

PERSONAL HYGIENE (PART 2 OF 2): THE NATURAL WAY

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Description: Five natural ways of personal hygiene taught by Islam.

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Muslims believe that all of humankind is born innately knowing that God is One. It is a natural state of being where one instinctively knows that there is a Creator and our natural way of life is to worship Him and please Him. The Arabic word for this state of being is *fitrah* and linguistically it means causing a thing to exist for the first time, in its most pure and natural condition. Prophet Muhammad said **that every child was born in a state of fitrah, with the correct understanding of God.**^[1]

The respected Islamic scholar and historian At-Tabari described fitrah as the way, or religion of God. The religion of Islam is a holistic way of life. It encompasses emotional, physical, and spiritual well being and takes into account the natural needs of humankind. When we mention the fitrah in relation to personal hygiene, we mean things done to improve overall health and well-being. Some actions are according to the natural way – the way that is pleasing to God and beneficial to humankind.

The traditions of Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, include advice about actions that are part of a natural way to maintain personal hygiene. He said that, **“Five things are part of the fitrah: shaving the pubic hair, circumcision, trimming the moustache, plucking the armpit hairs, and cutting the nails”.**^[2] This is believed to be the ancient way, the natural way, followed by all of the Prophets, and enjoined on the believers by the laws that they brought.^[3] Let us examine each of the five actions of fitrah in relation to cleanliness and personal hygiene.

Shaving the pubic hair

It is obligatory that impurities are completely removed before prayer; therefore, removal of the pubic hair makes it easier to maintain cleanliness. Although plucking was recommended by Prophet Muhammad, the hair may be removed by whatever method is safest and easiest for each individual. The hair that grows around the pubic area is usually very course and thick and after using the toilet traces of faeces and urine may be trapped between the hairs or on the skin.

Muslims are encouraged to keep their genital area and underwear as clean as possible. Prophet Muhammad advised the believers to use their left hand to clean

themselves thoroughly after using the toilet. If we fail to clean this area properly, our bodies become a breeding ground for diseases including urinary tract infections. In the days of Prophet Muhammad, they used stones or dried clay but now days we have the luxury of toilet paper. However, the use of toilet paper alone is not sufficient. Once all traces of impurity have been removed with the toilet paper, if possible, water must be used to give the area a thorough clean. Muslim homes often have water hoses installed next to the toilet or have water jugs available to facilitate cleanliness.

Circumcision

The majority of Islamic scholars agree that circumcision is obligatory for men providing they do not fear that it may harm them. Circumcision makes it easier to keep the penis clean from traces of urine, dirt, or impurities and it involves cutting the foreskin covering the glans. It does not involve flaying the skin or part of the penis, in fact to do so would be causing deliberate harm and thus be against the teachings of Islam. Female circumcision is not part of the obligatory rites of Islam.

Trimming the moustache

Prophet Muhammad made it clear to his followers that they should trim their moustaches but leave their beards.^[4] The scholars have different opinions about whether the moustache should be shaved off completely however, all agree that it should be trimmed so that the hair does not hang over the lip or get into the mouth. It is important that the area around the mouth is kept clean and so it does not emit a bad smell.

Plucking the armpit hairs

Although plucking would be the best way to remove hair from the armpits, it may not be the most comfortable; therefore, any hair removal method is permissible. Removing the hair from the armpits makes it easier to clean an area of the body where sweat and grime collect. Hair, combined with darkness and moisture is an ideal place for bacteria to grow.

Cutting the nails

Again, the main reason for keeping the nails short is for cleanliness and hygiene. Dirt, grime, and bacteria can easily be trapped under the nails and passed on to other people, especially when preparing food or in a medical environment. Having dirty or long finger and toe nails, is unhealthy and unhygienic.

In order to be sure that his followers were well groomed and clean Prophet Muhammad ordered that the hair be removed from the armpits and pubic area, and that the nails and moustaches be trimmed, at least every forty days.^[5] Personal hygiene is important in Islam. In order to worship God correctly it is necessary to strive to be healthy in both

mind and body. Physical cleanliness is important just as spiritual cleanliness is important. Islam has provided us with clear guidelines. Our purpose is to worship God and we are asked to assure that all our actions begin with the intention to please God. Pleasing God is the ultimate goal and God reminds us in Quran that cleanliness is pleasing to Him.

“Truly, God loves those who turn unto Him in repentance and loves those who purify themselves.” (Quran 2:222)

Footnotes:

[1] *Saheeh Muslim*

[2] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim*

[3] *AS-Shawkaani, Nayl al-Awtaar, Baab Sunan al-Fitrah*

[4] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari*

[5] *Saheeh Muslim*

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