) who says: “Knowledge is divided into two categories: knowledge of the body and medicine and knowledge of rituals and religions.” (Karaajaki, 1985, p. 239; Najmabadi, 1974, p. 123) In explaining the quotation, the author adds that every wise person must acquire sufficient knowledge in medicine. Although they may not be able to treat the patient, they can succeed in maintaining health and preventing disease. In stating the purpose and motivation of writing the treatise, he posits that the main purpose of writing and compiling this scientific dissertation is to help maintain health and give health and prevention recommendations to the rulers and the officials. Concerning the book's content in the field under discussion, it is worth mentioning that, before writing this book, no efficient independent work was written in Persian, and this is considered the first research-oriented work published in Persian in this field. At the end of the introduction, he refers to the sources used in the treatise, in general, including the Greek medical works - especially those of Hippocrates and Galen - and the major works of Islamic physicians and sages. Then, he outlines the general contents of the treatise. (Figure 2)

The first section of chapter one contains the advice given by physicians and sages on maintaining health, disease prevention, and moderation and temperance. The discussion begins with quotations from Galen and Hippocrates. For instance, it quotes Galen stating that: maintaining good health is an art, leading to survival and taking advantage of worldly pleasures. The writer continues by providing examples and recommendations from prominent leaders of the Islamic world (the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and Imam Ali



(AS). They emphasize maintaining moderation in consuming food and considering this the best factor in keeping good health. (Afzal Kermani, 1977, p. 46). In further explanation of the importance of the subject discussed, he quotes the following ten principles from the special physician of Anushirvan, the famous Sasanian king, which are, in fact the health recommendations given to the king.

- A: Empty bowels before bed
- B: Refrain from eating unripe fruits
- C: Avoid taking medication as much as possible
- D: Avoid having excessive sex
- E: Avoid having sex with old women
- F: Eat food when hungry
- G: Avoid unnecessary cupping
- H: Avoid consuming hard foods
- I: Take a bath every two days
- J: Cleansing the body of impurities correctly and effectively (Afzal Kermani, 1977, p. 47).

In the second section of chapter one, the author has discussed some necessary and essential principles in maintaining health and disease prevention one by one, as follows:

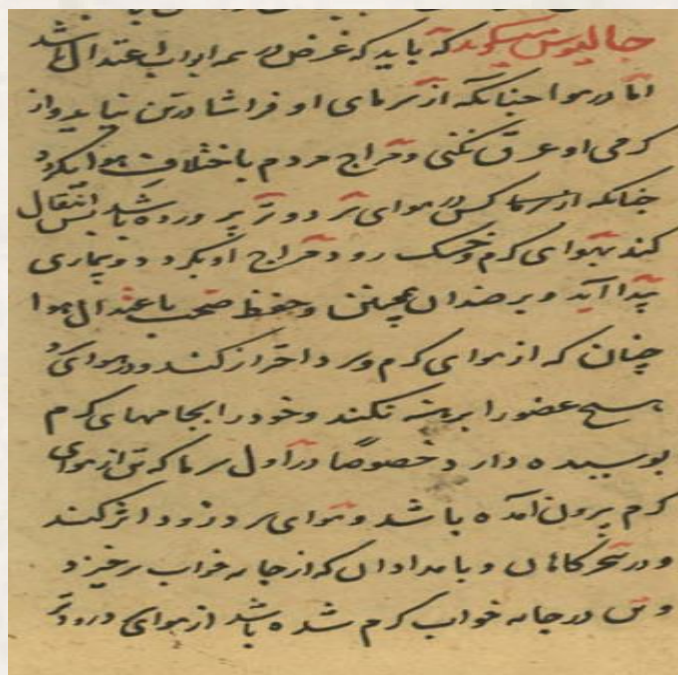


Figure 2. Manuscript of *Salah al-Sahih* (Afzal Kermani, n.d., p. 115)

1- Concerning the importance of the air in maintaining health and preventing diseases, it briefly mentions the following points:

- A: Avoid cold weather, especially at the beginning of the cold season, at dawn and when getting out of the warm bed.
- B: Avoid hot weather as much as possible, and in case of exposure to that, consume



fresh fruits and vegetables - including pears, lettuce, willow leaves, and Myrtus leaves. Moreover, it is advised to cool the resting place with water and other cooling facilities available. (Afzal Kermani, 1977, p. 48)

2- Eating and drinking

In this category, first, the instructions for eating and the related things that help maintain good health are discussed, a few points of which are given below:

A: To eat food after you feel hungry and stop eating before feeling full. In this regard, he adds that: overeating causes shortness of breath, headache and side pain; in case of discomfort, having a long sleep period, doing workouts and exercise, and fasting are the best ways to overcome the problem.

B: It is good for the body to eat once a day or maximum two times – at noon and night.

C: It is said that to Galen, the best food is high-quality wheat bread, chicken and fish, and in case of dysentery, the best food is high-quality wheat bread, young mutton and beef - especially its muscles which digests fast.

D: Eating the food –even if undesirable- that one is accustomed to is better than that the body is not accustomed to.

E: Eating different types of food together, taking hard-digesting food, eating one type of food in the long run, and eating food of extremely cold nature in winter and that of extremely hot nature in summer should be avoided since they adversely affect digestion.

F: Avoid eating wet-nature fruits and if desired, consume hot-wet fruit, such as grapes and figs. It is recommended to eat fruits - except for melons - before meals to reduce its possible harm.

G: Try to keep the stomach light, and in case of heaviness and discomfort, laxative medicine should be used. The following tips are prescribed on how to drink water and wine:

1. Avoid drinking water while eating.

2. Avoid drinking snow water and ice water.

3. Avoid drinking water after going to the bathroom, having sexual intercourse and vigorous physical activity.

4. To keep the brain healthy, avoid drinking wine and drinks made from dates, grapes, barley and rice. If a person is addicted and has a great desire to drink wine, in order to avoid further harm to the body, they are advised to drink less and, keeping in mind the temperament, to consume diluted wine for hot-tempered people, but strong wine for cold-tempered people, It is necessary to have peace of mind, physical health and avoid frequent drunkenness and immediate relief from hangover is to drink two or three glasses of water mixed with vinegar. (Afzal Kermani, 1977, p. 50).

3- Sleeping and Sleeping Etiquette

Sleep etiquette and related issues are topics of interest to the author of the treatise. The followings are recommended in this regard:

A: Avoid sleeping with a full stomach

B: Quit sleeping during the day, and if one is in the habit of sleeping in daytime hours, they should take care that sleeping a lot, especially in winter - will be harmful and cause catching a cold.

At the beginning of sleep, first, sleep on the right hand and a few seconds later, on the



left hand. Sleeping on the stomach is desirable, but on the back is harmful. (Afzal Kermani, 1977, p. 50).

4- Exercise and physical activity

Afzal Kermani considers inactivity and quitting exercise harmful to the body and health; in this regard, quoting Hippocrates, he says that doing exercise is more fruitful than taking medicine. The medicine reduces body muscle mass but exercise strengthens the body, the latter being beneficial to digestion, as well. He suggests the followings on how to be physically active and do exercise:

A: Do exercise and workouts before eating.

B: An effective exercise usually causes slight sweating in the body. Avoid performing vigorous workouts that cause pain, or putting too much strain on the body.

C: Doing exercise is not beneficial for those with a hot and dry temperament; But if interested, they may try light physical activity with care.

D: Rubbing and moving the foot can effectively relieve the headache. However, excessive massage will weaken the flesh (Afzal Kermani, 1977, p. 51).

5- Vomiting and cleansing the body

In order to maintain health and get rid of some diseases and pains, vomiting and cleansing the body are recommended in this treatise. Performing phlebotomy, using laxatives, and vomiting have been prescribed and introduced as effective treatments for cleansing the body. The author claims that phlebotomy will definitely affect repelling colds, meningitis, and headaches. The following points are reminded in the manner and etiquette of phlebotomy:

A: The person's cheeks are rosy, and his veins are wide.

B: After phlebotomy, the patient should relax himself, avoiding sorrow, and stress.

C: The volunteer's limbs should be healthy, strong, and powerful.(Afzal Kermani, 1977, p. 51).

In the second chapter, together with several other chapters, as shown below, the author explains how to maintain the health of the organs of the body.

1- Care and maintenance of eye health (sense of sight)

Regarding the eyes, the following advice and points are given:

A: Keep the eyes away from dust and small particles in the air.

B: Avoid staring at the sun, especially at sunrise and sunset.

C: Do not stare at glowing objects and lights.

D: Look at the running water and black objects.

E: In case of eye pain, it is advised to use eye drops and extracts of medicinal plants mixed with rose water, as well as putting a mixture of flaxseed, rosewater, flower oil and egg white on the eye and resting in a dark place. (Afzal Kermani, 1977, pp. 51-52)

2- Care and maintenance of ear health (sense of hearing)

Afzal Kermani considers the sense of hearing as one of the most important and admirable senses, and while emphasizing its care, recommends the following points:



A: Protect the ear from cold winds and avoid staying close to loud sounds, such as drum bells, horns and the like.

B: Drop a drop of lukewarm flower oil in the ear once a week.

C: Put the ear on the hot pan to flush out the ear wax.

D: The following instructions have been prescribed for curing earache:

1. Drop half a gram of lukewarm marjoram extract drop, ungrounded saffron, flower oil and vinegar in the ear

2. Drop half a gram of boiled extract drop of flower oil, vinegar with a bit of opium; if the pain is caused by hot temperament, the drop is effective in its healing and removing the ear wax.

3. Drop half a gram of lukewarm vinegar soaked in lukewarm honey water in the ear; this will be effective in ear discharge. (Afzal Kermani, 1977, p. 52).

3- Taking care of and maintaining the health of taste (sense of taste)

In this section, the author has especially emphasized oral health and has recommended and prescribed the following points:

A: Avoid drinking cold water.

B: Avoid foods with hot nature, such as garlic, onions, leeks and the like.

C: Brush every morning.

D: Chew some carnation. This will increase the glaze and moisture in the mouth, making it easier to speak. (Afzal Kermani, 1977, p. 52)

4- Care and maintenance of the health of touch sense (sense of touch)

The following has been prescribed and emphasized in connection with the care and maintenance of touch sense.

A: Dip the hands with shrinking materials, such as pomegranate and pomegranate skin.

B: Avoid activities that cause the skin to become coarse and rough.

C: To protect body's skin from the cold winter weather.

D: Constantly soften the hands with gentle and scented oils. (Afzal Kermani, 1977, p. 52)

5- In maintaining the health of and strengthening sexual powers

The following points are advised and recommended in this regard:

A: Avoid dust, especially flour dust. This can be very harmful.

B: Eat a mixture of beneficial substances and mildly cooked pottage, ivy leaves, lettuce leaves, honey, sugarcane juice, adding twenty grams of cold peppermint syrup.

C: Consume a cooked mixture of manna of hedysarum and cow's milk.

D: Consume bergamot orange milk, fatty fried beef, lean meat and cooked onions.

E: Consume the mixture of white onion juice and honey and the mixture of milk and date.

F: Avoid eating and smelling lettuce seeds, rue seeds, morning glory flower seeds and camphor (Afzal Kermani, 1977, pp. 52-53)

6- Treatment of Salmonella

The final subject of the treatise is how to cure salmonella. The author assumes a 14-day



period of the mentioned disease, dividing the period into the first-three-day, the fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth days onwards - until the end of the fourteenth day - and considering the duration period, the age of the patient, fever and body temperature, prescribes specific instructions, such as phlebotomy, the use of some compound medication, herbal, and their syrups. Among the herbal and tree medicines prescribed, we can mention chicory seeds, jujube, willow chicory extract, Nikoo, Allium jesdanum, black plum, plum, barley, flower extract and Beshooratsh (a kind of skin Antidote) (Afzal Kermani, 1977, p 54).

Conclusion

In the medical history of the middle period of Islamic Iran, Afzal Kermani is considered among the skilled, renowned and trusted physicians among people and local governors in Kerman and Yazd. He has left a remarkable record in education and research in medical sciences, the establishment of hospital and hospital management.

Conflict of Interest

None.

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