13348 - Etiquette of Eating in Islam

the question

What is the etiquette of eating in Islam?

Summary of answer

Etiquette of eating in Islam is divided into categories: before eating; while eating; and after eating. The etiquette of eating also includes: eating with a group; not speaking about haram things whilst eating; eating with one's wives and children.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Etiquette for eating in Islam

In Islam, there is an etiquette for eating, which is divided into categories:

Etiquette before eating

· Washing the hands before eating. The hands should be washed before eating, so that they may be clean when a person eats with them, and so that he will not be harmed by any dirt that may be on them.

· Part of the etiquette of eating is to ask about the food if you are a guest and you do not know what it is (i.e., what type of food it is), and you are not sure about what has been offered to you. The Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) used not to eat food until he had been told about it or told what it was called, so that he would know what it was. Al-Bukhari narrated from Khalid ibn al-Walid that he and the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) entered upon Maymunah, who was his [Khalid’s] maternal aunt and the maternal aunt of Ibn

'Abbas, and found that she had some roasted lizard that her sister Hafidah bint al-Harith had brought from Najd. She offered the lizard to the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), but he would rarely stretch forth his hand to food until he had been told what it was. The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) stretched forth his hand, then one of the women who were present said, “Tell the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) that what has been offered to him is lizard.” The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) withdrew his hand from the lizard, and Khalid ibn al-Walid asked, “Is lizard haram, O Messenger of Allah?” He said, “No, but it is not found in the land of my people and I feel that I would have no liking for it. Khalid said, Then I chewed it and ate it, and the Messenger of Allah was looking at me. (Narrated by al-Bukhari, 5391; Muslim, 1946)

Ibn al-Tin said:

“He used to ask, because the Arabs would eat anything because food was hard to come by amongst them. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) may not have liked some things, so that was why he asked. It may be understood as meaning that he used to ask because some animals were forbidden in shari’ah and some were allowed, but they (the Arabs) did not regard anything as forbidden, and they may have brought him some grilled or cooked meat that could not have been distinguished from another type except by asking.” (Fath al-Bari, 9/534)

· Hastening to eat when food is brought by the host. Part of honouring one's guest is to hasten to offer him something, and part of the guest’s honouring the host is to hasten to accept his food and eat from it. If the host sees the guest not eating, he may think badly of him. So the guest has to reassure his hosts by hastening to eat his food, because that will reassure him.

· Mentioning the name of Allah before eating. It is obligatory to mention the name of Allah before eating. What is meant by that is saying “Bismillah (in the name of Allah)” when starting to eat. It was narrated from Umm Kalthum from ‘Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her) that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “When any one of you eats, let him mention the name of Allah. If he forgets to mention the name of Allah at the beginning, then let him say ‘Bismillahi awwalahu wa akhirahu (In the name of Allah at the beginning and at

the end).'" (Narrated by al-Tirmidhi, 1858; Abu Dawud, 3767; Ibn Majah, 3264. Classed as sahih by al-Albani in Sahih Sunan Abi Dawud, 3202).

And 'Umar ibn Abi Salamah said: I was a young boy in the care of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and my hand used to wander all over the platter (of food). The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said to me, "O young boy, say Bismillah, eat with your right hand, and eat from what is directly in front of you." (Narrated by al-Bukhari, 5376; Muslim, 2022).

Etiquette while eating

· Eating with the right hand. It is obligatory for the Muslim to eat with his right hand; he should not eat with his left hand . It was narrated from Ibn 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "No one among you should eat with his left hand, or drink with it, for the Shaytan eats with his left hand and drinks with it." (Narrated by Muslim, 2020)

This applies so long as there is no excuse; if a person has an excuse for not eating and drinking with his right hand, such as sickness or injury etc., then there is nothing wrong with eating with his left hand.

The hadith indicates that a person should avoid doing actions that resemble the actions of the Shaytan.

· Eating from what is directly in front of one. It is Sunnah for a person to eat from the food that is directly in front of him, and not reach out to take food that is directly in front of others, or from the middle of the platter, because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said to 'Umar ibn Abi Salamah, "O young boy, say Bismillah, eat with your right hand, and eat from what is directly in front of you." (Narrated by al-Bukhari, 3576; Muslim, 2022)

For a person to eat from his companion's place is bad manners and impolite. His companion may find this off-putting, especially if the food is soupy etc. That is because Ibn 'Abbas narrated that

the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “The blessing descends in the middle of the food, so eat from the edges and do not eat from the middle.” (Narrated by al-Tirmidhi, 1805; Ibn Majah, 3277. Classed as sahih by al-Albani in Sahih al-Jami’, 829)

But if the food is dates or something of that type, (the scholars) narrated that it is permissible to eat from all parts of the plate.

· Washing the hands after eating. The Sunnah may be done by washing with water only. Ibn Raslan said: But it is better to wash the hands with potash or soap or something similar. (See Tuhfat al-Ahwadhi, 5/485)

So washing the hands is mustahabb both before and after eating, even if a person has wudu.

· Rinsing the mouth after eating. It is mustahabb to rinse the mouth after eating, because Bashir ibn Yasar narrated that Suwayd ibn al-Nu’man told him that they were with the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) in al-Sahba – which is some distance from Khaybar – and the time for prayer came. He called for food, but he did not find anything but some sawiq (barley mush). So he ate some and we all ate with him. Then he called for water and rinsed out his mouth, and then he prayed, and we prayed, and he did not do wudu. (Narrated by al-Bukhari, 5390)

· Praying for one's host. Anas narrated that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) came to Sa’d ibn ‘Ubadah who brought him some bread and oil, and he ate. Then the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “May fasting people break their fast with you, may the righteous eat your food, and may the angels send blessings upon you.” (Narrated by Abu Dawud, 3854; classed as sahih by al-Albani in Sahih Sunan Abi Dawud, 3263)

· Eating with three fingers. The Sunnah is to eat with three fingers; eating with more than three fingers is a sign of greed and is bad manners, because there is no need for more than three in order to gather up a morsel. If it is necessary to use more than three, because the food is light and cannot be gathered in three fingers, then he may use the fourth or fifth. (See Fath al-Bari, 9/578)

This applies if a person is eating with his hand. But there is nothing wrong with using a spoon etc., as we shall see below.

· Eating a piece of food that falls on the floor. If a piece of food falls on the floor, then the person eating should remove any dirt that gets onto it and eat it; he should not leave it for the Shaytan, because he does not know where the blessing is in his food; it may be in the piece that fell, and leaving it makes a person miss out on the blessing of the food. Anas ibn Malik narrated that when the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) ate, he would lick his three fingers. Anas said: "And he said, 'If any one of you drops a piece of food, let him remove any dirt from it and eat it, and not leave it for the Shaytan.' And he commanded us to clean the plate, and said, 'For you do not know where in your food the blessing is.'" (Narrated by Muslim, 2034).

· Not reclining whilst eating. That is because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "I do not eat whilst I am reclining." (Narrated by al-Bukhari, 5399). The scholars differed as to what reclining meant. Ibn Hajar said: The scholars differed as to what reclining meant. It was said that it means being too comfortable in sitting to eat in whatever manner; or that it meant leaning on one side; or that it meant resting with one's left arm on the ground… Ibn 'Adiyy narrated with a da'if (weak) isnad that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) rebuked a man for resting on his left arm when eating. Malik said, this is a kind of reclining. I say, this indicates that Malik regarded as makruh everything that may be counted as reclining whilst eating, and he did not mention any one specific type thereof. (Fath al-Bari, 9/541)

· Not spitting or blowing one's nose whilst eating, unless that is necessary.

Other etiquette of eating

The etiquette of eating also includes: eating with a group; not speaking about haram things whilst eating ;

eating with one's wives and children; not keeping a particular food to oneself unless there is a reason for that,

such as it being for medicinal purposes – rather one should offer the best food to others first, such as pieces of

meat and soft or good bread. If the guest has had enough and stops eating, his host should say, “Eat!” and

repeat it, so long as he does not think that his guest has had enough, but he should not repeat it more than three

times. He should clean between his teeth and not swallow any bits of food that come out from between his teeth.

Etiquette after eating

It is Sunnah to say the words of praise to Allah and du’a after one has finished eating. When he had finished eating, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) used to say, “Al-hamdu Lillahi hamdan kathiran tayyiban mubarakan fihi ghayra makfiyyin wa la muwadda’in wa la mustaghnan ‘anhu rabbana (Praise be to Allah, much good and blessed praise. O our Lord, You are not in need of anyone, and we cannot do without Your favour nor dispense with it).” (Narrated by al-Bukhari, 5458)

And whenever he ate food other than milk, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) would say, “Allahumma barik lana fihi, wa at’imna khayran minhu (O Allah, bless it for us and feed us with better than it).” And when he drank milk he would say, “Allahumma barik lana fihi wa zidna minhu (O Allah, bless it for us and give us more.).” (Narrated by al-Tirmidhi, 3377; classed as hasan by al-Albani in Sahih al-Jami’, 381).

Ibn 'Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Whoever is fed by Allah, let him say, ‘Allahumma barik lana fihi, wa at’imna khayran minhu (O Allah, bless it for us and feed us with better than it).’ And whoever is given milk to drink by Allah, let him say, ‘Allahumma barik lana fihi wa zidna minhu (O Allah, bless it for us and give us more)’.” (Narrated by al-Tirmidhi, 3455; classed as hasan by al-

Albani in Sahih Sunan al-Tirmidhi, 2749).

General etiquette regarding food

· Not criticizing the food. Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) never criticized any food. If he liked it he would eat it and if he did not like it he would leave it. (Narrated by al-Bukhari, 3370; Muslim, 2046)

What is referred to here is permissible food; as for haram food he would criticize it and forbid it.

Al-Nawawi said:

“Part of the confirmed etiquette of food is not to criticize it such as saying it is too salty, or too sour, or not salty enough, or thick, or thin, or not well-cooked, etc. Ibn Battal said: This is part of good manners, because a person may not like food that others like, but there is nothing wrong with eating anything that is permitted in the Shari’ah.” (Sharh Muslim, 14/26)

· Part of the etiquette of eating is moderation in eating and not filling the stomach . The most that a Muslim is permitted to do in this regard is to divide his stomach into three thirds: one-third for food, one-third for drink and one-third for air. “A man does not fill any vessel worse than his stomach. It is sufficient for the son of Adam to eat enough to keep him alive. But if he must do that, then one-third for his food, one-third for his drink and one-third for his air.” (Narrated by al-Tirmidhi, 2380; Ibn Majah, 3349; classed as sahih by al-Albani in Sahih al-Tirmidhi, 1939)

This keeps the body healthy and light, because eating one’s fill makes the body heavy, which leads to laziness in worship and work. One-third is defined as being one-third of that which would make you feel full. (Al-Mawsu’ah, 25/332)

· Avoiding eating and drinking from vessels of gold and silver, because that is haram. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Do not wear silk or brocade, and do not drink from vessels of gold and silver, or eat from plates thereof. They are for them in this world and for us in the Hereafter.” (Narrated by al-Bukhari, 5426; Muslim, 2067)

· Praising Allah after finishing eating. There is a great deal of virtue in this. It was narrated from Anas ibn Malik that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Allah is pleased with His slave when he eats something and praises Him for it, or drinks something and praises Him for it.” (Narrated by Muslim, 2734)

How to praise Allah after eating

Several ways of praising Allah have been narrated from the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him):

· Al-Bukhari narrated that Abu Umamah said: When the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) finished eating, he would say, “Al-hamdu Lillah hamdan kathiran mubarakan fihi ghayra makfiyyin wa la muwadda’in wa la mustaghnan ‘anhu rabbana (Praise be to Allah, much good and blessed praise. O our Lord, You are not in need of anyone, and we cannot do without Your favour nor dispense with it).” (Narrated by al-Bukhari, 5458).

Ibn Hajar said: “ ‘ghayra makfiyyin (You are not in need of anyone)’ means that He has no need of any of His slaves but He is the One Who feeds His slaves and suffices them.”

· Mu’adh ibn Anas narrated that his father said: The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Whoever eats some food then says, ‘Al-hamdu Lillahi alladhi at’amani hadha wa razaqnihi min ghayri hawlin minni wa la quwwah (Praise be to Allah Who has fed me this and provided me with it with no power or strength on my part),’ his previous sins will be forgiven.” (Narrated by al-Tirmidhi, 3458; Ibn Majah, 3285; classed as hasan by al-Albani in Sahih al-Tirmidhi, 3348).

· Abu Ayyub al-Ansari (may Allah be pleased with him) said: “When the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) ate or drank anything, he would say, ‘Al-hamdu Lillah alladhi at’ama wa saqa wa sawwaghahu wa ja’ala lahu makhrajan (Praise be to Allah Who has given food and drink,made it easy to swallow and provided an exit for it).’” (Narrated by Abu Dawud, 3851 and classed as sahih by al-Albani).

· ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn Jubayr narrated that a man who served the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) for eight years told him that he used to hear the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) saying, when food was brought near him, “Bismillah .” And when he had finished eating he would say, “Allahumma at’amta wa asqayta wa hadayta wa ahyayta, fa laka’l-hamd ‘ala ma a’tayta (O Allah, You have fed, given to drink, guided and brought to life, so praise be to You for what You have given).” (Narrated by Ahmad, 16159; classed as sahih by al-Albani in al-Silsilah al-Sahihah, 1/111)

Note: it is mustahabb to use all the words of praise that have been narrated to be said after finishing eating. So you can say one du’aa’ on one occasion, another du’a on another occasion, and so on, so that you will have followed the Sunnah in all ways and attain the blessing of these du’as, as well as feeling the meanings of these words in your heart when you say them on various occasions, because if you get used to saying a particular du’aa’ all the time, you think less about its meaning, because you have said it so often.

Reference:

Al-Adab by al-Shalhub, p. 155