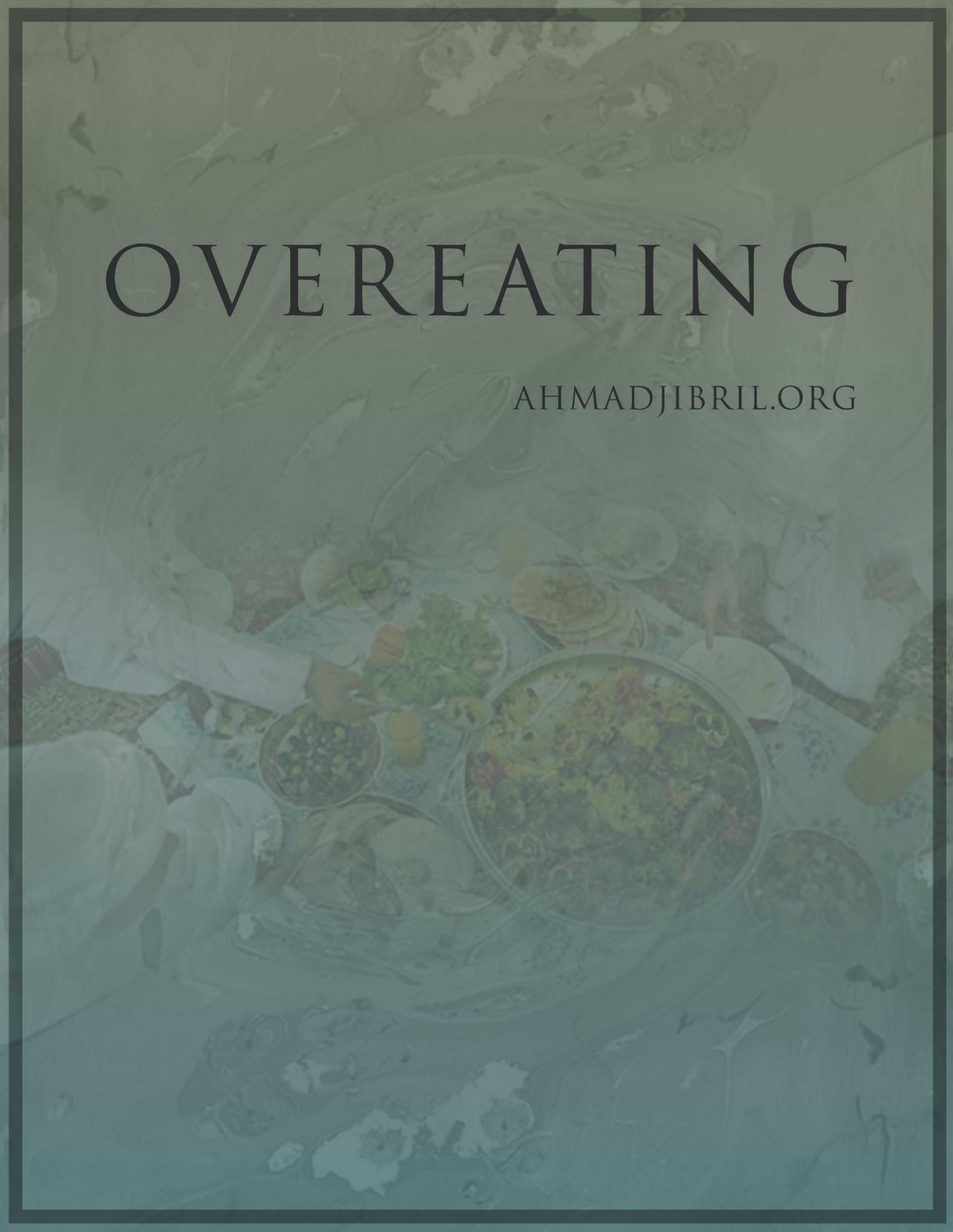


OVEREATING

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Overeating

Ash-Shaykh Al-Imām Ahmad Mūsā Jibrīl (حفظه الله)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



Question: What's the ruling on eating beyond fill?

The Messenger ﷺ gave the clearest solution for that and he gave a principle for everyone to follow in this matter. A Hadīth that indicates the miracle of the Sunnah of the Messenger ﷺ. It presents a cure, or more so a preventive measure, to a major source of illnesses — both physical and spiritual.

مَا مَلَأَ آدَمِيٌّ وَعَاءً شَرًّا مِنْ بَطْنٍ بِحَسْبِ ابْنِ آدَمَ أَكْلَاتٍ يُقْمَنُ صُلْبَهُ فَإِنْ كَانَ لَا مَحَالَةَ فَثُلُثٌ لِبَطْنِهِ وَثُلُثٌ لَشَرَابِهِ وَثُلُثٌ لِنَفْسِهِ

A human being fills no worse vessel than his stomach. It is sufficient for the son of Ādam to eat what will support his back. If this is not possible, then a third for food, a third for drink, and a third for his breath.¹

The worst container to fill is the stomach. There's no container worse to fill than the stomach. Never fill your stomach. The Messenger ﷺ taught us that it's sufficient for one to eat what supports his back, meaning the basic he needs to survive. Ibn Al-Qayyim said that's the bare minimum where one maintains his strength and will not fail or weaken. If it's not possible to do that, then a third for food, a third for water, and a third for breathing. Back in the time of Al-Ma'mūn and Al-Mutawakkil, there was a famous physician named Abu Zakariyyah Yahyā Ibn Māsawayy. He authored many medical books back then. He was a Christian, he wasn't Muslim. He read this Hadīth in the books of Abu Khaythamah, and he said, "If people", — this is a Christian physician back then — he said, "If people apply this Hadīth, hospitals and pharmacies would shut down."

¹ Tirmidhi: 2380

Today, many people's lives roam around the goal of eating and drinking. They overeat and become dissatisfied with the most delicious meals because of all the Ni'am and blessings they have become accustomed to. Food has become what angers or pleases people. If it's too salty or not as expected, it may cause a divorce in some households. So the bottom line is that the Messenger ﷺ taught us not to habitually fill our stomachs. Mighty people, the people who live for a cause, don't fill their stomachs. Hunger can be satisfied with something very simple and basic, because the Messenger ﷺ said so. One-third for eating, one-third for drinking, and one-third for breathing is the recommendation of the Messenger ﷺ. If you read the books of the Ulamā' in the past, you would be astonished at how seriously they took this matter and how stern they were about it. Ibn Rajab spoke about it, Ibn Al-Qayyim spoke about it, Ibn Abi Ad-Dunyā, Al-Ghazzālī, Al-Qurtubi, and many others either had statements about it or entire chapters about it. Ibn Al-Qayyim رحمه الله تعالى mentioned it in Madārij As-Sālikīn and he also mentioned it in Zād Al-Ma'ād. He considered overeating among the matters that corrupt the heart. He said it extinguishes the light of the hearts and it blinds the insight of the heart. He said consuming too much food weakens one's powers, weakens one's health and resolve, and it stops his determination and makes him fall backward. And he said whoever doesn't realize this, or whoever is not aware of this, has a dead heart. Ibn Al-Qayyim and Al-Ghazzālī both said — and I rephrase what they said — they said overindulging in food burdens one from performing 'Ibādāt. Ibn Rajab Al-Hanbali warned about this, and he mentioned many quotes about this. He said if you were to go to the graveyard and ask the people there why they died, he said most of those in the graveyard would be telling you it was from overeating. He also mentioned that overeating is the head of diseases and ailments. Ibn 'Umar رضي الله عنهما, it was narrated that he said at one time that, *"I haven't filled my stomach in four months."* In another narration, he said, *"I haven't filled my stomach since I embraced Islam."* Similar to that is Ash-Shāfi'i, he said, *"I haven't filled my stomach in sixteen years,"* because filling the stomach weighs down the body. It diminishes the intelligence, brings sleep, and it weakens one from his 'Ibādāt.

Some say “Oh, but the Sahābah never had anything, that's why they never filled their stomachs.” That’s actually proof against them, because Allāh سبحانه وتعالى chooses what's best for the Messenger ﷺ and the Sahābah. He chose for them the most perfect and best conditions, and that was one of them. Ibn ‘Umar رضي الله عنهما used to imitate that status by choice, later on, just as his father did, رضي الله عنهما.

Muhammad Ibn Wāsi’ says whoever lessens his intake of food will comprehend better, will teach better, and will be pure. Salamah Ibn Sa’ad said a man used to be reproached for his obesity just as he would be reproached for his sins. Al-Hasan Al-Basri said, “SubhānAllāh, does a Muslim ever eat until he can’t eat anymore?” Many Ulamā’ stated, in one way or another, that overeating is carrying a heavy load, that it corrupts the heart, causes laziness to the physical parts of the body, diminishes one’s ability to make 'Ibādāt, and pushes one towards desires.

Some people may have health issues, and that may cause them to overeat or to be overweight, but how can it be acceptable for a young, healthy brother or sister in their prime, maybe late teens or early twenties or so — in the peak of their prime — yet they overeat and allow themselves to be overweight and then cry about the illnesses that follow along with that. To some, food has become like a goal in life. Ibn Taymiyyah رحمه الله تعالى said excessiveness in what’s permissible is exceeding the limit, and that’s forbidden and transgression. The Qur’ān made it as clear as possible,

وَكُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا وَلَا تُسْرِفُوا إِنَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُسْرِفِينَ

*And eat and drink, but be not excessive. Indeed, He likes not those who commit excess.*²

² [7:31]

If it's habitual overeating, then it's a problem that must be addressed. If someone exceptionally overeats at a wedding, special occasion, or gathering, then it shouldn't be a problem, because the Messenger ﷺ once smiled and gave Abu Hurayrah رضي الله عنه a drink. Abu Hurayrah said, "I drank." Abu Hurayrah said, "I kept drinking and the Messenger ﷺ kept saying, 'Drink!'" until Abu Hurayrah said, "By the One Who sent you with the truth, I have no room for it."

لَا وَالَّذِي بَعَثَكَ بِالْحَقِّ، مَا أَجِدُ لَهُ مَسْلَكًا

*By Him Who has sent you with the Truth, I have no room for it.*³

That's evidence on the permissibility of filling the stomach *at times* — random occasions, for certain reasons. What the Ulamā' mentioned about either disliking or prohibiting overeating, they mean when it burdens the stomach to where one can't stand up or struggles when he stands up in his 'Ibādāt, or when it leads to him becoming fatigued, or it causes him to do sins or to oversleep, or it causes laziness or illnesses. That's the first Hukm on this matter, and it's what Al-Qurtubi said. He said it's disputed between being Harām or Makrūh. What's disputed between being Haram or Makrūh — some of the Ulamā' said it's Haram, some said it's Makrūh? Filling the stomach and then going *beyond* that to overeating, without there being a legitimate reason, or without it being exceptional. They dispute whether it's Haram or Makrūh, and really, the Hukm of whether it's Haram or Makrūh would depend on the level of Isrāf or the effect of the harm that it causes to an individual. Some in the past said don't overeat and don't over drink so that you will not oversleep, and you'll end up losing a lot.

The second Hukm is the opposite of the first Hukm. It's when it's Fard to eat, and that's when one must eat the bare minimum to remain alive, the survival limit. If one abandons eating and drinking until he dies, then he has disobeyed

³ Bukhāri: 6452

Allāh والعياذ بالله, سبحانه وتعالى. It's Fard on what to eat for survival, and that's what's meant in the Hadīth,

بِحَسْبِ ابْنِ آدَمَ أَكْلَاتُ يُقْمِنُ صُلْبَهُ

It is sufficient for the son of Ādam to eat what will support his back.

The third Hukm is when one gets reward for it. Eating slightly above the Fard level in order to nourish himself, to attain energy to perform the 'Ibādāt, or, for example, with the right intention, so that he can go out and work and provide for himself and his family, so that he can be comfortable and properly perform the 'Ibādāt like fasting, for example. Or to stand for prolonged periods of time in 'Ibādah.

The fourth category is when it's permissible. It's when one eats until he's full. The difference between the fourth category and the first one is that here, this fourth one is not overfilling the stomach, it's just filling it. The first category, where we said it's either Makrūh or Haram, is going *beyond* filling, and here in the fourth category, it's neither a sin to do that nor is there reward for it.