

EATING AND DRINKING CONDUCT OF PROPHET MUHAMMAD¹

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ABSTRACT: In the present day, a great deal of research is being done on how to eat as well as eating etiquette for people's wellbeing. This article touches upon Prophet Muhammad's eating and drinking habits and etiquette, including the kinds of food he ate, the amount eaten, when he ate, and with whom. Other aspects of eating etiquette, such as beginning a meal with Allah's name, ending it in praising Him, hygiene, and avoiding wastefulness are also considered. Since the Prophet was chosen by Allah to deliver His message to the people through teaching them how to live and eventually reach perfection, he is the perfect model to be followed in every aspect of a person's life.

Eating and drinking are among the basic requirements of a person's material life. If these needs are not met correctly, its effects on the body and spirit are detrimental. Since the body works as a vehicle for the soul, any disorder in the body will undoubtedly disrupt it.

¹ This is translation of chapter two of *Sire-ye Akhlāqi-e Payāambar-e A'zam: Sulūk-e Fardi* (2011, Nashr-e Ma'ārif, Qum).

The prophets and saints (*awliya' Allah*) were also not needless of food and drink. By following the correct approach to eating, they ensure their body's wellbeing and use it as a means to bring the soul to perfection. For this reason, when studying the lifestyle of the Prophet, the etiquettes related to eating, drinking, and other aspects related to bodily health and physical appearance should be studied before those related to one's spiritual life.

Considering all the narrations (*hadiths*) regarding the etiquette and conduct of the Prophet with regards to eating and drinking, we find answers to questions such as: When, why, and how did the Prophet eat? How much and what types of food did he have? Did he eat alone or with others? The answers are found in the following discussions.

A) The primary goal for eating

Why people eat or drink seems obvious at first glance: eating and drinking are natural necessities of human life. However, from the viewpoint of saints, the philosophy behind providing for the physical needs of the body in general is more important than mere survival: The body plays the role of an instrument for man's reality – the soul. In other words, for the soul to move towards perfection, the needs of the body as the vehicle and instrument for the soul should be supplied. For this reason, the instrumental role of eating in the direction of worship and performing obligations has been pointed out in narrations, as the Prophet said:

O' God, grant us abundance (*barakah*) of bread and do not let us be separated from it, for without it we will not be able to perform ritual prayer, fast, and perform our divine obligations.²

² Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, vol. 5, p. 73, no. 13 and vol. 6, p. 287, no. 6

Imam Sadiq also states, “The foundation of the body is based on bread.”³ In another narration, a person asks Abu Dharr,⁴ “What is the best deed after believing in God?” He replied, “Performing ritual prayers and eating bread.” Seeing the person surprised by this answer, Abu Dharr continued, “If there is no bread, God will not be worshipped.”⁵ As Sarakhsi said, Abu Dharr implied that eating bread gives a person enough strength to perform ritual prayers.

Considering these hadiths, the Prophet’s aim for eating was noble; rather than eating to become gluttonous, it is to prepare the body for fulfilling ritual obligations.

B) The kinds of food the Prophet ate

The Prophet chose food that was *halal* (permissible), simple, and beneficial:

1. Permissibility (halal)

Since the Prophet’s role was to guide people, he was the most careful when it came to eating permissible foods. He constantly ate along with his family and servant, and they ate only what God permitted.⁶ The Prophet also insisted on eating with others, as well as beginning a meal in the name of God and praising Him when the meal was finished. The food must also be permissible (*halal*).⁷

One of the practical examples of the Prophet’s attention towards eating permissible food and avoiding prohibited food is seen when he became the guest of a group of the Ansar. When they put a piece of broiled mutton in front of him, he put a morsel into his mouth, chewed it, but

³ Ibid, vol. 6, p. 286, no. 3 and 7

⁴ One of the Prophet Muhammad’s companions

⁵ Al-Sarakhsi, *Al-Mabsut*, no. 30, p. 258

⁶ Al-Tabarsi, *Makarim Al-Akhlaq*, p. 26; Majlesi, *Bihar Al-Anwar*, vol. 16, p. 241

⁷ Al-Barqi, *Al-Mahasin*, vol. 2, p. 398

did not swallow it. He took it out and said that he was informed that the mutton “has been supplied unfairly.” Confirming what the Prophet said, they admitted, “Since we did not manage to find any sheep at the market, we took a sheep from one of the neighbours without permission and expect to pay for it afterwards.”⁸

2. *Simplicity*

Narrations state that the Prophet’s food was as ordinary as his contemporaries. Based on Tabarsi’s narration, the Prophet was not demanding with regards to what he ate. He never insisted on having a specific type of food; he ate whatever he was provided within the boundaries of its permissibility.⁹ Of course, this does not contradict the narrations that specify the foods and fruits that the Prophet liked; if it was possible, the Prophet would have the beneficial foods or fruits he liked.

In most cases, the Prophet ate barley bread made with whole grain flour. In some narrations, barley bread has been introduced as the food of the prophets, as seen in this saying by Imam Ridha:

There has not been any prophet who has not invited people to eat barely bread and has not asked for its abundance. And it has not gone into any stomach without removing an illness. It is the food of the prophets and the righteous people, and God has refused to place anything other than barley as their main food.¹⁰

In another narration, Qutadah speaks of the simplicity of the Prophet’s food: “Sometimes we would go to Anas Ibn Malik while his baker was working. One day, Anas turned to us and said, ‘Eat from these pieces of

⁸ Al-Hilli, *Tazkirah Al-Fuqaha*, vol. 2, p. 392; Al-Muqaddasi, *Al-Sharh Al-Kabir*, vol. 5, p. 395

⁹ Tabarsi, *Makarim Al-Akhlaq*, p. 26; Majlesi, *Bihar Al-Anwar*, vol. 16, p. 241

¹⁰ Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, vol. 6, p. 305, no. 1

bread, though I have not ever heard about the Prophet's having bread made with sifted flour without bran, and his having broiled mutton.”¹¹

The Prophet's stew was also very simple. Imam Sadiq narrates that one day the Prophet went to his wife, Umm Salamah, who brought a slice of bread for the Prophet. When he asked her if she had any stew as well, she replied that she did not, and that she only had vinegar. The Prophet then said, “Vinegar is good stew. The house in which there is vinegar is not poor.”¹²

The Prophet sometimes would only have bread dipped in milk. Based on Kulayni's narration from Imam Sadiq, one morning the Prophet went out of his home for prayer while eating a slice of bread dipped in milk.¹³

3. Beneficial and Harmless

The Prophet did not consume food or drink that was harmful. Imam Sadiq narrates from Imam Ali that once, when a very hot food was brought for the Prophet, he said, “Let it become cool. God has not fed us fire. And foods that are not too hot are blessed.”¹⁴ Nowadays, the damaging effects of eating hot food are known to everyone.

Because of the Prophet's connection to the source of Divine knowledge and his awareness of the qualities and effects of the various foods, he

¹¹ Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad Hanbal*, vol. 3, p. 134; Al-Bukhari, *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, p. 206. There is also a narration from *Ayisha* about Prophet's eating barely bread. It is worth mentioning that barley bread was financially less valuable than wheat bread, but today, it has proven to be nutritiously more valuable.

¹² Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, vol. 6, p. 329, no. 1; Majlisi, *Bihar Al-Anwar*, vol. 16, p. 267, no. 70

¹³ Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, vol. 6, p. 273, no. 2. It is mentionable in according to view of Shi'ite jurists, eating while walking is undesirable. For this reason they have interpreted that his deed was for necessity or for stating permit for that action. (refer to: Shahid Awal, *Al-Durus*, vol. 3, p. 27; Al Hurr Al-Ameli, *Wasail Al-Shi'a*, vol. 16, p. 421. The source of narration about abomination is one hadith from Abdullah Ibn Sanan quoted from Imam Sadiq based on prevention of this deed except for necessary cases. (refer to: Shaykh Saduq, *Man La Yahzuru Al-Faqih*, vol. 3, p. 354)

¹⁴ Refer to: Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, vol. 6, p. 322, no. 1

chose the most beneficial food available. Furthermore, he also observed medical principles with respect to the amount of food he ate.

In the narration mentioned earlier by Imam Reza, the curative quality of barley bread was pointed out.¹⁵ Moreover, in some other narrations, Imam Sadiq presented milk, vinegar, oil, and *sawiq* (a kind of food made of mashed meat and mashed wheat or barley together with sugar and dates) as the food of the prophets, and meat and milk as their soup.¹⁶

The Prophet's favourite food was meat given its healthy benefits:

Meat increases the strength of hearing and sight. It is superior to all the foods in this world and the Hereafter. Had wanted God to feed me with meat every day, He would do so.¹⁷

Sometimes he would have meat cooked in water and at other times he would have it roasted and served with bread.¹⁸ He liked sheep's leg more than its other parts.¹⁹

Imam Sadiq has said that the Prophet broke his fast with sweets when they were available,²⁰ and if he did not have access to them, he would break his fast with lukewarm water. Regarding this, he said:

It [warm water] cleans the liver and the stomach, makes the smell of the mouth pleasant, strengthens the teeth

¹⁵ Refer to: Ibid, p. 305, no. 1

¹⁶ Al-Barqi, *Al-Mahasin*, vol. 2, p. 491; Ibid, p. 467; Ibid, p. 482; Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, vol. 6, p. 306

¹⁷ Al-Tabarsi, *Makarim Al-Akhlaq*, p. 30

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Refer to: Shaykh Saduq, *Ilal Al-Sharayi'*, vol. 1, p. 134

²⁰ It is noteworthy that breaking the fast with sweets is beneficial from two aspects: first, they are absorbed quickly in the body and relieve the hunger of the fasting person, and second, they reduce the appetite for eating, when one breaks his fast with them, and thus prevent gluttony.

and the eyes, sharpens the sight, causes forgiveness of sins, stimulates the blood vessels, removes bitterness, stops phlegm, decreases the heat in the stomach, and removes headaches.²¹

The Prophet also liked honey; he knew that eating it – along with reciting verses of the Qur’an – as well as chewing frankincense would remove phlegm.²²

The Prophet sometimes expressed the desirability of meals by saying “*tayyib*” (“delicious”). For example, once, when one of his companions offered him some kind of desert like *faludeh*, he took some of it, and asked him, “O’ Aba Abdallah, what is it made of?” The man answered: “We spilt some oil and honey into one stony pot, and then heated it. After that we grind wheat cores and mix it with the honey and oil until it is completely mingled and ready to eat.” The Prophet then said, “This is a delicious dish.”²³

C) The kinds of food served

The simplicity of the Prophet did not allow for more than one kind of food to be served at each meal. Imam Sadiq narrates that one Thursday night when the Prophet was at Quba Mosque, he asked for a drink to break his fast. Aws Ibn Khuli Al-Ansari brought a big bowl containing a mixture of milk and honey. The Prophet brought it close to his lips (perhaps to smell it), and then suddenly refused to drink it, and said:

This contains two kinds of drinks. Only one is sufficient.
I will not drink them together. However I do not forbid

²¹ Al-Nayshaburi, *Ruzah Al-Waizin*, p. 341; Al-Tabarsi, *Makarim Al-Akhlaq*, p. 27, 28; Majlesi, *Bihar Al-Anwar*, vol. 16, p. 242. There are also a number of hadiths from Imam Sadiq about the breaking fast with lukewarm: Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, vol. 4, p. 152

²² Ibid, vol. 6, p. 332. In a similar hadith Imam Sadiq has narrated from Imam Ali a hadith with the similar content.

²³ al-Tabarsi, *Makarim Al-Akhlaq*, p. 28

eating them. I choose not to drink them so as to show my humbleness before God, and anyone who shows humility before God, God will dignify him. Anyone who is arrogant, God will degrade him. He who is moderate in livelihood will be given sustenance by God, but he who is extravagant, God will make him deprived. And he who remembers death often will be liked by God.²⁴

This tradition portrays the Prophet's contentment with one kind of drink and food at a time, and this contentment is preferable – not mandatory – given that Islam is a simple religion to follow. It also indicates the ascetic lifestyle in which the infallible Imams and righteous people lived; although they had the opportunity to use worldly blessings, they only used what was necessary due to their modesty and humility towards God, as they did not consider themselves deserving the least Godly gifts and confessed their inability to thank God for His smallest favours. On the other hand, the arrogant are completely occupied with worldly affairs and use God's blessings while being unconcerned about His favours; instead, they transgress from the right path and demand more from Him. Thus, the Prophet's main advice in this narration is moderation in life and refraining from prodigality. At the end of the narration, the Prophet advises people to remember death, which is an important way of preserving man from deviations.²⁵

D) The amount the Prophet ate

The saints and the people of wisdom have always strictly advised others to eat a moderate amount of food and forsake gluttony. Nowadays, researchers of medical sciences also emphasize this issue.

²⁴ Al- Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, vol.2, p.122 ,no.3; al-Hurr al-Ameli, *Wasail Al-Shi'a*, vol.11 p.219, no.31; Majlesi, *Bihar Al-Anwar*, vol.16, p.265, no. 64 and vol.75, p. 126, no. 25 and also look at: Ahwazi, *Kitab Al-Zuhd*, p.55, no.148.

²⁵ Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, vol.5, p.494 ; Al-Ameli, *A'yaan Al- Shiah* vol.10, p.374; Al-Ameli, *Al-Intisaar*, vol.9, p.407.

Kulayni quotes Imam Baqir saying, “In the eyes of God, nothing is more unfavourable and hated than a full stomach”²⁶ and “When the stomach becomes full, it steps into the path of transgression.”²⁷ As the wise saying goes: “Do not eat very much, so as to not drink very much, so as to not sleep very much, so as to not regret very much.”²⁸ Prophetic narrations have also stressed that gluttony causes disease, hardheartedness, sluggishness in worship and prayer, and illness of the body. This causes the heart to die, and as a result, one becomes distanced by God and eventually disliked by Him.²⁹ Regarding the amount of eating, the Prophet said:

The children of Adam do not fill any pot worse than the stomach. Only a few morsels that give them strength is sufficient for them. But if one has to eat, he should put one-third [of his stomach] for his food, one-third of it for his drink, and the remaining one-third for breathing.³⁰³¹

The Prophet’s spouses also witnessed the Prophet’s moderate way of eating: as they said, “The Prophet’s stomach never became filled with food.”³²

E) When the Prophet ate

The Prophet did not eat except when he felt hungry and when his body required nutrition, as he said, “Eat when you have an appetite for eating, and stop eating while you [still] have an appetite for it.”³³ Another narration states that the Prophet’s preferred to have food when

²⁶ Al- Kulayni, *Al- kafi*, vol. 6 , p.270, no. 11.

²⁷ Ibid, no.10

²⁸ Yahsabi, *Al- Shifaa Beta’riif Huquq Aal-Mustafa* , vol.1, p.85.

²⁹ Refer to: Nuri Al-Tabarsi, *Mustadrik Al- Wasail wa Mustanbit Al-Masail*, vol.16, p.209-221

³⁰ Considering the fact that breathing is not the stomach’s function, it can be understood that what is meant by breathing is the gases that are emitted from the food.

³¹ Ibid, A hadith has been stated from Imam Sadiq with a similar content, look at: al-Barqi, *Al-Mahasin*, vol.2, p.440; Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, vol.6, p.269.

³² Yahsabi, *Al-Shifaa Beta’riif Huquq Aal-Mustafa* , vol. 1, p. 85

³³ Nuri Al-Tabarsi, *Mustadrik Al- Wasail wa Mustanbit Al-Masail*, vol. 16, p. 221, no. 17

it was necessary to do so. He never ate when he was full.³⁴ Moreover, regarding the Prophet's food, Anas ibn Malik said, "The Prophet would never eat meat or bread during the day or night, except when his body needed them."³⁵

The Imams recommended having two meals every day³⁶ and eating a small portion at night before going to sleep:

Do not abandon eating dinner, even if it is only three morsels (of bread) with salt. And anyone who abandons eating dinner (totally), a vessel dies in his body which will never be revived.³⁷

The Prophet has also stated, "Eat dinner even if it is only a handful of low quality dates, because abandoning eating dinner brings about old age."³⁸

F) Who did the Prophet eat with?

The Prophet advised others against eating alone as he never ate alone when he had the opportunity to eat with another person:

Would you like me to inform you who the worst among you is? One who rejects his guest, beats his servant, and eats alone.³⁹

³⁴ Al-Tabarsi, *Makarim Al-Akhlaq*, p. 27; Majlesi, *Bihar Al-Anwar*, vol. 16, p. 241. "Za-Fa-Fa" is said to have two meaning, need being and the first and gathering of a group of people to eat the second. If we translate the hadith using the second meaning, it will be related to the next headline which is whether we should eat alone or with others. (Refer to: Al-Juhari, *Al-Sihah, Taj al-luqah* and *Sihah Al-Arabiyyah*, the root "za-fa-fa"; Majlesi, *Bihar Al-Anwar*, vol. 16, p. 254 - 255)

³⁵ Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad Ahmad*, vol. 3, p. 270; Al-Tirmizi, *Al-Shamail Al-Muhamadiyah*, p. 318.

³⁶ Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, vol. 6, p. 288, no. 2

³⁷ Al-Tabarsi, *Makarim Al-Akhlaq*, p. 195

³⁸ Al-Tirmizi, (*Al-Jami' Al-Sahih Sunan Al-Tirmizi*, vol. 3, p. 188; Al-Jurjani, *Al-Kamel fi Al-Zoafaa Al-Rijal*, vol. 4 p. 294; Majlesi, *Bihar Al-Anwar*, vol. 66, p. 346, no. 22

³⁹ Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, vol. 2, p. 290; Al-Tabarsi, *Makarim Al-Akhlaq*, p. 31

When a food possesses four qualities it becomes perfect: being *halal*, *eating it with other people*, having started with the name of God, and having ended with the praise of God.⁴⁰

He also said:

The best food in the eyes of God is that food which has many hands (i.e. many people) involved in eating it.⁴¹

Imam Sadiq narrates from Imam Ali that the Prophet with regards to eating also said:

Eating food with people brings about abundance. One person's food portion is enough for two people, and two people's food portion is enough for four.⁴²

The Prophet's statement may mean that despite not becoming full, the body's requirements will be provided for, and this might be the consequence of the people's sacrifice (*ithar*) in sharing their portions with others. The emergence of abundance (*barakah*) in food means that by God's blessing, little food can result in sufficient food that is sufficient to supply the body's needs.⁴³

Thus, the Prophet reproached those who ate by themselves while choosing not to invite those who pass by to join them. Kulayni narrates that once when the Prophet was performing prayer in a battle, a group of people went to see him. But since they found him worshipping, they went to the Prophet's companions and told them that if they were not in a hurry to leave, they would have waited for the Prophet to finish his

⁴⁰ Al-Barqi, *Al-Mahasin*, vol. 2, p. 398.

⁴¹ Nuri Tabarsi, *Mustadrik Al-Wasail wa Mustanbit Al-Masail*, vol. 16, p. 227, no. 11

⁴² Ibn Ash'ath Al-Kufi, *Al-Ja'fariyat*, p. 159; Al-Barqi, *Al-Mahasin*, vol. 2, p. 398; Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, vol. 6, p. 273 Chapter on *Ijtima' al-Aydi Alaa al-Ta'am*, no. 1

⁴³ Under a similar hadith from Imam Sadiq, Qaazii Nu'mani gives a similar explanation about the hadith. (Al-Tamimi Al-Maqribi, *Da'aim Al-Islam*, vol. 2, p. 111

worship, but they said that they had to go and asked those companions to send their greetings to the Prophet. After they left, the Prophet told that group of companions unhappily, “A group of people come to you, send their greetings to me, and you do not invite them to eat something? If my friend Ja‘far [ibn Abi Taleb]⁴⁴ was here, it would never happen that a group of people meet him without eating food with him.”⁴⁵

According to Tabarsi’s narration, the Prophet partook permissible (*halal*) food together with his family and servant, or when he was invited to eat, together with those who had invited him. He sat on the ground or on whatever the hosts used for sitting, and ate the same food they ate, unless a guest came to him, in which case he ate with his guest.⁴⁶

According to another narration from Tabarsi, once a person said to the Prophet that they ate food but never became full, the Prophet said, “Perhaps you eat separately. Gather together at the time of eating, and recite the name of God so that you may have abundance.”⁴⁷

These sayings, in addition to inviting others to share a meal and visit one another, emphasize on making family relations stronger by cooperating with one another. The Divine blessing on a group of believers who assemble out of affection and brotherhood is far greater than the blessing on believers individually.

The Prophet sometimes ate with poor and needy people, and by the blessing of his presence, many of them were fed to their fill. It has been narrated from Imam Baqir that one night the Prophet broke his fast

⁴⁴ Cousin of the Prophet and brother of Imam Ali who migrated with some Muslims to Abyssinia and some years after his return he was martyred in one of the battles.

⁴⁵ Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, vol. 6, p. 275, no. 1; Majlesi, *Bihar Al-Anwar*, vol. 16, p. 263, no. 56

⁴⁶ Al-Tabarsi, *Makarim Al-Akhlaq*, p. 26-27; Majlesi, *Bihar Al-Anwar*, vol. 16, p. 241

⁴⁷ Al-Tabarsi, *Makarim Al-Akhlaq*, p. 149, and also refer to: Ibn Hibah Allah Al-Shafi’i, *Tarikh Madinat Dimashq*, vol. 62, p. 42

beside the pulpit (*minbar*), together with the deprived people who slept in the mosque. He ate in an earthenware pot, and by the blessing of his presence, thirty people ate from that food and were fed to their fill. Then the pot was returned to the wives of the Prophet, and they all were fully fed as well.⁴⁸

This narration contains two messages: the concern of the Prophet for sharing company with people in eating, and his miracle in feeding a large number of people to their fill with a small amount of food.

G) How did the Prophet eat and drink?

There are numerous narrations about how the Prophet ate and the mannerisms he followed:

1. Beginning in the name of Allah and ending with praising Him

As in other affairs, the Prophet also mentioned the name of God when eating and drinking.⁴⁹ We quoted the Prophet earlier saying:

The meal with four qualities is perfect: its permissibility (*halal*), having many people eating it, initiated with the name of God, and ended with praising Him.⁵⁰

When food was brought for the Prophet, he would say:

*Bism-Allah (In the Name of God). O' God, make this gift a gift for which we are grateful so that we gain the gift of paradise through it. Bism-Allah, O' God, grant us abundance in what you have provided for us and make it continue.*⁵¹

⁴⁸ Al-Humayni, *Qurb Al-Isnad*, p. 148; Majlesi, *Bihar Al-Anwar*, vol. 16, p. 219, no. 9

⁴⁹ Al-Tabarsi, *Makarim Al-Akhlaq*, p. 27

⁵⁰ Al-Barqi, *Al-Mahasin*, vol. 2, p. 398

⁵¹ Al-Tabarsi, *Makarim Al-Akhlaq*, p. 27; Majlesi, *Bihar Al-Anwar*, vol. 16, p. 241-242

Moreover, contrary to the customary practice of praying after the meal, the Prophet prayed *before* eating, which is an indication of giving thanks for a gift before actually starting to use it.

While drinking, the Prophet mentioned the name of God and prayed in the beginning, and praised God in the end. Since he drank water in three breaths, he said “*Bismillah*” and praised God three times.⁵² When he wanted to start drinking, he prayed thus:

Praise be to the God who sends down water from the sky, and manages the affairs as He desires. In the name of God, the best of names.⁵³

Also, Imam Ali said:

Many times I have been with the Prophet and saw that while drinking water, he would breathe three times, and each time he would mention the name of God in the beginning and praise God in the end.⁵⁴

Also, when drinking water, he would say:

Praise be to the God who, by His grace, quenched our thirst with clean and pleasant water, and did not give us bitter and salty water despite our sins.⁵⁵

According to another narration, when drinking milk, the Prophet would say, “O’ God, grant us abundance in this, and bestow us more from it.”

2. Drinking in three gulps

⁵² Al-Tabarsi, *Makarim Al-Akhlaq*, p. 31; Majlesi, *Bihar Al-Anwar*, vol. 16, p. 246

⁵³ Al-Tabarsi, *Makarim Al-Akhlaq*, p. 151; Majlesi, *Bihar Al-Anwar*, vol. 16, p. 475

⁵⁴ Al-Tamimi Al-Maqribi, *Da’aim Al-Islam*, vol. 2, p. 130, no. 453

⁵⁵ Ibid, no. 456

As pointed out, the manners and lifestyle of the Prophet regarding drinking was such that he divided a drink into three gulps, and mentioned the name of God and praised him in each gulp. In the narrations from the Imams, it is mentioned that the difference between human beings and animals in drinking is that human beings do not drink water in one breath as animals do. Imam Baqir and Imam Sadiq said, "Drinking in three breaths is better than in one breath." Both Imams found it unfavourable that a person should dip his head in the water, like a thirsty camel, and continue until his thirst is quenched.⁵⁶

It is narrated by ibn Abbas that the Prophet took two breaths⁵⁷ while drinking. Also according to a narration from Tabarsi, the Prophet sometimes drank in one breath.⁵⁸ This may have happened in cases in which he drank a small amount of water and drinking in three breaths was not necessary.

3. Drinking from clean utensils

In one narration, one day the Prophet saw a man who had dipped his mouth in water and drank from the middle of the pot as animals do. The Prophet said to him, "Do you dip your head in water and drink like animals? If you have no dishes, fill your palms with water since it is the cleanest dish."⁵⁹

4. Sipping Water

Another way in which the Prophet drank water was by sipping it; he said, "Drink water by sipping and do not drink it all at once, because it causes pain in the liver."⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Al-Tamimi Al-Maqribi, *Da'im Al-Islam*, vol. 2, p. 130, no. 454

⁵⁷ Ibid

⁵⁸ Al-Tabarsi, *Makarim Al-Akhlaq*, p. 31

⁵⁹ Al-Tamimi Al-Maqribi, *Da'im Al-Islam*, vol. 2, p. 130, no. 452

⁶⁰ Ibid, no. 452; Al-Tabarsi, *Makarim Al-Akhlaq*, p. 31

5. Not Breathing Inside the Container

When the Prophet drank water, he would remove the container from his mouth if he wanted to breathe;⁶¹ this showed his concern for hygiene.

6. Eating from the food placed in front of him

When other people were present at the meal, the Prophet confined himself to the food that was in front of him, and would not reach for the food that was in front of others.⁶² This characteristic is a kind of social politeness, which is very delicate.

7. Starting to Eat Before Others and Finishing After Them

When the Prophet ate with other people, whether he was a guest or the host, he started eating before others, and also stopped after everyone had finished eating. This was especially noticeable when he was the host.⁶³

This behaviour was not out of greed; rather, it was to make the guests feel comfortable and not shy to eat. This behaviour also has a specific ethical delicacy. At the times that the Prophet was a guest, others did not start to eat before he did out of respect for him. Thus, by starting to eat earlier than others, the Prophet made them feel at ease in starting to eat. At the end of the meal, also, if the Prophet stopped eating sooner than others, it would make them stop – perhaps even before feeling full – of respect or shame.

8. Eating and drinking using his right hand

The right hand is a symbol of blessing in Islamic culture. In the Holy Qur'an, "The people of the right hand" (*ashab al-miymanah*) and "The

⁶¹ Al-Tabarsi, *Makarim Al-Akhlaq*, p. 31

⁶² Ibid, p. 23 and 28

⁶³ Ibid, p. 23

people of the left hand” (*ashab al-yamin*) have been presented as the people of salvation and felicity, and on the Day of Judgment their record of deeds will be given in their right hand.⁶⁴

The Prophet also performed various activities with his right hand. While mentioning the noble manners of the Prophet, Tabarsi has said:

And the right hand of the Prophet was for eating, drinking, taking, and giving. He did not take except with the right hand, and did not give except with the right hand. And his left hand was for other activities. He liked “*tayammun*” (acting by the right hand) in everything he did, such as putting on clothes, putting on shoes, moving objects, etc.⁶⁵

According to a narration, Imam Sadiq narrates from his ancestors that the Prophet discouraged eating and drinking with the left hand.⁶⁶ There is another narration that indicates the emphasis that the Prophet put on this matter.⁶⁷

9. Modesty and politeness

The Prophet was not voracious during a meal; he sat calmly and politely, bringing the food close to his mouth to bite it rather than lowering his head towards the food.⁶⁸ Other narrations state the Prophet’s modesty while eating, and unlike [arrogant] kings, he used to eat without leaning against something:

⁶⁴ Qur’an, Chapter *Waqiah* (56), verse. 8-12; Ibid, verse. 90-91; Qur’an, Chapter *Inshiqaq* (84), verse. 7,8

⁶⁵ Al-Tabarsi, *Makarim Al-Akhlaq*, p.23.

⁶⁶ Al-Tamimi Al-Maqribi, *Da’aim Al-Islam*, vol. 2, p. 130, no. 447

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 119, no. 399, and also refer to: Nuri Tabarsi, *Mustadrik Al-Wasail wa Mustanbit Al-Masail*, vol. 16, p. 228

⁶⁸ Al-Tabarsi, *Makarim Al-Akhlaq*, p. 30

After being assigned prophethood until the time of his death, the Prophet never ate leaning against something, and this was because of his humility before God.⁶⁹

In addition to acknowledging that the Prophet never ate leaning against something, Imam Muhammad ibn Muslim from Imam Baqir says that these behaviours indicates the special humility of the Prophet before God.⁷⁰ In another narration, Bashir Dahhan asks Imam Sadiq whether the Prophet ate leaning on his left or right side, to which the Imam replied:

The Prophet never ate while leaning on his left or right side; rather, he sat like a servant and this was out of humility before God.⁷¹ Imam Sadiq said also to Mu'alla ibn Khunays:

Since the time he was assigned prophethood, the Prophet never ate while leaning against something and he disliked behaving like [arrogant] kings.⁷²

What comes to mind first from the word “leaning” is resting one’s back, or left or right side against something. The reason for avoiding eating in such a condition – as it is understood from the mentioned narrations – is to avoid behaving like arrogant people and to express humility before God. Some scholars have interpreted the word “leaning” in these narrations as a particular form of sitting in which one’s tendency to eat increases, such as sitting cross-legged. But the Prophet sat in such a way as if he was ready to rise at any moment.⁷³ Also, this etiquette of sitting does not bring about gluttony. The way the Prophet sat humbly is likened to the way servants sat – with

⁶⁹ Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, vol. 8, p. 164, no. 175; Al-Tabarsi, *Makarim Al-Akhlaq*, p. 23 and 27; Majlesi, *Bihar Al-Anwar*, vol. 16, p. 242 and vol. 41, p. 130, no. 41

⁷⁰ Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, vol. 8, p. 129, no. 100

⁷¹ Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, vol. 6, p. 271, no. 7; Majlesi, *Bihar Al-Anwar*, vol. 16, p. 262, no. 5

⁷² Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, vol. 6, p. 272, no. 8

⁷³ Yahsabi, *Al-Shifaa Beta'riif Huquq Aal-Mustafa*, vol. 1, p. 86

modesty and humility. The Prophet himself said, “Indeed I am a servant who eats like servants and sits like them.”⁷⁴ Also, Imam Baqir said, “The Prophet ate like servants and sat like them. And he ate and slept on the ground.”⁷⁵ He also quoted the Prophet saying:

There are five things which I will not quit until the time of my death: eating on the ground together with servants, riding saddleless mounts, milking goats with my hands, wearing woolen clothes, and greeting (saying *salam* to) children, so that they become customary (*sunnah*) after me.⁷⁶

The intention of the Prophet in making these simple behaviours customary is the message that lies behind them, which is to be humble with people.

It is narrated from ibn Abbas that the Prophet sat and ate on the ground. And he accepted the invitation of servants for eating barley bread.⁷⁷ Imam Sadiq also said: “The holy Prophet ate like a servant and sat like a servant, and he knew himself a servant.”⁷⁸

While sitting on the ground like a servant, the Prophet sat on his knees like servant as a sign of humility before God. This interpretation is mentioned in a narration from Tabarsi in the following way:

Most of the time, when the Prophet ate, he ate from the food that was in front of him, and sat on his knees, similar to a person who is performing prayer sits at the time of *tashahhud*, except that he put one knee on the other knee

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, vol. 6, p. 271, no. 6; Al-Barqi, *Al-Mahasin*, vol. 2, p. 457, no. 387; Majlesi, *Bihar Al-Anwar*, vol. 16, p. 262, no. 55

⁷⁶ Shaykh Saduq, *Al-Amaali*, p. 130; Majlesi, *Bihar Al-Anwar*, vol. 16, p. 215, no. 2

⁷⁷ Al-Tabarsi, *Makarim Al-Akhlaq*, p. 16; Majlesi, *Bihar Al-Anwar*, vol. 16, p. 222, no. 19

⁷⁸ Al-Barqi, *Al-Mahasin*, vol. 2, p. 456, no. 386; Majlesi, *Bihar Al-Anwar*, vol. 16, p. 225, no. 29

and one foot on the other foot. He said, 'I am a servant who eats like a servant and sits like a servant.'⁷⁹

Besides what was mentioned, the Prophet also discouraged eating while lying on the back or the stomach. In addition to politeness and modesty, this was also because of health-related issues.⁸⁰

10. Avoiding Formalities (takalluf) in providing the items

The Prophet – especially considering the economic state of that time – did not have any strict commitments to the formalities or the unnecessary items related to serving the food. For example, if in some cases there was no tablecloth – or something that could be used instead – the Prophet would eat on the ground.⁸¹ One day, one of the Ansar brought some dates for the Prophet as a gift. But since they found no dishes at home, the Prophet cleaned a space on the ground with a piece of cloth, and said, "Place them here. By God if the world had the value of a fly's wing in the eyes of God, He would not give any of it to the disbelievers and hypocrites."⁸² It should be mentioned here that considering the Prophet's concern for hygiene, putting the dates on the ground does not mean consuming them in that condition, and they would of course be consumed after being cleaned.

The Prophet also ate with his hands. This means that, considering the circumstances of his time, he invited his followers to simplicity of life. Here it is necessary to mention two points:

First, eating by hands is not in disagreement with observing hygiene; because, as it will be mentioned in the discussion about food hygiene, the Prophet washed his hands before and after eating.

⁷⁹ Al-Tabarsi, *Makarim Al-Akhlaq*, p. 27

⁸⁰ Al-Tamimi Al-Maqribi, *Da'aim Al-Islam*, vol. 2, p. 119, no. 399

⁸¹ Al-Tabarsi, *Makarim Al-Akhlaq*, p. 28

⁸² Al-Iskafi, *Al-Tamhis*, p. 48, no. 79; Majlesi, *Bihar Al-Anwar*, vol. 16, p. 284, no. 133 and vol. 69, p. 51, no. 72

Second, the message of these kinds of narrations is not that the followers of the Prophet today should also eat by hand. But rather the message is that in case formalities and other related items cannot be provided, one should not go through a lot of difficulties for providing them. The way the Prophet ate with his hand was such as to not look similar in the slightest degree to the way arrogant people ate. The Prophet, depending on the kind of food, ate with three or four fingers, and sometimes used his whole hand if necessary, or even his both hands.⁸³ Regarding this, Imam Sadiq said:

The Prophet sat like a servant, put his hand on the ground, and ate with three fingers. He did not eat with two fingers like arrogant people.⁸⁴

Tabarsi describes this as follows:

The Prophet ate with three fingers: the thumb and the two adjacent fingers (the index and middle fingers), and sometimes he ate with four fingers, and [sometimes] with his whole hand. He did not eat with two fingers and would say: 'Eating with two fingers is [like] the way Satan eats.'⁸⁵

11. Avoiding waste

Regarding consuming the food that remains in the dish, the Prophet said, "The greatest blessing is in the end of the food."⁸⁶

⁸³ Al-Tabarsi, *Makarim Al-Akhlaq*, p. 29; Al-Tamimi Al-Maqribi, *Da'aim Al-Islam*, vol. 2 , p. 119, no. 402

⁸⁴ Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, vol. 6, p. 297, no. 6; Al-Barqi, *Al-Mahasin*, vol. 2, p. 442; Majlisi, *Bihar Al-Anwar*, vol. 63, p. 414

⁸⁵ Al-Tabarsi, *Makarim Al-Akhlaq*, p. 28

⁸⁶ Ibid.

Imam Sadiq also stated: “The Prophet wiped the dish of the food and said, ‘Anyone who does this, his action is like he has given charity to the size of the dish of his food.’”⁸⁷

The Prophet wiped the dish of the food and said: “The end of the food has the greatest blessing, and the angels hail those who do this and pray for the abundance of their sustenance. And there is a double reward for them.”⁸⁸

The fact that wiping the dish of the food is known as bringing about blessing might be because of the reason that there is a kind of thankfulness for the Godly gifts, and avoidance of squander and ungratefulness in it. Thus, the person who does this is addressed by the following verse of the Qur’an: “*If you are grateful, I will surely enhance you [in blessing].*” (14:7)

12. Observing Food Hygiene

One of the important characteristics of the Prophet was the attention he gave to hygiene in various dimensions, especially in eating and drinking. For instance, washing the hands, both before and after eating, was very much emphasized by the Prophet. Especially taking into consideration the fact that the people of that time usually ate with their hands, there are many narrations from the Prophet regarding this issue in which the effects of this act of hygiene are mentioned; effects such as removal of poverty, increasing of sustenance, abundance of good, keeping away insanity, accuracy of sight, and staying away from illness.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, vol. 6, p. 297, no. 4; Al-Barqi, *Al-Mahasin*, vol. 2, p. 443, no. 318; Al-Hurr Al-Ameli, *Wasail Al-Shia*, vol. 16, p. 496, no. 1

⁸⁸ Al-Tamimi Al-Maqribi, *Da’aim Al-Islam*, vol. 2, p. 120, no. 405

⁸⁹ Nuri Tabarsi, *Mustadrik Al-Wasail wa Mustanbit Al-Masail*, vol. 16, p. 269, no. 11; Ibid, p. 267; Ibn Ash’ath Al-Kufi, *Al-Ja’fariyat*, p. 27; Shaykh Saduq, *Man La Yahzuruhu Al-Faqih*, vol. 3, p. 358; Ibn Salamah Al-Qazai, *Musnad Al-Shahab*, vol.1, p.205; Rawandi, *Al-Da’awat*, p. 142; Rawandi, *Al-Nawadir*, p. 221. It is worthy to mention that, according to the belief of

Another manifestation of food hygiene in the lifestyle of the Prophet is his emphasis on the cleanliness of the container of food or water. It is narrated from Imam Sadiq that the Prophet preferred to drink water in the dishes that were brought to him as gifts, from the city of *Sham* (Damascus), and he said: “These are the cleanest of your dishes.”⁹⁰ It might be the case that the structure of these dishes was such that the smoothness of their surface made it less possible for unclean particles to remain in dish, as it can be the case with uneven surfaces and dishes with patterns carved into them. The Prophet drank water in containers made of wood, or skin, or in earthenware, and he also drank water in the palms of his hands and said: “There is no dish cleaner than the palms.”⁹¹

According to some narrations, the Prophet forbade bending the lid of the waterskin while drinking water from it, and prohibited others from doing so as well.⁹² This prohibition might have been due to the fact that the water inside the waterskin, as a result of being bent, would give a foul odour, and that the bent area would gradually become polluted. Since the surface of the waterskin is greasy, when some part of it is often bent, there is a higher possibility of that part becoming polluted.⁹³

It was mentioned earlier that when the Prophet wanted to breathe while he was drinking water, he took the container away from his mouth, and brought it near again after breathing.⁹⁴ This indicates the Prophet’s consideration of the most delicate issues of hygiene and manners. Breathing in the container, especially if someone else is going to drink

Shi’ite scholars, the meaning of the word *wudu* (ablution) and words from the same root in these hadiths is “to wash hands”. Sayyid Murtaza, *Al-Amaali*, vol. 2, p. 58; Najafi, *Jawahir Al-Kalam*, vol. 36, p. 448

⁹⁰ Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, vol. 6, p. 386, no. 8; Majlesi, *Bihar Al-Anwar*, vol. 16, p. 268, no. 80

⁹¹ Al-Tabarsi, *Makarim Al-Akhlaq*, p. 31

⁹² Al-Tabarsi, *Makarim Al-Akhlaq*, p. 31

⁹³ Al-Tamimi Al-Maqribi, *Da’aim Al-Islam*, vol. 2, p. 129, no. 448

⁹⁴ Al-Tabarsi, *Makarim Al-Akhlaq*, p. 31

from it, is not in accordance with the principles of hygiene⁹⁵ and proper manners.

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⁹⁵ It is a proven fact, now, that during expiration body gives out carbon dioxide and this why water in a bowl becomes unclean by breathing.

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