

ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE AND INTERNAL MEDICINE. WHERE IS THE TRUTH?



Essay

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By

Dr. Ahmed Mohamed Zaki El-Sayed Assar

M.D in Anaesthesia – Faculty of Medicine – Cairo University – 1997

Diploma in Internal Medicine

Faculty of Medicine – Cairo University -2007

Under Supervision of

Prof. Dr. Tarek M. Hussein El-Shabony

Professor of Internal Medicine

Faculty of Medicine – Cairo University

Prof. Dr. Ahmed Taha Sayed

Professor of Internal Medicine

Faculty of Medicine – Cairo University

Faculty of Medicine

Cairo University

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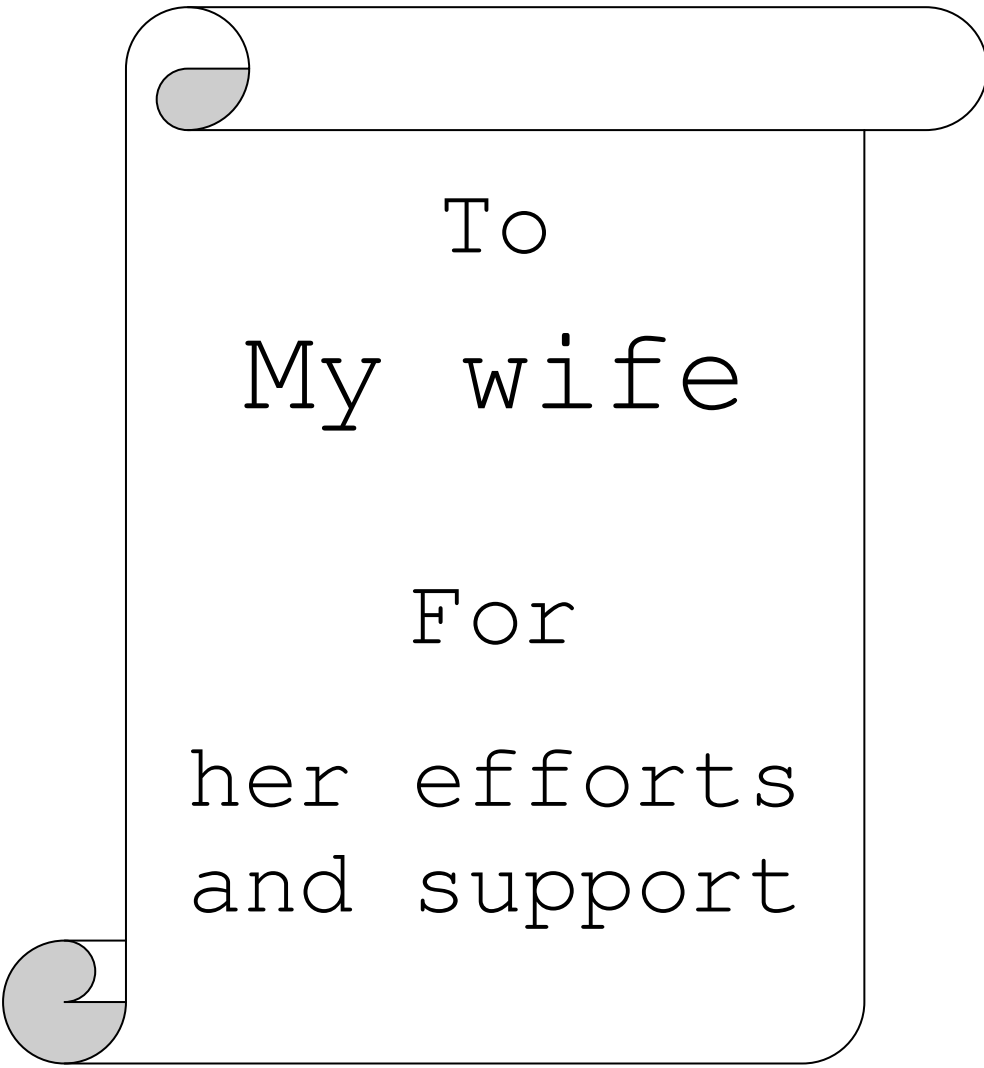
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To
My wife

For
her efforts
and support

PREFACE

More than ten years ago, my sister asked me to read the Arabic translation of **J. Abele's book** on cupping therapy, but I did not bother. However, during the long years I still spend as a political prisoner, I noticed the wide spread application of cupping therapy especially between the political prisoners, hence I found it important to write an essay on the scientific basis of cupping therapy gathering the available research data and trying to prove to the group of physicians, who do not believe in the words of the prophet of Islam Mohamed Peace be upon him, that cupping is a real medicine. Moreover, I hope that this essay helps me to design a future research on cupping, which with the aid of God could happen at one day.

ABSTRACT

Few hundreds years ago, the Western medicine has been evolved and replaced effectively the old traditional medicine (alternative medicine). Nowadays many patients are seeking the old traditional medicine owing to the limitations and drawbacks of the western medicine. Cupping is an ancient remedy that has been used by physicians for thousands of years and then died in America and Europe in the early years of the twentieth century. Although the mechanism of cupping is unknown, it seems that counterirritation, stimulation of acupoints, improvement of local circulation, immunomodulation, and regulation of neurotransmitters are likely mechanisms. The sites used for cupping are either acupoints and energy meridians of traditional Chinese medicine, certain reflex zones designed by the German doctor Abele or the sites chosen by the prophet of Islam Mohamed, peace be upon him. There are two forms of cupping (1) the dry (non-bloody) form, in which glass cups with negative pressure are applied to the skin, and (2) the wet (bloody) form in which the skin is cut at designated sites before the cups are applied. The preliminary studies done on cupping, proved its efficacy in treatment of many diseases. If the proper precautions are done, cupping is very safe.

Conclusions: Cupping the safe traditional remedy, can help to treat many diseases where Western medicine proved to be unsatisfactory. However, the limited studies available, only produce preliminary data, that is suitable for future researches, to precisely determine the mechanism of cupping, and to provide us with a simple clinical approach to indications and sites for cupping therapy.

Keywords: Alternative medicine, Western medicine, Dry cupping, Wet cupping, Acupoints.

INTRODUCTION

Herbs, acupuncture, cupping therapy and other methods of the old traditional medicine have been used for thousands of years to treat different diseases by the ancient Egyptians, the old Arabs and the Chinese. Few hundreds years ago the classic modern "western" medicine has been evolved and since then modern pharmaceuticals, modern surgery, physiotherapy and other modern techniques have effectively replaced the old traditional methods of treatment. However, due to well known drawbacks and limited efficacy in some diseases with modern methods, many patients are seeking the old traditional methods, as they believe they are far more safe to the extent that some patients believe that these old methods have no drawbacks at all. These old traditional methods are contained under the term alternative medicine.

In this essay, we hope to find an answer to the question (alternative medicine and internal medicine, where is the truth?).

However, as the term alternative medicine is very wide, cupping therapy being a well known method of treatment still widely used in this country and other countries, was chosen as an example of alternative medicine. Moreover cupping therapy has been approved as a method of treatment by the prophet of Islam Mohamed "peace be upon him" who said that "the best of your methods of treatment is cupping therapy".

This essay consists of the following chapters:-

- 1- History of cupping therapy.
- 2- Mechanism and scientific basis of cupping therapy.
- 3- Sites of cupping therapy
- 4- Technique of cupping therapy

- 5- Cupping therapy in different diseases compared to internal medicine.
- 6- Drawbacks of cupping therapy.
- 7- Conclusions.
- 8- Summary.
- 9- Arabic summary.

CHAPTER ONE

HISTORY OF CUPPING THERAPY

At one time cupping was a commonly used therapy for a wide variety of complaints. As recently as before the second world war, it was used extensively in the Mediterranean and also throughout Eastern Europe. Yet it is now almost unknown outside a small circle. One reason for this is the social structure of medicine in the past. Then as now, there was an "establishment" medicine and an alternative medicine. The difference is that in those days there were no subsidies for medicine so that establishment medicine was reserved for the very rich. The labourers and country people could not consider the luxury of going to a doctor when the standard consultation fee "in England in the 1920s" was one guinea, which correspond to several weeks wages (*J. Scott, 1997*).

Cupping is an old method of treatment which was used for the first time by the ancient Egyptians. About four thousands years ago the Chinese yellow emperor mentioned cupping in his book on internal diseases (*F. Homidy*).

The Chinese and Cupping therapy:

The therapy of cupping has been used in China for thousands of years. At first it was applied using cattle horn, and was consequently also called horn therapy. To create a negative pressure inside the horn, fire was ignited to expel the air.

The method was used primarily to withdraw pus and blood in the treatment of boils. Another method was to create a hole in the top of the horn, around which the practitioner would place his lips and physically

suck out the air to create a negative pressure. As far as safety was concerned the length of the horn would be the only protection afforded to the practitioner. This method is still employed in many countries for the treatment of boils and carbuncles. Cupping was then used as an auxiliary method in traditional Chinese surgery. Later it was found to be effective in other diseases and developed into a special therapeutic method (*I.Z. Chirali 1997*).

The earliest records of cupping is in Bo Shu "an ancient book written on silk", which was discovered in an ancient tomb of the Han (*Dynasty in 1973*). Some therapeutic cupping methods were also introduced in a book by Zouhou Fang in about 28 AD. Cases of treatment of tuberculosis were recorded in Weitaimiya in 755 AD. Three hundred years later another ancient classic, Susen Liang Fang, recorded an effective cure for chronic cough and the successful treatment of poisonous snake bites using cupping therapy. About slightly more than 500 years ago, a famous surgeon called Wei Ke Zen Zon presented a detailed record of the cupping methods used in surgical practice (*Dr. H. Chong*).

During the Jin Dynasty, Ge Hong "281- 341 AD", first mentioned the use of animal horns as a means of draining pustules.

Zhao Xueming of Qing Dynasty in his Supplement to outline of herbal pharmacopoeia wrote a separate chapter on the subject under the heading "Fire- Jar Qi" "*Cui Jin 1989*".

The original natural horn cup has been replaced by bamboo, ceramic or glass cups. Some African patients report that horn cupping is still used today in rural Africa as the only way to expel poison. In the 1950s, the clinical efficacy of cupping was confirmed by Co-Research of China and acupuncturists from the former Soviet Union, and was

established as an official therapy practice in hospitals all over china. This issue substantially stimulated the development of further cupping researches (*I.Z, Chirali, 1997*).

The Ancient Egyptians and Cupping Therapy:

The ancient Egyptians were the first to use cupping therapy systematically. Ebers papyrus, thought to be the oldest medical textbook, written in approximately 1550 BC, in Egypt, describes bleeding by cupping in order to remove the foreign matter from the body. Galen and Hippocrates were also great advocates of cupping "*Cui Jin 1989*".

In the early days the technique was used solely for bleeding purpose. In those days there were two schools of thought as far as disease was concerned. Starve the source of sickness from the body, or bleed to drain it away. Among the Egyptians and the various nations inhabiting Egypt close to the 16th century, cupping appears to have been considered as a remedy for almost every type of disease, as well as an important means of preserving health (*I.Z, Chirali, 1997*).

History of Cupping in Europe:

The London cupper Samuel Bayfield in 1823 gave the following account on the history of cupping in Europe "From the Egyptians this ancient art was transferred to the Greeks by Cecrops who emigrated with his companions from Egypt, established a colony in Greece and built the city of Athens and although the practice is discovered to have existed among the civilized ancients of other countries, and even in the tribes of some uncultivated savages, yet the origin of it is hid in obscurity, and no records or tradition remain by which its primary traces may be discovered. It is found that the natives of America, the Hindoos, the inhabitants of the South Sea Island and of New Holland, the Japanese,

and the Chinese have long practiced the operation of cupping. It appears from another part of the works of Hippocrates that very large cups were employed by the more ancient Grecian physicians for the reduction of dislocation of the vertebrae from a supposition that the bones, when protruded inwardly might be restored to their proper position by the suction of cups. From Hippocrates, who died at the age of 101, at Larissa, in Thessaly, 361 years before Christ, the art passed through the hands of succeeding physicians who valued or Neglected it. In the year 360, Hourished Oribasius, a professor of Medicine in Alexandria. He speaks very copiously of local bleeding and cupping. In the fifth century, the interruption of the Goths, Vandals and other barbarians, overturned every seat of learning and put stop to the useful as well as the polite arts and medicine also sunk in the general wreck, but in the Ninth century, after the Saracens had expelled the Goths, we find it in the hands of the Arabian in Spain, by whom it was cultivated for three or four hundred years. Arabian physic now began to extend itself into Italy and for Spaniards they established medical correspondence with the Italian physicians, and the Greeks now emigrating to Italy in the fifteenth century, Italy became the favourite field of medical science. In 1683, Bellini, an Ialian physican of eminence favoured the operation of dry cupping.

As is apparent from reports, European and American doctors and surgeons were employing cupping therapy to treat a variety of conditions up to the late 1860s. They mostly used the wet type "bleeding method", which almost always involved some kind of scarification and blood letting.

However, after 1860 interest in the invention of new scarifactors declined as wet cupping decreased in popularity and medical attention

shifted to the therapeutic virtue of dry cupping. The dry technique offered even greater opportunities for inventors, who sought means to bring the effects of vacuum to more areas of the body for greater lengths of time (*I.Z, Chirali, 1997*).

Mothers with under developed or inflamed breasts, posed a frequent problem for the 19th century physician, who treated them with either large doses of tartaremetic a strong purgative or cupping. In the 1920s some breast pumps were attached to electric motors. From 1834 to 1975 more than 60 breast pumps were patented, the majority in the period from 1860 to 1920. We can safely conclude that cupping therapy was indeed used in western hospitals from very early times and that it was performed by highly skilled doctors and surgeons (*I.Z, Chirali, 1997*).

The Arabs and Cupping Therapy:

No one could tell who was the first arabian to use cupping and when had this been happened? However, in the seventh century A.D, when the prophet of Islam Mohamed "peace be upon him" lived, cupping therapy was well known, and he himself not only recommended cupping as a method of treatment, but also asked some cuppers to treat him from different disease by cupping. This has been mentioned by (*Ebn Elkayem*) in his book " Medicine of the prophet".

As mentioned before Samuel Bayfield said that in the ninth century cupping was found in the hands of the Arabians in Spain, by whom it was cultivated for three or four hundred years. Arabian physic began to extend itself into Italy.