

Eating – The Islaamic way (part 1 of 2)

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allaah, the Most Merciful, the Bestower of Mercy

Islaam is not merely a religion, it is a way of life; a holistic approach designed by our Creator to benefit all of humankind. The comprehensiveness of Islaam allows every aspect of life to be an act of worship, from praying to sleeping, from washing to working. Every chore from the menial to the profound can earn countless rewards simply by a person wanting to please Allaah with their every thought and action.

When Allaah created the world He did not set things in motion and then leave us to our own designs; quite the contrary He sent us guidance. This guidance comes in the form of Qur'aan and the Sunnah (Prophetic Traditions) of Prophet Muhammad, may God praise him. Within these two sources of guidance we will find the rules and regulations, and the rights and responsibilities that allow us to deal with any situation we may find ourselves in. In this article we will discover the Islaamic etiquette of eating.

All actions performed in the daily course of life can be raised to the status of worship simply by remembering to praise Allaah and seek His pleasure. Yes, even eating; it has an etiquette that raises its status from a mundane act to a rewarding act of worship. Think about it. Food plays a significant part in our daily lives. Shopping, storing, preparation, eating, and cleaning - all take up a large amount of time, effort and money. The rewards accumulated from the act of eating can be innumerable and of more substance than a full belly or bulging waist line.

The etiquette of eating involves actions before, during, and after eating.

Cleanliness

There is an old western saying - cleanliness is next to Godliness and Islaam places great emphasis on cleanliness. Just as a Muslim purifies his body before turning to Allaah in prayer he must also pay attention to the cleanliness of his surroundings.

[Allaah loves those who turn to Him in repentance and He loves those who keep themselves pure and clean.]¹

¹ Qur'aan [2:222]

Eating – The Islaamic way (part 1 of 2)

Therefore it is important that the food preparation area and the hands that will touch the food are kept clean. Filthy conditions cause disease and ill health. If you have not been involved with the preparation of the food it is still important to thoroughly wash your hands before eating.

Mentioning the name of Allaah

A Muslim should begin every task, even eating, by mentioning the name of God. One should say:

“Bismillah” for this means **“I begin with the name of Allaah”**.

“When one of you eats, he should mention Allaah’s name; if he forgets to mention Allaah’s name at the beginning, he should say:

“Bismillaahi fee awwalihi wa aakhirih”

“I begin with the name of Allaah at the beginning and at the end of it (i.e. this meal).”²

Eating and drinking with the right hand

Eating with the right hand is obligatory for Muslims unless there is an excuse such as illness or injury. The left hand is usually used to clean the body of filth and impurities while the right hand is used for eating, passing objects from one person to another and for shaking hands. Prophet Muhammad also advised us in his Sunnah that Satan eats with his left hand therefore the believers should refrain from anything that causes them to resemble Satan.

Prophet Muhammad said,

“When any one of you intends to eat, he should eat with his right hand, and when he (intends) to drink he should drink with his right hand, for Satan eats with his left hand and drinks with his left hand.”³

“When I was a young boy in the care of the Messenger of Allaah, my hand used to wander all over the platter (of food). The Messenger of Allaah said to me, ‘O young boy, say Bismillaah (I begin with the name of Allaah), eat with your right hand, and eat from what is directly in front of you’.”⁴

Eating with one’s hand is a way of emulating Prophet Muhammad and his companions, and as such is a recommended and rewardable act, however, the use of forks, spoons and knives is not prohibited.

² At-Tirmidhee, Aboo Daawood & Ibn Maa jah

³ Saheeh Muslim

⁴ Saheeh Bukhaaree, Saheeh Muslim

Eating – The Islaamic way (part 1 of 2)

Good manners

In situations where everyone eats from a common platter or serving dish, taking the food that is directly in front of you is considered good manners. Reaching over others or searching for the most delicious pieces of food can make your dining companions uncomfortable and cause you to appear ungrateful or greedy.

It is from the manners of Islaam to respect guests by offering them the choicest food and delivering it in a timely manner. The guest is then able to respond by hastening to taste and praise the food and by praying for and sending blessings upon the host. A very pleasant supplication to make for your host is the following:

“Allaahumma baarik lahum feemaa razaqtahum, waghfir lahum warhamhum”

“O Allaah, bless them in what You have provided for them, and forgive them and have mercy on them.”⁵

It is wrong to criticise food, rather it is better to merely refrain from eating anything you do not like. Umm Hufaid served Prophet Muhammad a dish of butter (ghee), cheese and some lizards. He ate out of the clarified butter and cheese, but left the lizard finding no liking for it.⁶

The good manners inherent in Islaam also indicate that a person should not spit or blow his nose whilst eating, nor should he recline while eating.

⁵ Saheeh Muslim

⁶ Saheeh Muslim