

SOUL FOOD:

Serving The Guest
Food For Rememberance

Nourishing The Muslim Body

Anisa Abeytia

There is an old adage that states, "you are what you eat," but how literally should we interpret this statement? If we think about it, we are recreating ourselves everyday with what we place into our mouths. The building blocks of life, glucose (sugars, but not the kind you think), fatty acids (fats, both saturated and unsaturated) and amino acids (proteins), too often lack vital energy in the diet's of Americans and at a growing rate in the diet's of people living in developing counties. When we do not adequately provide our bodies with quality nutrients, we are recreating, changing ourselves from the state we were in at birth, into something inferior due to our poor food choices. Our bodies are not separate from our soul, so we must too recognize this soul altering phenomena. This alteration begins at the moment of birth.

One of the first things a parent does is follow this *hadith*, "[h]e, the Holy Prophet, chewed them and then put his saliva in his mouth. The first thing that entered his (baby) stomach, was the saliva of Allah's Messenger, may peace be upon him."¹ We must ask ourselves why the ingestion of food is so important that it is one of the first applications of *deen*.

If we survey the *hadiths* regarding medicine, more than half deal with food. Adequate nutrition is part of our *deen*, but unfortunately a neglected part that has serious repercussions for us. William Dufty goes so far as to state that it was the introduction of excess sugar consumption that ultimately lead to the downfall of the Muslim empire.² Allah *subhanatallah* tells us that, "[a]nd Satan circulates in the body of Adam's offspring as his blood circulates in it."³ This *hadith* takes on greater significants when we know that one tablespoon of sugar impares the immune system for up to five hours, leaving the individual open to an attack from anything. Dufty further quotes from the botanist Leonhard Rauwolf in his 1573 treatise:

*The Turks and Moors cut off one piece [of sugar] after another and so chew and eat them openly everywhere in the street . . . in this way [they] accustom themselves to gluttony and are no longer the interpit fighters they had formerly been.*⁴

Allah *subhannatallah* tells us:

*The son of Adam never fills a vessel worse than his stomach. The son of Adam only needs a few bites that would sustain him, but if he insists, one third should be reserved for his food, another third for his drink and the last third for his breathing.*⁵

Site these two statements together because sugar creates a "false" hunger. Over consumption of refined, white sugar leads to over eating as in Syndrome X. When sugar is over consumed, the calories are negative calories and our body signals that it is still hungry. When we deny our body, fresh, quality whole foods, we create the conditions for diseases to arise. "There is no disease that Allah has created, except that He also has created its treatment."⁶ And for our purposes I would add, there is a cause for every disease. The work of ibn Qayyim, *Healing with the Medicine of the Prophet* (swas) provides an insight into this process:

*"Physical aliments attack and harms the body and alters its normal functions, because of an excess amount of substance. This type constitutes the majority of diseases and occurs because of overeating or consuming more than what the body needs, that which brings about little benefit or is not digested easily, or due to complex meals."*⁷

Cacik or
Mast-o-Khyar
Cucumber
Yogurt Salad

Kathleen Siegel

Total time
1-1/2 hours
Preparation time
1/2 hour
Chilling
1+ hours

"All food is soul food; to treat it otherwise is to court indigestion, both chronic & metaphysical."¹

2 cups peeled, seeded and diced cucumber
2 tbsp. salt (for cucumbers)
1 quart yogurt
1 heaping tbsp. garlic
2 tbsp. dried or 1/4 cup fresh finely chopped mint
Salt to taste

Garnish:

Several sprigs fresh mint

Put the cucumbers into a colander, sprinkle with 2 tbsp. salt and let drain for 1/2 hour.

Combine the yogurt, garlic and mint in a mixing bowl, then rinse the cucumbers well and add them to the bowl. Taste and add salt as needed. Cover and refrigerate for at least an hour before serving, garnished with sprigs of mint.

¹ Hakim Bey



There is power in food because the very act of cooking is alchemy. So what about the way we grow and process our food, which no longer renders it whole and nutritious? By altering our foods, we alter ourselves in positive or negative ways. For many years I was a fan of Chef Boyardee's ravioli. Are you a big mac, super taco or an over processed t.v. diner? Are you "genetically modifying" your DNA? Twenty years ago in the US 1 in 10,000 children had autism, today it is 1 in every 166 children. In England 1 in every 60 children, mostly boys, have autism. These figures lead Mary Megson, MD and autism expert, to state that we have altered the human genome. This is a dramatic statement when we take into consideration that the human genome is altered 1 percent every 100 years.

As Muslims, we must make the connection between what we eat and the state of our *iman* because the two are linked. How is your prayer after a sugary treat? Can you memorize Quran after a cup of coffee? These are all provocative ideas that I hope to share with you here each month.



Anisa Abeytia lives in rural Northern California with her husband and four children and is a member of the Islamic Writer's Alliance. She is pursuing her M.S. in Holistic Nutrition and maintains the website www.womenshealingcircle.org. She is dedicated to the physical, mental and spiritual health of the Muslim Ummah. Anisa can be reached at anisa@womenshealingcircle.org.

¹ Muslim 25:5344

² Bukhair 3:33:255

³ Dufty, 30

⁴ Dufty, 30

⁵ Qayyim 30

⁶ Bukhari 7:71:582

⁷ Qayyim 30