



Review Article

Hammam Therapy: An Ancient Wisdom with Contemporary Relevance

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A B S T R A C T

laj bit tadbeer is one among the operational modes of treatment that has been described in Unani system of medication, in which modification in *Asbabe Sitta Zarooriyah* is disbursed for the treatment of diseases. Among the various varieties of regimens like *Hammam*, *Dalk* (Massage), *Riyazat*(Exercise), *Fasd* (Venesection), etc. described within the classical texts, *Hammam* is one among the famous regimens practiced everywhere the globe since antiquity. A mixture of moist and dry heat is employed in classical *Hammam* for the treatment of diseases. Such combination of warmth causes evacuation of superfluous or morbid matter from the body, responsible for the existence of diseases. In recent years, *Hammam* has gained international attention because of its effectiveness in management of variety of diseases.

Keywords: *laj Bit Tadbeer*, *Hammam*, Unani, Regimens, Classical Texts

Introduction

The word *Hammam* springs from the Arabic root *Hamm* which suggests "spreader of warmth" or that produces heat.^{1,2} In line with *Ibne Sina* the word *Hammam* springs from *Alhamim* which suggests the vehemence of summer heat. The word *Hammam* is getting used as bathroom or toilets in many dialects of vernacular Arabic. In unani system of medication the term *Hammam* refers to hot bath, it's aimed not only to clean the body but also to induce beneficial effects for skin and different organs and prevention from Humoral diseases. It evacuates the superfluous matter or waste from the body as sweat and vapours. *Hammam* reduces repletion and increases attractive power of nutrients and thus promotes health.

Hammam like *Riyazat* and *Dalk* is a part of *Asbab-e-Ghair Zarooriyah*³ which implies they're not essential for the existence of life but if they're performed they maintain

the health, if the health is present and that they restore the health, if the body is ill or diseased.

Hammam has three rooms each having different temperament, the first room is *Sard Tar* (*Barid Ratab*), second is *Garm - Tar* (*Haar Ratab*) and thus the third room is *Garm-khushk* (*Haar Yabis*). Additionally, there is a 4th room, called the Robing room, although, not included in the area of hammam. It is utilized for changing clothes and for the comfort.⁴ The bather enters the rooms successively till the third room or he can stop the *Hammam* at room second as per the need.

The mechanism, procedure and benefits of hammam mostly resemble to today's famous procedures like spa, sauna bath and aromatherapy even Turkish bath is taken into consideration synonymous to *Hammam*. In recent years, *Hammam* has gained increasing international attention. It's claimed that the combination of heat, steam and



aromatherapy helps to alleviate stress, relaxes muscles, ease respiratory problems, and stimulates circulation.

Historical Aspect of Hammam Therapy

The use of steam bath spread first throughout Greece then later westward to Rome then became widespread in much of the realm. The Greek and Romans are considered the leaders for elaborating expensive bath houses within which they conduct the gossip with friends, eat, drink or arrange marriage alliances. Hammam or bath is extremely private practice nowadays, but in prehistoric period it was a component of social life for entertainment and gossip with friends. "In the book of bath" Françoise de Bonneville writes that around the 6th Century BC Greece "Bathing was ritualized, becoming an art of cleansing sands, hot water, hot air in dark vaulted vapor bath, a cooling plunge, a rubdown with aromatic oils hence our steam bath, aromatherapy, hot baths are all ancient inventions."⁵

The Greeks and Romans recognized that cleanliness was essential to health. Homer (about 900 BC) tells us of the big variety of baths from plight tubs to hot air bath. The Spartans developed primitive vapor bath a forerunner of our steam shower. Hot air baths were treated by coal burning fires or by hot rock method heating rocks outside the chamber. The Greek also used essential oils for curative essences; the same as today's aromatherapy. Sweating was enhanced by massage with infused oils or by drinking a cup of hot herb peppermint or flower tea before entering the vapour bath. Hippocrates (360 BC) recommended daily bathing and massage with fragrant oils.

Hammam and other Similar Therapies

1. **Turkish Bath:** Nowadays it is used as synonymous to *Hammam*.

Turkish *Hammam* is a hot steam hydro-therapy treatment which has a miraculous effect on both the mental and physical state of everyone able to enjoy its benefits to the full.⁶

- Temperature of Turkish bath: around 50° at the height of the head, about 20° on the feet
- Humidity rate: can reach 100%
- Inside the Turkish bath: path to follow:
 - i **Calidarium:** a heated room, rich in steam, stay for 15 minutes
 - ii **Tepidarium:** a warm room, stay a few minutes to re-acclimatize
 - iii **Frigidarium:** a cold room, stay for half a minute to tone the body

This sequence can be repeated a subsequent time. One may also directly go to the next relaxation phase. A rejuvenating and reactivating massage based on essential oils is practiced here.⁶

2. **Sauna:** Sauna has low humidity and far hotter than a steam bath usually the temperature in sauna bath is 70 to 100° Celsius but it's still comfortable, thanks to their low humidity.⁷ The third room of *Hammam* which has *Har Yabis* (hot & dry) temperament is comparable to sauna bath.

There are several sorts of sauna, supported how the space is heated.⁸

These include:

- i. **Wood burning:** Wood is employed to heat the sauna room and sauna rocks. Wood-burning saunas are usually low in humidity and high in temperature.
 - ii. **Electrically heated:** have high temperatures and low humidity. An electrical heater, attached to the ground, heats the sauna room.
 - iii. **Infrared room:** Special lamps use light waves to heat an individual's body, not the whole room. Temperatures are typically less than other saunas, but the person sweats during a similar way. Usually, infrared saunas are about 60° Celsius.
 - iv. **Steam room:** These are different from saunas. Rather than dry heat, a steam bath involves high humidity and moist heat.
3. **Spa:** A spa could be a location where mineral rich spring water and sometimes sea water is employed to allow medicinal bath.⁹ **Types of spa⁹** are as follows:

Day spa: It offers a variety of facilities for improving health, beauty and relaxation through personal care treatments such as massage and facials.

Destination spa: A resort for personal care treatment may include aromatherapy, facials fitness consultation, hair spa treatment, massage, nutrition counselling, etc.

Difference between Sauna and Turkish Bath⁶

| Sauna Bath | Turkish Bath |
|---|---|
| Sauna is typically a dry environment. | The Turkish bath is very wet. |
| Heat is generated by a stove. Temperature ranges from 50° to 85°. | Heat is radiant due to Diffusion of steam. |
| Humidity is almost non-existent (it can reach a maximum of 10/15%). Heat is strong and dry. | Humidity is very high (90/100%). Forms a mist of steam that brings the temperatures from 20/25°C of the floor level to 40/45°C of the head level. |

Rooms of Hammam

Hammam has 3 rooms, may be a kind of medicated bath that particular kind of construction was done. *Hammam* has three rooms, another room which is excluded from the space of *Hammam* is for the changing of garments or “robing room” has *Moatadil* temperament. ⁴

The temperament of rooms of *Hammam* is as follows.

| Rooms of Hammam | Names of rooms | Mizaj (Temperament) of Rooms |
|---|--|--|
| 1 st Room of Hammam | <i>Qameem</i> or <i>Bait-ul-naar</i> (<i>Bhatti wala Hissa</i>) | <i>Sard Tar</i> (<i>Barid Ratab</i> or Cold and Wet) |
| 2 nd Room of Hammam | <i>Al-qism-ul-burani</i> or <i>Bairuni Hissa</i> | <i>Garm Tar</i> (<i>Har Ratab</i>) or Hot and Wet |
| 3 rd Room of Hammam | <i>Al-qism-ul-wustani</i> or <i>neem-garm</i> | <i>Garm Khushk</i> (<i>Har Yabis</i>) or Hot and Dry |
| 4 th Room or Changing Room/ Robbing Room | <i>Al-qismul Juwani</i> or <i>Al-qismul Haar</i> or <i>Andruni Hissa</i> | <i>Moatadil</i> or Moderate |

Temperature of Water Employed in Hammam

In 1714, the first mercury thermometer was invented by Gabriel D. Fahrenheit for measuring the temperature. Due to the unavailability of the temperature-measuring device, there's nothing stated about the temperature of water used

in Hammam in old classical Unani literature.

The temperature of water is employed in *Hammam* is as follows.¹⁰

| | |
|-------------------------------|-----------|
| Very Cold water | 40-65°F |
| Cold water | 65-75°F |
| Tepid warm or <i>Moatadil</i> | 85-95°F |
| Hot water | 95-100°F |
| Very Hot water | 100-110°F |
| Extreme Hot water | 110-120°F |

Characteristics of a perfect Hammam:^{3,4}

- Building of *Hammam* should be old.
- *Hammam* should be spacious.
- Water should be sweet or soft.
- There should be proper arrangement for regulating the temperature.

Disadvantages of Hammam

Each person has their own body complexion and *Mizaj* (temperament). Therefore, the temperature of air and the timing of *Hammam* for a particular person staying within the *Hammam* are decided. If it's not done right way it produces certain disadvantages which are as follows:^{11,12}

- Causes weakness of the heart that further causes weakness of the body
- Produces nausea and vomiting
- Disperse the matter towards the weaker organ
- Weakens the nerves

Types of Hammam and their Advantages

Hammam is of following types:¹³⁻¹⁶

| | |
|--|--|
| Hammam Barid or cold bath 40°F– 65°F mostly 65°F- 75°F | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beneficial for <i>Haar</i> (hot) temperament person • Helpful in inward movement of <i>Hararat e ghariziyahto Jism e Batin</i> of the body thus increases digestive power • Strengthens the nervous system and cardiovascular system • Also effective in lowering the body temperature just in case of hyperpyrexia |
| <i>Hammam Bahri</i> or sea bath (sea water is employed) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It provides strength and stimulus to the skin; thus effective in skin disorders |
| <i>Hammam Bukhari</i> or vapor bath or Steam bath (Hammam steam is passed in whole body) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opens the pores of skin which enhances the sweating, thus helps to get rid of the toxins from the body • Relieve the musculoskeletal pain • Helps to cut back the weight • Strengthens the nerves |
| <i>Hammam Boriqi</i> or borax bath | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mostly effective in patients with weakness & debility • Better results than <i>Hammam e Bukhari</i> in weaker patients |
| <i>Hammam Turki</i> or Turkish bath (like classical <i>Hammam</i>) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Wajaul Mafasil</i> (rheumatoid arthritis) • <i>Niqras</i> (Gout) |

| | |
|---|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Waja e Asaab</i> (Nerve pain) • <i>Auram e Muzmina</i> (chronic inflammations) • <i>Siman e Mufrat</i> (obesity) |
| <i>Hammam Har</i> or Hot bath (95°F -110°F) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective in conditions like osteoarthritis, amenorrhoea, renal pain, obesity |
| <i>Hammam Hamiz</i> or acid bath | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sue Hazm</i> (indigestion) • <i>Zofe Jigar</i> (liver disease) |
| <i>Hammam Ramli</i> (sand bath) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sea sand has strong absorptive power • helpful in reducing the surplus fluid in ascites |
| <i>Hammam Saboosi</i> (bran bath) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It makes skin smooth and soft • It relieves from dermatological conditions like itching, eczema, psoriasis, sunburn |
| Hammam e Labani (milk bath) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employed for cosmetic purposes • Softens the skin and improves the complexion • Natural lactic acid found in milk aids exfoliating the dead skin cells. • Vitamin E and zinc in milk aids in slowing down the aging mechanism and retain skin's natural elasticity |
| Hammam e nisfi or Aab e zan (Sitz bath) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hemorrhoids • Anal fissure • Rectal surgery` • Episiotomy care • Uterine cramps • BPH • Vaginal infections • Urinary tract infections |
| <i>Hammam e Barqi</i> (electric bath) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advised in <i>wajaul mafasil</i> and <i>fali</i> |
| <i>Hammam e Wahli</i> (mud bath) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mud can absorb toxins from the body and has healing properties • Helps in relaxation of muscles • Improve blood circulation and reduces inflammation and swellings as in osteoarthritis • Beneficial in skin diseases like psoriasis, rosacea |
| <i>Hammam e Tadreeji</i> (graduated bath) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beneficial in patients with balghami temperament |
| <i>Hammam e Dawai</i> (Medicated bath) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aids in subsiding the swellings and inflammation |
| <i>Hammam e Khardali</i> (Mustard bath) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Found effective in <i>ahtebas e haiz</i> (amenorrhoea) and Urticaria |
| <i>Hammam e Qabiz</i> (Astringent Bath) alum, mazu, maaen, gond etc are added to the bathing water. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beneficial in <i>harq wa salq</i> (burn and scald) |
| <i>Hammam e qadmi</i> (Foot Bath) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advantageous in <i>Ruaaf</i> (epistaxis), <i>Nazla wa Zukaam</i> (rhinorrhoea), <i>Ummus Sibyan</i> (epilepsy), <i>Ahtebas e Haiz</i> (amenorrhoea) and painful lower extremities |

Effects of Hammam on the Body

Usually the temperature inside *Hammam e Muarriq* is 45°C and the humidity rate is nearly 100%. The internal

hot environment of hammam warms up the body, which triggers sweat secretion as a self-defence measure from the warmth. The warmth and steam together work to open the

pores of skin and cause sweating or perspiration. *Ta'reeq* (Sweating) promotes the elimination of toxins and uric acid, enhancing renal activity and hydration of the upper respiratory tract. The sole purpose of perspiration is to control the body heat. Its importance lies in the fact that it prevents from having a heat stroke. *Hararate ghariziyah* (Normal body heat) also maintains the normal functioning of all the internal organs. So when the core temperature gets raised, the body begins to sweat as a prophylactic measure.^{6,17}

Effects of the Hammam on the Musculoskeletal System

The Hammam as a therapy is a broader term, so far more than simply a steam bath. The dense wet steam and warmth within the Hammam, rises upto 102 degrees, relaxes the muscles, relieves built up tension and thus, alleviate pain consequently. It's also suggested to use the Hammam steam prior to massage treatments, because the Hammam will warm up the muscles, allowing the message therapist to supply a simpler treatment because the body is already prepared and loosened, ready for treatment.¹⁸

Effects of the Hammam on the Skin and Hair

Perspiration assists in maintaining the healthy skin and hair. In addition to checking blackheads, sweating also assists in preventing rashes and irritated skin, colds and other infections as it contains an antimicrobial peptide called dermcidin that assists fight infections and germs.¹⁹

Sweating from the scalp helps remove accumulated matter from hair follicles, and permits striking new hair growth. It also opens the pores on the scalp, removing any accumulation inside the pores that would be checking the expansion of hair.¹⁹ The humid interior of the Hammam prevents evaporation of sweat thus the skin remain wet as well as moist. Due to this the skin gets benefitted in two ways. Firstly, the skin pores are exposed due to perspiration and the built-up dirt underneath the skin is pushed out, thereby preventing unsightly blemishes or pimples on the skin. Secondly, due to abundant skin hydration, the removal of cells from the stratum become easy hence facilitates the cellular turnover making the skin more elastic, smoother and bright.¹⁷ In today's scenario, many factors including air conditioners, sun lamps, and aging process, etc. contribute to peeling-off of epidermis (the superficial layer of the skin), and makes the skin dry. Thus, for dry skin also, the Hammam is a suitable therapy.¹⁷

The effects of the Hammam on Blood Circulation and Lymphatics

Normally, the Hammam improves blood circulation and stimulates peripheral vasodilation. It is therefore very advisable, those who suffer from cold extremities and

cellulite. The mechanism of action lies in its ability to expand pores of the skin and allowing the toxins to escape.¹⁷

Effects of the Hammam on the Respiratory System

Essential oils, for example; lavender, peppermint, tea tree oil and eucalyptus are diffused within the Hammam to get maximum therapeutic advantages. The anti-inflammatory, antiseptic and decongesting properties of these promote a good respiratory health.¹⁸

Effects of the Hammam on the Mental well-being

The smell of the essential oils is stimulating. It helps in getting rid of exhaustion and mental sluggishness. Also enhances ones' mood and spirits. Light therapies utilized in the Hammam enrich the sensory experience. It also helps control mood swings with a warm sense of well-being and relaxation.¹⁸

Effects of the Hammam on the Sleep Quality

A hot bath can help change the body's core temperature and obtain you to nod-off more quickly. A scientific data analysis evaluating research that linked bathing, water temperature, and sleep quality was conducted by Shahab Haghayegh et al., a PhD candidate of the department of biomedical engineering at The University of Texas at Austin. The researchers reviewed 5,322 studies and used a few dozen with solid methodologies to form their conclusions. According to their results, bathing one to 2 hours-preferably, 90 minutes-prior to bed, in water at 104 to 109°F (40 to 43°C) did the trick to assist people get the excellent quality sleep. Bathing at that point and temperature can assist you nod-off an average of 10 minutes earlier than normal. Their report explored the consequences of how body heat could affect the power to nod-off.²⁰

Conclusion

Steam has beneficial effects on the body and mind keeping stress away. Popularity of hammam continues to be increasing day by day due to their beneficial effects. Immersed within the heat, the body's natural cooling mechanism of sweating kicks in, and detoxifies itself by eliminating toxins through the pores.

This process yields many beautifying results like glowing, clean skin. Not only this, it's a good practice for enhanced overall internal health. Hammam improves blood circulation, promotes a good respiratory health, enhances ones' mood and spirits, and helps get the excellent quality sleep. The healing effect of improved vital sign can play a serious role in prevention as well as curative therapy.

Conflicts of Interest: None

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