



Protecting the Stomach

Imām ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Alawī al-Ḥaddad ¹

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As for the stomach, protecting it and placing it under strict regime are among the highest priorities. This is to be done by protecting it from eating forbidden and doubtful food and then by restraining it from excessive desires and from filling it even with what is lawful.

We have already addressed the question of the unlawful and the doubtful in the chapter of scrupulousness, *al-war’a*.

As for over indulging ones desires and excessive eating, that is disapproved. In it lie many afflictions and hazards. Among them is the hardening of the heart and laziness of the limbs with regard to obedience, lack of vigor in acts of worship, diminished understanding of knowledge and wisdom and minimal mercy and compassion for the weak Muslims and those in need.

It is also feared that over indulgence and frequent over eating will plunge one into what is doubtful and maybe even to what is forbidden.

Hujjat al-Islām ², may Allah the Exalted show him mercy said, ‘Over-eating from what is lawful is the source of all evil, and so what of (eating from the) forbidden’.

And says he, upon whom be prayers and salutations, said, ‘The son of Adam has not filled a vessel more evil than his belly. Sufficient for the son of Adam are morsels to sustain his back. But if this is impossible, then let him keep a third for his food and a third for his water and a third for his breath.’ ³

¹ Excerpted from his book *Naṣā’ih al-Dīniyya wal-Waṣāya al-Imāniyya*

² That is, Imām al-Ghazālī.

³ Related by al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasa’ī and Ibn Mājah on the authority of al-Miqdād.

It has also been related that he, upon whom be prayers and salutations, said, ‘the wicked among my *nation* are those nourished on luxury and whose bodies grow from it and consequently their aspirations are only for assortments of food and clothing, and they affect eloquent speech.’⁴

And says he, upon whom be prayers and salutations, said, ‘he whose stomach is full longest in this world will be hungry for longest in the Hereafter’.⁵ ‘Alī, may Allah ennoble his face, said, ‘a man who aspires to what enters his stomach will be valued to the extent of what comes out of it.’

It is incumbent upon a believer to hold himself back from his desires as a matter of contentment and renunciation of worldly things. When he eats, he should fall short of eating to his fill. He should restrict himself to whatever lawful thing he can find, without putting himself in search of what is most delicious and most akin to one’s nature. If he aims for the coarsest and the nearest, then he will be closer to *piety, taqwa*, less strenuous upon himself and furthest from his own desires, and in righteousness, most like the virtuous predecessors.

The most common food of the Messenger of Allah, upon whom be prayers and salutations, was barley. He used to knead it himself and it was baked for him without being sifted as sieves are a more recent invention. He and his family, may blessings and peace be upon him and them, used to live on dates and water for months on end with no fire bring lit for food or any other purposes.

A believer should eat with the correct etiquette and in following the prophetic way, including beginning with the name of Allah and thanking Him at the end. He should eat with the intention of consuming food in order to carry out acts of obedience to Allah and fulfilling acts of piety and should follow the many other etiquettes transmitted in the tradition.



⁴ Related by al-Tabrani in *al-Kabīr* and al-Baihaqī in *Shu‘b al-Imān* on the authority of Abī Umāma.

⁵ Related by al-Tabrani in *al-Kabīr* on the authority of Salmān