

LETTER TO EDITOR

Contentment Drug: An Ancient Persian Text about Happiness

Dear Editor,

Contentment drug (*dārūg ī hunsandīh*) is a short passage in Pahlavi language in which instructions for preparing a virtual drug, called contentment drug, are provided, using medical terminology and common practices of medicine in ancient times¹. In fact, this Pahlavi text makes some recommendations in common medical terminology to accomplish more happiness.² The summary of the short passage is as follows:

Contentment drug is gained following the combination of these elements: 1. Having the knowledge of contentment; 2. Thinking of what one can do if he is not content; 3. Suggesting that tomorrow would definitely be better than today; 4. What seems bad could be worse; 5. Being content is preferred to being unhappy; 6. Contentment might not change the reality but can at least make it more tolerable.

Then all six, or according to the text, the six elements should be put together in endurance mortar, pounded with prayer pestle and sieve with patience. Then, the content-

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1- Mazdapour, 2003: 2-13

2- Zargaran et al., 2012: 255.



ment drug should be taken by two spoons of faith in God every morning. The person will become content and overcome sorrow and grief.³

Besides the exclusive way of expressing contentment in this passage in which medical terminologies instead of common ethical and religious wording are used, the text has another significant characteristic. Perhaps the text dates back to Sassanid era (AD. 224–637, the last empire before the Arab invasion to Iran) when medicine was making remarkable progress. Jondishapour was a prominent medical center where, even according to *Shahnameh* (The book of kings, written by Ferdowsi between c. 977 and 1010 CE; the most important Persian epic poem about Iranian mythology and pre-Islamic era history), physicians had gatherings for consultations on patients (like present seminars).⁴ A passage like the contentment drug exhibits the deep penetration of medicine into cultural concepts. In other words, medical paradigm was so dominant that it could infuse its form and concepts as common words into the body of the culture of the time.

On the other hand, the text shows the metaphorical power of medical concepts in ancient medicine and hence the passage should be considered as an outstanding example of using medical terminology for explaining and describing non-medical concepts.

References

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3- Mazdapour, 1382/2003: 2-13

4- Ferdowsi, 1993.

