

# Nutrition in Islam

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## Abstract

**Background:** As nutrition is an integral part of human material life, it is inseparable from his spiritual life as well. **Objectives:** This study aimed to assess interrelationship between spiritual health and nutrition in Islam. **Method:** The research method is mainly desk research (religious texts, the way of Islamic scholar) and PubMed. **Results:** Islam as a religion is linked to nutrition recommendation. Food consumption and meal time Islamic orders are not only proper for physical health but also for other aspects especially for spiritual wellbeing. It can be concluded that one's aim of food consumption should be obedience to God and spiritual perfection. For Muslim, foods should be hygienic, healthy and prepared in halal way. Moderation in food consumption recommended in religious narration and excessive eating and drinking not only harmful for physical health but also is opposed to spirituality. Of course, the nature of some foods is more appropriate with spirituality mentioned in this article. **Conclusion:** The result is that the guidance of the holy Quran and traditions can make a major contribution to human society in solving physical and emotional difficulties caused by malnutrition (defined by religion) facing humanity today.

**Keywords:** Spirituality, Nutrition, Islam.

## Introduction

Eating and drinking are necessary for human life, God put the human body in need of food and water to help it continue to grow and evolve. All living creatures based on their structural nature need to be fed. Humans also comply with the general rule with the only difference that the features of human being as God's appointed creature demand that a suitable feeding program which is appropriate with the goal of his creation, spiritual excellence, be considered for him.

Some of the religious orders about nutrition are outlined in healthy diet and promote physical health and prevent diseases. Islam as all the religions in the world has some specific instruction exclusively for spiritual promotion as well (Sabate, 2004) in parallel to fulfilment of the fundamental human need (Koenig HG, 2012; Glanz, 2005). There are some precise and sometimes hard instruction about what, why when and how much and which environment and with whom to eat. (Tan MM 2014; Sabate 2004) Special dietary recommendations are common in religion and most of them fall in two categories: temporary abstinence from food in a definite period such as fasting or permanent commands as consuming food in special condition such as halal meat (Tan MM, 2014; Moubarac, 2013; Koole, 2016). Sincerity in lifelong acceptance of dietary tasks for religion believer will decrease the prevalence of non-communicable disease and will change worldwide burden of disease This special commands are mainly for spiritual wellbeing. (Gillum, 2006; Bell, 2012)

Holy prophets needed food as well. The important thing is that the holy prophets took benefits from Divine blessings to meet not only their material needs to provide bodily growth and development, but also spiritual development and soul perfection. According to the Holy Quran, Prophet Ibrahim (a.s) introduced God to people in this way: "My Lord is the One He created me and guides me; " the One who feeds me and gives me water to drink; "And when I get ill, He is the One who Heals me; " And the One who will cause me to die and will bring me to life again; ...." (Quran 26:81-87)

They also taught their followers that they should have contemplated on their food so that they eat or drink with the aim of both meeting the needs of body as well as spiritual perfection and excellence (Tabatabai, 1996).

The fact is that Islamic teachings pays specific attention to spiritual aspect of nutrition, while unluckily they are even largely neglected

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among Muslims, but Qur'anic teachings and Sunnah can be a great help to human society to remove the physical or spiritual problems as a result of malnutrition.

In this article, it is tried to discuss the teachings of Islam that promote spiritual growth and spiritual perfection in nutrition to achieve the desired. The discussion will be continued under several titles. Although these teachings are largely neglected even among Muslims, the guidance of the Quran and Sunnah can be a great help to society in physical and mental problems as a result of malnutrition (defined by religion).

#### *Type of the food*

Islam has some careful recommendation for type of food. Some foods are mentioned especially in the Quran and there are different interpretation about the cause of swore on some foods such as olive or fig. Conclusively they are referred as accessible, healthy or nutritious. On the other hand, banned foods such as wine despite some benefits could decrease level of consciousness and destroys person's judgment in addition to several physical health hazards.

Also in Surah ..... Narrated that God sent from heaven to them that the food was flavorful lentils and onions.

In some traditions, the positive psychological effects of foods have been considered: 1. Moderation in eating less meat leads to good manners, confidence and courage, while indulging in it results in cruelty. 2. Milk causes patience, kindness, peace, etc. 3. Honey gives rise to good memory, smoothness of hearts and healing. 4. Grapes relieves grief and turns depression to happiness. 5. Date is pursuant to wait and patience. 6. Olive strengthens the memory. 7. Apple strengthens the nerves and face color. 8. Halim adds to the joyfulness of worship, and 9. Pomegranate increases the light of the heart and removes the devil (Al-Hurr al-'Amili, 1983).

Several studies has shown the relationship between fat, fruit, vegetable intake, physical activity and religious orientation in adults (Kim and Sobal, 2004; Bell and et al., 2012). Although, none of these studies were focused on Islam, however all of them supported the positive effects of religious environment, rituals and attitude on promotion of healthy diet, salutary meal time behavior and overall better quality of life.

#### *Top purpose and sanctity of intention in nutrition*

All human behaviors are purposeful, even instinctive behaviors such as eating have planning and control. One of the most important religious tasks are fasting, it could be summarized as eating in a special time frame and in a definite interval with more frequent prayers in order to improving physical and spiritual wellbeing. Fasting as purposeful way of eating beyond inherent need and as a holy act is introduced in every religion and has special rank in Islam.

Hence the religious teachings' attention is really on the result of a controlled and aimful feeding at a human subject.

The infidels of God's blessings eat just to satisfy his instinct attention therefore unhealthy behavior like overeating is more prevalent in this group as they were described Sura Mohammad, verse 12 "those who disbelieve though they enjoy the temporal enjoyment of this life and eat like the cattle.

Indeed religious rituals such as fasting can set up believer's capacity for self-control and dignity. Furthermore, they increase social responsibility and engagement and construct a true religious community (Sabate, 2004). Further research need to investigate the effects of fasting in different period of life. For example, up to now the consequences of fasting in different trimesters of pregnancy on prenatal growth were not conclusive (Susser and Ananth, 2013).

The men of God eat food not only to provide their material needs but also to take advantage of it for their spiritual development, so their holy intention causes them meaningful achievement.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, from this view point, bread and food take a kind of holiness. It has been narrated that the Prophet (P.b.u.h) has sought God: "God bless us in bread and do not deprive us from bread. Since if there were not bread, we would not be able to pray and practice the commandants of our Lord. (Koleini, 1988) Eating with the purpose of gaining strength to worship is itself a form of religious ritual.

Imam Ali (a.s) has said to his son, Imam Hasan (a.s): "O my Lord! I ask you the health of the pain and sickness and enjoy good health in my eating and drinking. I also ask you that the food provides me energy to obey you, to remember your blessings and to praise you. As

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<sup>1</sup> (Sura Mu'minin Verse 51).

long as the food is in my body, empower me for your obedience and inspire me to get away from your submissiveness (Boroujerdi, 2012). In another occasion he has said: "Do not live to eat but eat to live." (Mohammadi Rey Shahri, 2006).

Research result has shown the relationship between nutrient intake during meals and snacks in 24 hours intake, level of consciousness, psychological distress and overall individual health (Moubarac and et al., 2003). They also confirmed that the simple advises such as "eat less and be more active" are not sufficient for prevention of disease and spiritual health of individual and community and in another words environment characteristics are prerequisite for health promotion (Glanz and et al., 2005).

Although, Islam nutritional recommendations like all other religious tasks could not be hazardous to human life and we believe that they promote health. Several research confirmed the relationship between spirituality - religion and healthy diet (Koenig, 2012). Research in control and prevention of some chronic disease has shown positive effect of religious ritual frequency in the prevention and control of disease (Gillum, 2006; Bell and et al., 2012). They found no definite mechanisms for effects of spirituality /religion on cardiovascular disease and there are no specific pathologic condition that could better controlled in spiritual management system (Lucchese and Koenig, 2013) However, this area requires further investigation.

#### *Spiritual purity during the meal*

Cleansings and hygiene when eating or drinking is a subject that human society takes into account and it is also necessary in religion. However, in addition to this important issue, the religious teachings contemplate on spiritual refinement as well. In this regard, there are some commands that make eating be regarded as a form of worship. In the traditions, to take Wudhu<sup>2</sup> at the time of eating is recommended. (Nuri, 1989; al-Rawandi, 1987).

It has also been said that the person is discouraged to sit at the table of the food while he is Jonob<sup>3</sup>. And he has to perform Ghusl before he starts eating (Al-Hurr val-'Amili, 1983).

In another narration, Wuduh has been encouraged even after the meal. According to some scholars, the work done naturally and only for the pleasure could be even considered a spiritual and less material act if it takes place between two worshiping acts [e.g: two Wudho, one before and one after (al-Rawandi, 1987). In this regard, it has been quoted from the holy prophet (p.b.u.h) : "Do not sleep immediately after a meal since it causes cruelty" (Mohammadi Rey Shahri, 2006).

#### *The remembrance of Allah and praying during a meal*

The remembrance of God in all times is a pathway to spritual well-beinga window to spiritual states. The slaughtering of cattle as a part of Hajj rituals must be done in the name of God, moreover this is not only a moral issue but a religious obligation.<sup>4</sup> (Tabatabai, 1996).

Eating together with worship and praying to god should be performed repeatedly during meal.

Reciting God's name during and after eating was introduced by the holy prophet(p.b.u.h) as the means of development and perfection in eating (Ahmad and et al., 1993). It is also quoted from him: When a servant Muslim says the name of Allah, the angels praise him and order the devil to leave there. (Hurr Ameli 1982, vol. 16, p 584)

In another narration, it has been narrated from Imam Ali (a.s) saying that: "Whoever at Start and end a meal with the name of God and even express his/her thankfulness with every morsel of food , it will promote spiritual and metaphysical benefit in parallel to satiety in response of hunger cues . It has been concluded that, this way of feeding increase faithfulness to God (Al-Hurr val-'Amili, 1983) .In a narration from Imam Sadiq (a.s)

Beginning a meal with the name of God , elicit devil from home and bring about God compassion to our lives. Besides it reduce the probability of any harmful effect of food to our body in parallel to positive spiritual effects (Al-Hurr val-'Amili, 1983). Imam Baqir (a,s) has said: To start feeding in the name of God is one of the factors that cause the food not to be harmful (Al-Hurr val-'Amili, 1983) . These losses could be both material and spiritual as well.

In fact, prayers that are suggested to be recited while eating and drinking make them a kind of worship as well as bring forth specific joy and satisfaction of nutrition and result in physical and mental health.

<sup>2</sup> Wudhu is a spiritual practice in Islam consisting of symbolic washing of the face, hands and feet to gain spirituality.

<sup>3</sup> Jonob is a kind of impure spiritual state, in Islam man and woman after the sexual intercourse are considered Jonob and they have to perform Ghusl to get purified form this impure state.

<sup>4</sup> (Quran; 22:28)

The Prophet Mohammad (P.b.u.h) recited this prayer at a dinner-table: Glory be to You, O God, how beautiful you tested us ,Glory be to You, O Lord, You Bless us with what you confer us, Glory be to you, how greatly you grant us well-being (Boroujerdi, 2012). It is also quoted that he prayed at table: "O' God! Bless us, believing men and women, and Muslims." (ibid., Vol. 3, p. 183, 1039). In another narration that he said this prayer during every meal: "O', God! Bless this food to us and please allot us better than this ", (ibid., Vol. 3, p 183, 1040)

In anecdotal from Imam sadigh written this worship during a meal." Please facilitate our lives with your extraordinary favours and power."

: " O' Lord! As you satisfy us,

Bestow every believer enough food for satiation like us.(Babawayh and et al., 1983).

The Prophet (p.b.u.h) also mentioned the name of God and prayed at the beginning of drinking by reciting" in the name of God" and thanked God for it by reciting "the praise belongs to God" at the end. Since he drunk water in three breaths, he said those phrases three times (Al-Fadl and et al., 2014). He prayed such when he began to drink, "Praise be to Allah, who sent down water from the sky, and convert affairs based on His Will, In the name of Allah to Him belong The Names of Outstanding Excellence." (Al-Fadl and et al., 2014).

It has been narrated from Imam Baqir (a.s) to have said after drinking water: "all praise is due to God that gave me water to drink and grant me so much of the blessing to satisfy me, He is the one who heals me and relieved me from any problem

O'. Lord! please give me the permission to be eligible and drink from our prophet water pool (Boroujerdi, 2012).

#### *The observance of courtesy during a meal*

It is understood from Islamic traditions that a Muslim should feel like he is in the presence of God and he is His guest while eating a in a perfect position with obedience to God and its spiritual attendance.and whenever he sits at the table, he behaves like someone who is sitting at the table of an honourable person. The secular and faithless group usually arrogant who take benefit from divine blessings and are carelees about their resources, meanwhile the true believer not only express their humility and submissiveness to God and appreciate Gods favour and blessing for such enormous offering but also feel even not to be able to express thanksgiving to Him for food. It is quoted from Imam Sadiq (a.s) in this regard as saying: "the holy Prophet, from the time he was appointed to prophesy until death, never had food while propped against something and this was due to his humility before God. (Koleini, 1988; Al-Fadl and et al., 2014; Majlesi, 1983) It is also quoted that Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) has never eaten while leaning on his left or right, but he would sit in a perfect position with obedience to God and its spiritual attendance as a Muslim and this was due to his humility before God. (Koleini, 1988; Majlesi,1983) Even he did not bend toward the table. (Al-Fadl and et al., 2014). According to other traditions, one should not eat food while lying down and stretching his legs but kneeling (Al-Fadl and et al., 2014). He is even said to have commanded the respect of food (saying): respect and honour bread because the Lord descended blessing for it from heaven as well as out of the earth, sanctity requires not to be chopped or trodden underfoot (Ahmad and et al., 1993).

#### *Gratitude for Divine blessings*

After the meal comes the gratitude of God. According to Tabatabai, in some cases the "revolt" is to be ungrateful to the blessings of God instead of expressing thankfulness (Tabatabai, 1996). And appreciation is to try to fully and well utilize a favour (Makarem Shirazi, 1995).

The teachings of Islam are that all blessings and provisions are from Him who is the One who has created and given sustenance. Take note to this fact and saying it is an encouraged custom in Islam.

The Prophet (p.b.u.h) at the end of the meal has said: "Praise is to God for feeding everything and not to be fed "(Al-Hurr al-'Amili, 1983).

Imam Zayn al-Abidin (AS) is narrated to have said when food was put in front of him: "o'! God. This is a grace; magnanimity and gift from you, then bless this food (Boroujerdi, 2012)

Imam Sadiq (a.s) has said: " my father after the food said: " Praise to God who fed us from among the hungry ""(Al-Hurr al-'Amili, 1983). Ali Bin Al-Hussein (a.s) has been narrated to have said in time to pack table: "Praise be to Allah who provided us with the means

of transportation on land and sea, and also provided us lawful and pure sustenance.” (Al-Hurr al-'Amili, 1983) However, praise should not only be expressed at the end of the food as Imam Sadiq (a.s) has said: "Indeed when someone wants to eat something, reaches for it and says: "In the name of Allah and Praise be to Allah the Lord of the Worlds “. May God forgive him before the morsel reaches his mouth"(Al-Hurr al-'Amili, 1983).

#### *Type of Food*

In order for food to have a positive impact on lives alongside on body and thereby the survival and spiritual growth, The Holy Quran does not allow the stomach to be laden with whatever called food, or only to consider the hygienic and nutritious and Noorishing of the food. It should be noted that by precision command in food,<sup>5</sup> it has emphasized that among the foods which look beautiful, amaze the appetite, healthy and enjoy nutritional standards, some eating and drinking are found to be infected and spiritually unclean. "The evil and the good are not alike" (Ahmad and et al., 1993). What God has permitted humans, are the clean blessings. The mission of the Prophet (PBUH) was the same that is good food and prevent the man of what is dirty.<sup>6</sup>When food is lawful and good in terms of reality and truth, as the Quran says, it is also the fruit of good deeds and the underlying spiritual excellence: "People, eat of what is lawful and good on the earth and do not walk in satan's footsteps, because he is for you a clear enemy "(Ahmad and et al., 1993). And said: "Messengers! Eat of that which is good and do good deeds".<sup>7</sup>

According to the Holy Quran, feeding is the means to evolution and this is why believers eating program is the good and given that kind of food is effective in the spiritual, moral and human functioning, then using lawful and good morsels is an introduction to do good deeds (Makarem Shirazi, 1995).

However, the result of contaminated and unclean food is evil actions and damage to moral and ethical understandings (Majlesi, 1983) Of the food considered forbidden are the dead, blood and the flesh of swine; also flesh dedicated to any other than Allah, the flesh of strangled (animals) and of those beaten, that which is killed by falling, gored to death, mangled by beasts of prey, unless you find it (still alive) and slaughter it; also of animals sacrificed on stones (to idols).<sup>8</sup> Even eating halal meat too much leaves negative effects on the soul. The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said: Whoever eats meat continued for forty days becomes implacable (Majlesi, 1983).

Therefore, in Islamic nutrition, in addition to the health of body, food consumption must take into account the health of the heart and the spirit and ethos correction and that malnutrition has adverse effects on body and mental health.

#### *Simplicity and lack of variety in a meal table*

Colorful variety of foods usually leads to a fascination with the world and neglect of spirituality and declines spirituality. The conduct of the leaders of Islam (pbuh) was on refuting variety of foods.

It was narrated that one brought the Prophet (pbuh) a bowl of milk mixed with honey. He closed it to his mouth, but put it aside and said: "This is the kind of drink that can be satisfied in one of them. I do not drink the two together; however, do not forbid it, but I will do for humility before God. Everyone who picks the middle way in the livelihoods, will be given much by God, and everyone who is overspending, will be deprived by God ..." (Al-Hurr al-'Amili, 1983). One meaning of being deprived is that gluttonous people who consume foods without any plan, will gradually suffer from indigestion and gastrointestinal diseases and will be deprived from eating many foods. It is clear that a limited number of food digested in a meal is easier for the alimentary canal. This lack of physical health can also interfere in religious programs and thereby be detrimental to spirituality too.

It has been quoted from him that: "nothing is worth than full stomach for God. When man is not hungry and his stomach is full, he will revolt" (Koleini, 1989) He did not eat food except when he was hungry and his body felt to need it (Majlesi, 1983). In a narrative of the Prophet, it has been quoted that: "Eat while you have the appetite to eat and do not eat while you have still the appetite to eat." (Nuri, 1989).

Imam Ali (AS) in the interpretation of the verse: "Eat and drink and do not waste"<sup>9</sup>, Said: "In this verse, all medicine is gathered"(Majlesi, 1983). In another hadith, he said, "refrain overeating, which causes corruption of body and disease and illness in worship. One who eats less, would have healthy body and heart and one who eats much, would have sick body and cruel heart." (Majlesi, 1983).

<sup>5</sup> -(Abas: 24)

<sup>6</sup> -(Araf/157).

<sup>7</sup> - (Mumenoon/51).

<sup>8</sup> - (Al-Maeda/3)

<sup>9</sup> - " (Araf / 31)

In all traditions, overeating causes corruption of body, incidence of disease, illness in worship, cruelty and dying of heart, being away from God, hatred of God, harm to one's religion, and of the characteristics of infidels and carelessness (Nuri, 1989).

## Conclusion

In this way it becomes clear that, in Islam, eating food is not just something natural and instinctive and to dispel the feeling of hunger, but anyone seeking permanent spirituality must hold in some degree of hunger. In fact, meals for a Muslim is a fully conscious action to be done for the power of good practice and worship and the type and amount is chosen not just on desire and quite natural and instinctive. Nutrition can be a spiritual behavior and be done aiming at physical and mental health. According to Islamic teachings, to have a good life and physical and mental health is based on proper nutrition. From the perspective of Islam, God has provided human with spiritual perfection through the creation of clean and halal foods and legislation with laws and regulations consistent with human nature. In God orders, nutrition has been accepted as a means of evolution and nutritious food habits has an effect on spiritual, moral and human performance. In many cases of the orders and the functionality of the prophet of Islam, there are lots of cases about the quantity and quality of food, feeding and its customs, and moral and material properties of food. In Islam, in addition to comply with health, safety and security needs of the body, special attention has been given to the importance of the spiritual dimensions whose samples include prayers and remembrances that exist in religious texts for before, during and in the end of eating food. While these words give eating and drinking the spiritual aspect and a certain satisfaction from the nutrition, they play a large role in physical and mental health. The fact is that Islam has paid specific attention to nutrition, while these teachings are largely overlooked among Muslims and even today humanity should confront and tolerate the consequences for this negligence, it is hoped the present efforts could bring a new insight to compensate for this disrespect.

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