قائد أخلاقي جدير بالإعجاب | ETHICAL LEADER TO ADMIRE

Professor Bashir Mohammed Osman Arbab

Father of Gastroenterology in Sudan

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Prof. Bashir Mohammed Osman Arbab

Today, I visited Dr. Bashir Mohammed Osman Arbab—the renowned specialist in internal medicine and gastroenterology—at his home in Riyadh, Square 9. Notably, Dr. Arbab has not left his home throughout the months and years of the current war. He remained with his wife, children, and his son, Dr. Osman Bashir, throughout this period. They played a pivotal role in supporting the Sudanese people through the centre established by the Ministry of Health at the mosque near his home.

My visit to Dr. Arbab brought back many memories; thank God, I found him mobile, with a sharp memory, the same intellect I have always known, and the kind conversation we are accustomed to from him. He spoke about this prolonged period during which the Sudanese people have suffered, expressing his astonishment at a war that targeted individuals and plundered their property.

Dr. Arbab is one of the most prominent medical icons in our history. He served as a specialist in internal medicine and gastroenterology at the University of Khartoum Faculty of Medicine, graduating in 1962. Among his most distinguished classmates were Dr. Abdul Rahman Musa, Dr. Al-Sheikh Mahjoub, Dr. Abdul Dayem Kashan, Dr. Abdul Rahman Al-Tom, and others who enriched the medical scene through their contributions to science, education, and clinical practice.

I was deeply touched by this visit to my brother, Bashir Arbab, which brought back memories of the beautiful days we spent together in Ward B1 at Khartoum Hospital—the main ward famously associated with Professor Daoud. Dr. Arbab was among those closest to Professor Daoud, owing to his profound knowledge, wisdom, literary grace, and piety. Professor Daoud often signalled us to consult Arbab on challenging cases and consistently sought his opinion during clinical meetings, asking: "Bashir, what is your take on this?"

Dr. Arbab, originally from the Shendi region, is married to a woman from Al-Gitaina. He worked as an internal medicine specialist in El-Obeid, where he is credited with establishing the Internal Medicine Department in its current, advanced form. At that time, he worked alongside the orthopaedic surgeon Dr. Abdul Dayem Kashan—both represent what is often described as the "Golden Age" of Sudanese physicians.

I worked with Dr. Arbab as an intern and later as a registrar, as Professor Daoud's unit was a joint division. We were in a constant race with other residents and interns to perform investigations and medical interventions for patients. Dr. Arbab was among the most distinguished specialists capable of diagnosing patients based solely on symptoms and physical signs—in an era when laboratory tests were neither readily available nor as precise as they are today.

He was exceptionally skilled in diagnosis, an attentive listener to the patient's history, and through his stethoscope and careful manual examination of the abdomen, he identified what others could not. Upon completing an examination, he almost always arrived at the correct diagnosis. I learned a great deal from Dr. Arbab, as did many generations of doctors. He was humble and deeply religious; he was never lured by the significant medical advancements that drew many other doctors towards politics or social work. He was a doctor in every sense of the word—born to be a physician, trained to be a physician, and remained a physician his entire life. May God grant him continued health and wellness.

Once, when the distinguished registrar Hasab al-Rasoul Siddiq Ali was working with him, a case of abdominal or peritoneal tuberculosis presented. After listening to the patient's description and placing his hand wisely on the patient's abdomen, Dr. Arbab stated that the patient was suffering from abdominal TB. After taking the necessary samples and running the requisite investigations, his diagnosis proved accurate. When Hasab al-Rasoul asked, "Dr. Bashir, how did you know?"—Dr. Arbab replied, "I smelled it." This is the sixth sense possessed by the first generation, of which Arbab is a prime example.

Prominent members of that graduating class included Dr. Abdul Rahman Musa, who excelled in nephrology, alongside Abdul Dayem Kashan, Osman Mahmoud Hassanein, Al-Sheikh Mahjoub, and others who enriched the medical field. This generation was distinguished by their devotion to their profession and their commitment to teaching others. They succeeded as professors at the Faculty of Medicine, laying a solid foundation for the institution—perhaps representing the second generation after Professor Daoud's cohort—and serving as the cornerstone of both the Faculty of Medicine and the healthcare system in Sudan.

We thank God that I found Dr. Arbab in full health and possessing a sharp, clear memory. I also visited his wife, Mrs. Suad, and his brother-in-law, Saleh, who worked with us at the Modern Medical Center.

Pioneer of Gastroenterology in Sudan

Dr. Bashir Arbab is the Father of Gastroenterology in Sudan. He was initially sent to the United Kingdom to specialize in neurology—Professor Daoud often selected the brightest minds for neurology training in the UK—but when he began practising this specialty in England, he found it unsatisfying. At the time, the specialty was quite limited due to the lack of diagnostic tools, a situation that has since changed drastically with the introduction of CT scanning, MRI, and electroencephalography. Since neurology at that time was purely clinical, Dr. Arbab switched to gastroenterology.

He introduced endoscopes to Sudan even before flexible endoscopes arrived. He maintained a clinic with the surgeon Dr. Mohammed Ahmed Hassan in Ward D2—the University of Khartoum's private surgical ward—where he performed endoscopies using rigid scopes to examine the oesophagus and abdomen, before transitioning to flexible endoscopy. He continued his work at the Modern Medical Center, where his clinic moved, and he served as a board member until the fateful outbreak of the war on 15 April 2023.

His son, Osman, also specialised in internal medicine and worked alongside his father in the clinic, training under the great master, Bashir Arbab; he is truly fortunate to have inherited such beneficial knowledge. In honouring this generation, we honour Dr. Arbab for his piety, morality, and steadfast adherence to Islamic values and practice. During this visit, I asked him how he spends his days, and he pointed to a large Quran beside him and the books of Quranic interpretation behind it, saying: "I spend my time between this and that."

This is the generation that created modern medicine in internal diseases and beyond. A salute to my brother, Bashir Arbab, and to all the icons of that Golden Age of Sudan. We must remember these life stories so that our students and science researchers know those who laid the strong foundations on which they now stand.

Source: Homeida M. My visit to the father of gastroenterology in Sudan, Dr. Bashir Mohammed Osman Arbab. Personal reflection / biographical tribute. February 2025.