

The Holy Prophet's ﷺ Manner of Eating

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1. عَنْ ابْنِ لَكْغَبِ بْنِ مَالِكٍ، عَنْ أَبِيهِ، أَنَّ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ كَانَ يَلْعَقُ أَصَابِعَهُ ثَلَاثًا

Ibn al-Ka'b ibn Malik رضي الله عنه reports from his father that the Holy Prophet ﷺ used to lick his fingers thrice (after finishing his meal) (Riyad as-Salihin 748).

Note: After having taken the meal, it is *mustahab* (praiseworthy) to lick the fingers before washing the hands. According to some Ulama, licking the fingers thrice (as in the above-mentioned hadith) is *mustahab* as the fingers will be cleaned fully.

Mulla Ali Qari asserts that the purpose is not to lick the fingers thrice, but to lick the three fingers as it appears from another tradition. But the opinion of some Ulama is that to lick the three fingers and to lick them thrice are both *mustahab*.

To eat with one finger is Satan's manner; it is stated in *Ihya ul-Uloom* that Allah سبحانه و تعالى becomes angry with one who eats with one finger only. To eat with four or five fingers is a sign of the greedy and a habit of the esurient (gluttonous).

2. عَنْ ابْنِ لَكْغَبِ بْنِ مَالِكٍ، عَنْ أَبِيهِ، قَالَ: كَانَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ يَأْكُلُ بِأَصَابِعِهِ، الثَّلَاثَ وَيَلْعَقُهُنَّ

Ibn al-Ka'b ibn Malik رضي الله عنه reports from his father that the Holy Prophet's ﷺ habit was to eat with three fingers, which he used to lick (after having finished his meal). (Ash-Shama'il al-Muhammadiyah, 140)

Note: To eat with three fingers (the middle finger, the index finger, and the thumb) is *mustahab*. In certain traditions, it is said that the Prophet ﷺ used to first lick the middle finger, then the index finger, and then the thumb. In licking in this order, there are different expediences; firstly, the process of licking may ideally progress towards the right side, and second, since the middle finger is the longest and, therefore, the most smeared, it should be licked clean first.

Allamah Khattabi has stated that some ignorant, foolish followers consider it bad luck to lick the fingers. But what is bad about this? The same food being eaten is sticking to the fingers, so what ill is there in licking the same food? Ibn Hajar has stated that if a man considers this act to be bad, it can be arguable, but if some unthinking fellow considers the prophetic act to be bad, then there is fear of his (objector's) *kufr* (infidelity). Since food is a bounty from Allah سبحانه و تعالى, any trace of it left on the fingers after eating must be valued. The Holy Prophet's ﷺ habit was to eat with three fingers, but it is permissible, as per necessity, to use all five fingers for eating. As

such, bread should be eaten with the help of three fingers, and rice too, if it is possible. If need be, all five fingers may be used. Obviously, one will make smaller morsels if one uses only three fingers. Mulla Ali Qari رحمه الله عليه writes that to eat with all five fingers is the sign of the esurient. If a morsel is large there is fear that it will get stuck in one's throat, and even if it is swallowed somehow, it will be a burden on the stomach. However, if the food is soft and thin, it is permitted to use all five fingers.

3. عَنْ أَنَسِ بْنِ مَالِكٍ، يَقُولُ: أَتَى رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ بَنَمْرٍ فَرَأَيْتُهُ يَأْكُلُ وَهُوَ مُقْعٍ مِنَ الْجُوعِ

It is reported from Hadhrat Anas رضي الله عنه who says: "Dates were brought before the Holy Prophet ﷺ, and I saw he was eating them; the hunger was so acute that he [could not sit by himself, but] had to take support from something to squat." (Ash-Shama'il al-Muhammadiyah

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Note: The Holy Prophet ﷺ was reclining against the wall or some other thing. Although reclining while eating is forbidden by other hadiths, here there is the excuse of weakness, and so it cannot be seen in conflict with the hadiths that prohibit reclining without a reason.

If the Islamic Shari'ah is studied thoroughly, it can be realized that Islam has taken care of every human aspect and condition. While the *sunnah* and *mustahab* methods for the healthy are different, it is permissible for the excused to take support upon or recline against something for eating. To partake in food while sitting is *mustahab*, but if there is no place for sitting, it is permitted to eat standing. It is in this sense that Islam is easy for everyone, the rich and the poor, the sick and the healthy, has been commanded per one's capacity.

It is proven, from the licking of the fingers, that one should take food with one's hand. The Holy Prophet ﷺ did not use a spoon for eating, hence our predecessors used to avoid spoons. It is stated in *Kashshaf* that once, when different dishes were arranged on Harun ar-Rashid's dinner cloth and spoons were also put on it, Imam Abu Yusuf رحمه الله عليه who was present there said to the Caliph, "Your grandfather, Hadhrat Ibn Abbas رضي الله عنه says the interpretation of a Quranic verse is, 'We have made fingers for the sons of man by means of which they eat.'" Harun, hearing this, immediately returned the spoons and ate with his fingers. Unfortunately, the Muslims of this period, instead of reviving the prophetic *sunnah*, are taking on European habits and customs and are using spoons, forks, and knives, and recline while eating. Western Muslims may consider it an advancement, but they do not realize that by giving up the prophetic *sunnah*, they are only causing weakness to their *imaan* (faith). The Ulama, realizing their responsibility, should acquit themselves of those practices on suitable occasions and thus discharge the obligation of preaching.