

# SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TRADITION OF THE PROPHET MOHAMMED

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The life of the Prophet (*peace be upon him*), represented the translation of the Al-Qur'an which is the revelation to him by Allah. Each and every act performed by the Prophet (*peace be upon him*), was entirely guided by Allah. The Creator of human beings knows the best for the style and the manner of living they should follow.

In this communication, the biological significance of the practices of Islam, performed by the Prophet (*peace be upon him*), are tried to be understood with the recent advances of knowledge. For example, the ablution performed five times a day, represents removal of extraneous particles from the skin which is exposed to the atmosphere. On a similar basis, the Prophet (*peace be upon him*), recommended performing the ablution before retiring, so as to cleanse the skin of the extraneous particles which could otherwise stick to the skin for approximately eight hours. It is not only the exposed surfaces of the skin but also the mucocutaneous junction of the nose, the deepness of the throat and the external auditory meatus which are taken care of as well during this process. In some forms, ablution was practiced in Judaism, the rudimentary of which is seen today in the form of washing hands.

This relationship of washing the skin and the physiological importance of the skin to various stimuli are relevant and important. Recent knowledge tells us that the skin is the largest organ of the body and has tremendous absorbing ability. The blood flow to the skin is rich and the effect of various neurohormonal influences on the skin are well documented. These all enhance the absorption of the particular matter, especially if they are permitted to adhere to the skin for any length of time or their concentration in the environment is increased as it is happening now.

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*This article was presented at the 10th Annual Convention of the Islamic Medical Association of the United States and Canada in Orlando, Florida on October 21-23, 1977.*

The eating with the hand, which most of us have changed to spoon or stick, has quite a physiological effect on the digestive system. The temperature of the food when eaten by hand is gauged much better and it takes longer to prepare the food in the hand for the process of swallowing it. This method of handling the food increases the amount of salivation and prepares the stomach by appropriate gastric reflexes, making the food easily digestible. Esthetically, it is more heartening to hold the food in the hand than with the sticks or spoons. In the literature, it has been reported that one of the sources of bodily iron is through cutlery which is used. However, the cutlery is mostly of alloy and the iron available is very minimal. It is questionable if this iron can be utilized and incorporated by the body. The tradition of washing the hands before eating is to cleanse the skin of particles which one may swallow with the food. It is interesting to note that the Prophet (*peace be upon him*), did not wipe his hands after washing with water, probably avoiding any extraneous particles which may be incorporated onto the skin from the drying cloth, etc.

The tradition of sleeping on the right side is physiological and probably protects the left cerebral hemisphere and, especially, the left middle cerebral artery. By this position, which may last during the major time of sleep, the left middle cerebral artery is under lesser blood pressure. Thereby, subjected to less effect of it and probably reducing the chances of atheromatous formation, resulting in relative protection to the dominant hemisphere from cerebral thrombosis. The dominance of one cerebral hemisphere is peculiar to human beings amongst mammals. In approximately 90% of the humans, the dominant hemisphere is the left hemisphere and thus, most human beings are right-handed. Also, there is a 96% correlation of the speech center being located in the dominant hemisphere.

The encouragement given to the Muslim children to  
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use their right hand may be of some significance, although the dominance of the hemisphere is genetically determined. Further, lying on the right side, while asleep, has other physiological effects such as emptying of the spleen, massaging effect of the diaphragm on the liver, thereby improving the hepatic circulation and emptying of the gastric content. Placing the right hand under the right side of the face makes certain that the head is comfortable and squarely on the lateral side without rotation of the cervical spine. This physiological position of the cervical spine on the remainder of the spinal column has also a protective effect on the vertebral arteries which otherwise may become kinked and predisposed to trauma. In this position, the remainder of the spine is also subjected to less strain in terms of rotation of the vertebrae, thereby lessening the chances of osteoarthritis.

These are but a few of the examples and we are sure that we will find all of the traditions of the Prophet (*peace be upon him*), with this significance, some of which may become understandable to us with the passage of time. After all, the 1400 years-old tradition is not really old but rather for all time, for all nations and for all people.

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