

Islamic Manners

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The Islamic traditions provide us with a rich source of manners pertaining to various aspects of our physical and spiritual life. Observing these manners is very important for our physical health and spiritual growth. This article briefly enumerates Islamic manners in relation to eating, drinking, walking, sleeping, sitting, getting dressed, leaving the house, attending mosques, reciting the Qur'an, and doing *istikbarah*.

Manners of Eating

The way one eats is a reflection of one's character. Due to its importance, the Islamic tradition has taught us the proper manners of eating. Below, we will mention some of these manners:

- a) Imam Sadiq (a) said, "Whoever washes his hand before and after eating will live in ease and will not be troubled with his body" ('Amili 1988, 24:336).
- b) It is reported that Imam Ali (a) once said, "I guarantee that those who say 'in the name of Allah' upon eating will not complain [of

any illness].” Ibn Kawwa then told the Imam, “I said ‘in the name of Allah,’ but the food harmed me.” The Imam (a) replied, “Maybe you had different foods and you said ‘in the name of Allah’ before some of them, but did not say it before the others” (‘Amili 1988, 24:362). Therefore, it is recommended to repeat saying “in the name of Allah” before eating a different kind of food.

- c) Prophet Muhammad (s) told Imam Ali (a), “Begin [your food] and finish it with salt, for there is a cure in it for seventy two diseases” (‘Amili 1988, 24:405).
- d) It is recommended to eat with the right hand (Imam Khomeini 1999, 421).
- e) Imam Ali (a) said, “When one of you sits to eat, he should sit like a servant [with humbleness]” (Kulayni 1986, 6:272). It is also reported that “the messenger of Allah would never eat resting his body on his left side or right side; rather, he would eat like a servant” (Kulayni 1986, 6:272).
- f) One should not eat hastily (‘Amili 1988, 24:266-7).
- g) Prophet Muhammad (s) said, “We are a people who do not eat unless feeling hungry and who, when eating, stop before getting full” (Tabataba’i 1975, 181).
- h) Prophet Muhammad (s) would never blow on the food [to make it cold] (Tabataba’i 1975, 192). Imam Ali (a) said, “Let hot food become cold [i.e. reduce its temperature]” (‘Amili 1988, 24:399).
- i) Among the common causes of illness, especially for those who do not have enough physical activities, is overeating. Imam Baqir (a)

said, "Nothing is more disliked by Allah than a full stomach" (Kulayni 1986, 6:270).

- j) It is necessary to be considerate of others especially when there is not enough food.
- k) It is necessary to put just the needed amount of food on the table, eating it gently to the end. It is also recommended to clean the dish with a piece of bread and eat it (Kashani n.d., 3:54). One should not put his spoon in a dish that other people also eat from, and should eat in a way that the pieces of food do not drop out of his mouth.
- l) If one feels that he is about to cough or sneeze, he should cover his mouth with a tissue to prevent his spit from scattering to the table and to other people.
- m) It is necessary to have the meals at a specific time throughout the day and not to eat in different times, since having irregular meal times is one of the main causes of stomach illness. From an Islamic point of view, it is recommended to have two meals a day ('Amili 1988, 24:327-8).
- n) Prophet Muhammad (s) said, "Eating in the marketplace is [a sign of] meanness" ('Amili 1988, 24:308).
- o) Imam Sadiq (a) said, "Do not eat while walking unless you have no other choice" ('Amili 1988, 24:261).
- p) One should avoid eating a *haram* (forbidden) food or a food that is likely to be so.
- q) One should eat lighter foods at night.

- r) Abu Hamza Thumali says, “The fourth Imam (a) used to say this prayer when eating: ‘All praise belongs to Allah, who fed us, gave us water, sufficed us, supported us, protected us, blessed us, and showed us mercy. All praise belongs to Allah, who feeds and is not fed’ (‘Amili 1988, 24:360).

Manners of Drinking

Here are some manners of drinking. In general, never start what you do, including drinking, except in the name of God.

- a) Be careful Your drink should be pure, clean, and *halal* (not forbidden).
- b) Do not drink water unless you are thirsty.
- c) Avoid drinking very cold water.
- d) Avoid having very hot drinks.
- e) Do not blow on hot drinks [to make them cold].
- f) In day-time, drink water while standing, and at night sit when drinking water.
- g) Do not drink water in one breath, rather take multiple sips.
- h) Remember the thirst of Imam Husayn (a) while drinking water.
- i) Thank Allah after drinking.
- j) Drink water with your right hand (Mamqani 1979, 38).

Prophet Muhammad (s) never breathed in the container of his drink. When he wanted to breathe, he would take the container away from his mouth (Tabataba'i 1975, 170). He would drink in three breaths and would say, “in the name of Allah” before every breath and “thanks to Allah” afterwards. The narrator of this *hadith* mentions that he asked the Prophet (s) about the reason why the Prophet (s) drank this way. The Prophet (s) replied, “I praise Allah to thank [my] Lord and say ‘in the name of Allah’ in order to be safe from diseases” (Tabataba'i 1975, 170). The Prophet (s) used to suck water, instead of hastily swallowing

it. He used his right hand for eating, drinking, giving and taking (Tabataba'i 1975, 46). After drinking water, he would say, "All praise is due to Allah, who supplies us with fresh and clear water, not salty and bitter water" ('Amili 1988, 25:250).

Manners of Walking

Walking properly is a simple action, but this simple action can show one's mental and moral characteristics, and even one's personality. Sometimes, a small action signifies a deeply rooted characteristic. Luqman is quoted in the Qur'an as saying,

"Do not walk strutting on the earth. Indeed Allah does not like any swaggering braggart" (Qur'an 31:18; 17:37).

Once the Prophet (s) was passing down a street, when he saw an insane person surrounded by a group of people who were looking at him. The Prophet (s) asked, "Why have they gathered?" They replied, "There is an insane person, and they have gathered around him." The Prophet (s) said, "He is not insane. Do you want me to tell you who a really insane person is?" They replied, "Yes." The Prophet (s) then said, "An insane person is the one who walks strutting ... That is a really insane person, but this person here is just disturbed" (Majlisi 1982, 76:303).

One should not walk lazily with the excuse of keeping one's dignity and tranquility. The Prophet (s) used to walk lightly and lively. Walking should also be balanced. The Qur'an says, "Be modest in your bearing" (Qur'an 31:19). Imam Kazim (a) said, "Walking fast ruins the believer's prestige."

Manners of Sleeping

One's daily amount of sleeping is closely related to physical and mental health, happiness, and one's energy and preparation for one's duties in life. The Qur'an says, "And we made your sleep for rest" (Qur'an 78:9).

One who seeks knowledge should have balanced sleep and observe the manners related to it. It is very important not to sleep more than necessary, but one has to be careful, on the other hand, not to harm one's health and learning ability by insufficient sleep. What follows are some of the important manners of sleeping:

- a) Using the bathroom before going to bed.
- b) Washing the mouth and brushing the teeth.
- c) Making *wudu* before sleeping. Imam Sadiq (a) said, "Whoever makes *wudu*, before going to bed, sleeps with his bed like his mosque" (Majlisi 1982, 76:182). There is also a narration from the Prophet (s) that says, "Whoever sleeps after making *wudu*, it is as if he stays awake the whole night [worshiping]" (Majlisi 1982, 76:181).
- d) Doing the deeds taught by Lady Fatima (a), who is reported to have said,

Once, my father came to me when I was about to sleep and said, "Do not sleep unless you have done four things: reciting the whole Qur'an, making the prophets your intercessors, pleasing the believers, and performing one *hajj* and *'umra*." I told him, "O my beloved father! You ordered me to do four things I am not able to do." My father smiled and said, "Whenever you recite the *sura al-Ikhlās* three times, it is as if you have recited the whole Qur'an. Whenever

you send salutations to me and to the other prophets, we will all be your intercessors. Whenever you ask for forgiveness on behalf of all believers, they will all be pleased. And whenever you say the Four *Tasbihat*,¹ you will be given the reward of one *hajj* and *'umra*." (Qummi 2000, 1:297)

- e) Reciting the recommended *dhikrs* and *duas*, mentioned in *Mafatih al-Jinan* and *Hilyat al-Muttaqin*.
- f) Imam Sadiq (a) said, "Whoever recites the last verse of *sura al-Kahf* will wake up whenever he wants" (Majlisi 1982, 76:202).
- g) Before sleeping, we should evaluate the deeds we performed during the day, to see whether we have committed any sins and whether we have been able to use all our chances and performed our duties. If we have had any shortcomings, we have to repent and be determined never to repeat our faults.
- h) Another thing we should do before sleeping is paying attention to our duties toward the people. If we have any debts or have harmed anyone, we have to make amends to them. We should also write what we owe to people in our will.
- i) It is better to sleep resting on the right side of the body and facing the Qibla (Esfandiari 1999, 80).
- j) One should sleep based on one's physical and mental activities during the day and avoid excessive sleeping. Imam Ali (a) said, "Excessive eating and sleeping damages the soul and causes harm" (Khansari 1987, 4:596). Imam Sadiq (a) said, "Indeed, Allah does not like excessive sleeping. Oversleeping ruins both faith and worldly life" (Majlisi 1982, 73:180).

If someone sleeps eight hours a day, it means being asleep one third of the day. Now, if one

¹سبحان الله والحمد لله ولا إله إلا الله

devotes even more than this to sleeping, will there remain enough time for spiritual elevation and knowledge-seeking?

- k) It is *makruh* to sleep between dawn and sunrise, in the afternoon, and in the state of *janabah*. Those in that state should first perform *ghusl* before sleeping. If they do not have access to water, they should perform *tayammum* instead.

Manners of Sitting

It is good to face the *qibla* while sitting. Imam Sadiq (a) said, “When sitting, the Prophet (s) would mostly face the *qibla*” (Kulayni 1986, 2:661).

It is good to sit respectfully; Imam Sadiq (a) said, “The Prophet (s) was never seen stretching his legs in front of anyone” (Kulayni 1986, 2:671). Imam Kazim (a) has reportedly quoted Imam Ali (a) as saying, “No one is to sit in the forefront of a session, except the one who has three qualifications: [ability to] answer questions when asked, speak when others cannot, and point to the opinion that contains the welfare of his people. Hence, one who does not have any of these [qualifications] and sits in the forefront is a fool” (Harrani 1983, 389).

Manners of Getting Dressed

Although getting dressed is a simple action and a daily routine, it is good to mention some of the manners taught in our tradition about it:

- a) Our clothes should appropriately cover our body, without being repulsive or sexually arousing.
- b) It is very good to wear clean and tidy clothes, so that our presence would be pleasing for others. The Prophet (s) said, “Be clean as

much as you can, for Allah founded Islam on cleanliness. No one enters heaven except those who are clean” (Muttaqi al-Hindi 1988, 9:277).

- c) Imam Sadiq (a) said, “Whenever you wear your clothes, remember how Allah covers your sins out of His mercy” (Muhaddith Nuri 1987, 3:325).
- d) Purchase your clothes with *halal* money.
- e) Wear clothes with bright colors.
- f) Avoid wearing thin and tightly fitted clothes that display the shape of the body.
- g) One should not wear clothes that attract people’s attention or clothes that are not appropriate for one’s status.
- h) It is disliked (*makruh*) for a person who performs prayer to wear dirty and tight clothes (Imam Khomeini 1999, 138).
- i) Wearing the kind of clothes that the enemies use is not appropriate and has been prohibited in our narrations (‘Amili 1988, 4:385).
- j) Whenever the Prophet (s) wore new clothes, he would thank Allah and perform two *rak‘ats* of prayer (Muhaddith Nuri 1987, 15:489-90).
- k) The Prophet (s) used to wear his clothes from the right side and take them off from the left side. When putting on his clothes, he would say, “All praise belongs to Allah, who provided me with clothing that I can cover my private parts with and look good among people” (Tabataba’i 1975, 123).

Manners of Leaving the House

When leaving the house, it is good to say, “In the name of Allah”, give some money to charity, and have a sincere intention. Imam Sadiq (a) is reported to have said, “When you leave your house, leave like a

person who is not coming back. Your leave should not be for any purpose other than obeying Allah or for a religious purpose. Keep on to calmness and dignity and remember Allah secretly and openly” (Majlisi 1982, 73:167).

Imam Rida (a) said, “When you leave your house, say,

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ ، آمَنْتُ بِاللَّهِ تَوَكَّلْتُ عَلَى اللَّهِ ، مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَا حَوْلَ وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ

‘In the name of Allah, the All-Beneficent, the All-Merciful. I have faith in Allah. I put my trust in Allah. What Allah wills [will be]. There is no power or strength but of Allah’ (‘Amili 1988, 11:384-5).

It is reported that the Prophet (s) said, “When one leaves the house and says ‘In the name of Allah,’ the angels say to him, ‘your health is protected.’ If he says, ‘there is no power except from Allah,’ the angels say, ‘your works will be done.’ When he says, ‘I put my trust in Allah,’ the angels say ‘you are now safe from problems’” (Esfandiari 1999, 182). Imam Rida (a) narrates from his father that “whenever my father left the house, he would recite this dua: ‘In the name of Allah. I leave by the strength and power of Allah, not by my own strength; rather, with your power – o my Lord! – [I leave] exposing myself to your provision. So bestow it upon me in good health” (Esfandiari 1999, 182).

When leaving the house, it is recommended to recite this *dua* after two *rak'ats* of prayer: “O my God, to you I entrust myself, my family, my property, my children, my life, my hereafter, my trust, and the end of my action (‘Amili 1988, 11:379-80).

When leaving the house, Imam Baqir (a) used to say, “I left with the help of Allah, I entered with the help of Allah, and in Allah I put my

trust, there is no power or strength except from Allah” (‘Amili 1988, 11:386).

According to a tradition from Imam Ali (a), one should greet the residents of a house when one enters it. If no one is present, one should say, “Peace be upon us from Allah”, and while entering the house, one should recite *sura al-Ikhlās* (Esfandiari 1999, 182).

Manners of Attending Mosques

Mosques are sacred places where Muslims worship Allah. The Prophet (s) said, “Whoever goes to one of Allah’s mosques will be rewarded with ten rewards for every step he takes until he returns home. [In addition,] ten of his bad deeds will be removed and he will be [spiritually] elevated ten levels” (‘Amili 1988, 5:201). Imam Ali (a) said, “Whoever goes to a mosque will gain one of these eight benefits: a brother who will help him in the path of Allah, new knowledge, a definitive verse, an awaited mercy, a word that will keep him from lowliness or lead him to a guidance, or he will refrain from a sin out of fear [of Allah] or out of shyness” (‘Amili 1988, 5:197). The Prophet (s) said, “A believer in a mosque is like a fish in water” (‘Amili 1988, 5:198), and also, “Whoever has the Qur’an as his words and the mosque as his house, Allah will make him a house in heaven” (‘Amili 1988, 5:198). Thus, to keep the honor of the mosque, believers should follow certain manners:

- a) Mosques are places for remembrance of Allah. Therefore, remembrance of others should be avoided.
- b) One should enter a mosque with physical and spiritual ornaments. The Qur’an says, “O Children of Adam! Put on your adornment in every mosque” (Qur’an 7:31).

- c) Those who are in certain states that make it religiously prohibited for them to stay in a mosque must observe this prohibition.
- d) If a part of a mosque gets *najis* it must be cleaned immediately.
- e) Sleeping in mosques is discouraged (*makruh*).
- f) It is better to step into the mosque with the right foot.
- g) Mosques should be kept clean.
- h) Those living in the neighborhood of a mosque should perform their prayers at the mosque, as Imam Ali (a) said, “The prayer of one who lives near a mosque is not accepted, unless it is performed in the mosque” (Majlisi 1982, 83:379). On the Day of Judgment, mosques will complain from about their neighbors who did not pray in them. Imam Sadiq (a) said, “Three things will complain to Allah: a ruined mosque whose people do not pray in it ...” (‘Amili 1988, 5:201). Imam Ali (a) said, “The sacred precinct of a mosque extends to 40 *dhira*‘ (approximately 200 meters) and its neighborhood extends to forty houses in all four directions” (‘Amili 1988, 5:202).
- i) Imam Ali (a) said, “Whoever eats a food with disturbing smell should not go near mosques” (‘Amili 1988, 5:227). One should also avoid entering a mosque with malodorous feet or socks.
- j) The Prophet (s) said, “Set your shoes neatly outside the door of the mosque” (‘Amili 1988, 5:229).
- k) Imam Sadiq (a) said, “Try to keep your mosques away from purchase, merchandise, insane people ... lost subjects, [legal] judgments and punishments, and loud voice” (‘Amili 1988, 5:233). It is quoted from Prophet Muhammad (s) that “at the end of the time, there will come a people who will go to mosques and gather in circles talking about this world and the love of this world. Do not sit with them, for there is no good for Allah (swt) in them” (Majlisi 1982, 83:386-7).

- l) Imam Ali (a) said, "It is of the *sunna* to face the *qibla* when you sit in a mosque" (Majlisi 1982, 83:380).
- m) The Prophet (s) said, "Sitting in a mosque waiting for the prayer is an act of worship as long as one has not committed an act of impurity." Someone then asked, "What is the act of impurity?" The Prophet (s) replied, "Backbiting" (Majlisi 1982, 83:384).
- n) The Prophet (s) said to one of his companions, "O Aba Dharr! Sitting in the mosque is in vain unless it is for three reasons: recitation of a person in prayer, remembrance of Allah, or seeking knowledge" (Majlisi 1982, 83:370).
- o) One of the manners of attending mosques is performing the special prayer of greeting the mosque. The Prophet (s) said, "O Aba Dharr! Indeed, for every mosque there is a greeting" He asked, "What is its greeting?" The Prophet (s) replied, "Two *rak'ats* of prayer" ('Amili 1988, 5:248).
- p) The Prophet (s) said, "Whoever sweeps a mosque on Thursdays or Thursday nights and removes dirt from it, even as much kohl is put in the eyes, Allah (swt) will forgive him" ('Amili 1988, 5:238).
- q) Ibn Shahr Ashub says, "Whenever Imam Hasan (a) reached the door of the mosque he would look up and say, 'O my Lord, your guest is at your door. O Beneficent, the sinner has come to you. Overtake the evil that is with me through the good that is with You, O Gracious" (Majlisi 1982, 43:339).
- r) It is recommended to use perfume before attending a mosque.
- s) It is recommended to have *wudu* while going to a mosque and to be clean and neat. One should not get involved in the worldly talks in the mosque. One should not use a mosque as a passage to go somewhere else [by entering from one door and leaving from another.]
- t) Imam Sadiq (a) said, "When you get at the door of a mosque, be aware that you have indeed headed toward the door of the house

of a great king into whose court no one can step except the purified; who no one is allowed to sit with except the most truthful. So fear stepping into His court as you fear [meeting] a king, for you will face a great danger if you are not careful” (Muhaddith Nuri 1987, 3:437).

Manners of Reciting the Qur’an

The Prophet’s (s) instructions and commands about the Qur’an and its unique status made it an important part of people’s life. Soon after the beginning of the revelation of the Qur’an, people started to memorize it. The Prophet (s) himself was the first memorizer of the Qur’an, and many people followed suit. Imam Sadiq (a) said, “Whoever memorizes the Qur’an and acts upon it will be accompanied by the noble and righteous envoys [from among the angels] on the Day of Judgment” (Kulayni 1986, 2:603).

We have also received several instructions regarding the recitation of the Qur’an. Some of these instructions are as follows:

- a) Having *taharah* (purity). The Qur’an says, “No one touches it except the pure ones” (Qur’an 56:79). Imam Ali (a) said, “One should not recite the Qur’an until one makes ablutions” (‘Amili 1988, 6:196).
- b) *Isti’adhab* (seeking refuge in Allah). When beginning to recite the Qur’an, one should seek refuge in Allah from the outcast Satan. The Qur’an says, “When you recite the Qur’an, seek the protection of Allah against the outcast Satan” (Qur’an 16:98).
- c) *Tartil*. The Qur’an should be recited with *tartil*, i.e., unhurriedly and with contemplation. As the Qur’an says, “Recite the Qur’an in a measured tone” (Qur’an 73:4).

- d) Consideration. In addition to *tartil*, Allah has ordered consideration and contemplation about the verses of the Qur'an: "Do they not contemplate on the Qur'an?" (Qur'an 47:24). Imam Ali (a) said, "Be aware that there is no good in reciting the Qur'an without contemplation" (Kulayni 1986, 1:36).
- e) Brushing the teeth. The Prophet Muhammad (s) said, "Clean the way of the Qur'an." One person asked, "What is the way of the Qur'an?" The Prophet replied, "The mouth." The person then asked, "With what?" The Prophet answered, "With brushing the teeth" (Majlisi 1982, 76:131). Also, in this regard, Imam Ali (a) said, "Your mouths are the ways of the Qur'an. So clean them with brushing" (Muttaqi al-Hindi 1988, 2:317).
- f) To recite by looking at the text of the Qur'an [not relying on memory]. The Prophet (s) said, "Reciting by looking at the text is better than reciting it from memory" (Muhaddith Nuri 1987, 4:268).
- g) Reciting beautifully. The Prophet (s) said, "Make the Qur'an beautiful with your voice, since beautiful voice increases the beauty of the Qur'an" ('Amili 1988, 6:211).
- h) *Ikhlās* (sincerity). Imam Sadiq (a) said, "Some people recite the Qur'an so that others say, 'So and so is a reciter.' Others recite it to achieve their worldly purposes and there is no good in this. But some other people recite the Qur'an to benefit from it in their prayer and in their days and nights" (Kulayni 1986, 2:607).
- i) Every time Imam Husayn (a) recited the phrase, "O you who have faith," he would say, "*labbayk Allahumma labbayk* [Here I am, O Allah, here I am]" (Majlisi 1982, 43:331).
- j) Schedule a time for reciting the Qur'an as you do for your studies.

- k) There are also instructions for those who listen to the Qur'an. They have to remain silent, contemplating the recited verses. Allah (swt) says in the Qur'an, "When the Qur'an is recited, listen to it and be silent, maybe you will receive [Allah's] mercy" (Qur'an 7:204).

Manners of ISTIKHARAH

There are two meanings for *istikharah*. One meaning is asking Allah for the good. This kind of *istikharah* is always recommended ('Amili 1988, 8:63-8).

Another meaning is performing special rituals in order to determine the right decision, when one cannot realize what is the best choice in a certain situation. This type of *istikharah* has certain manners and conditions. Unfortunately, due to incorrect understanding, some people do *ishtikharah* for every decision, without considering its conditions. These conditions are very important, and unless they are met, the *istikharah* is invalid. Below are some of the manners and conditions of *istikharah*:

- a) "Whenever you want to get help from the Qur'an to find out if something is good or bad, recite *sura al-Ikhlās* three times. Then ask Allah to send peace and blessings to the Prophet (s) and his family three times. Afterwards, say, 'Oh my Lord, indeed, I seek help from your book to find out the right decision and I put my trust in you. Thus, show me from your book the veiled of your secret, the hidden of your unseen things.' Then open the Qur'an, and get your omen from the first line of the first side, without counting the lines or pages. This has been narrated from the Prophet (s)" (Ibn Tawus 1988, 156).

- b) Thinking, consulting with others, and considering the different aspects of what one wants to do. Only if consultation and thinking cannot help in determining the right decision, there will come the turn for *istikharah*.
- c) Reciting *salawat* three times when doing *istikharah* with tasbeih (prayer beads) (Majlisi 1982, 91:250).
- d) Reciting *sura al-Ikhlās* three times (Majlisi 1982, 91:241).
- e) It is better to do *istikharah* by oneself. Some even believe that the *istikharah* done by one person on behalf of another person is not acceptable.
- g) While performing *istikharah*, one should be in the state of supplication; that is to request Allah to remove his confusion.¹

This article has presented various types of manners to be used in day to day life, based on teachings of the Qur'an and the holy Ahlul Bayt (s).

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¹ For further information on *istikharah*, see Ibn Tawus, *Fath al-Abwab*.

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