

uswatul MUSLIMAH
ROLE MODELS FOR THE MUSLIMAH

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Taste!

Adults' Taste: What would life be without it?

From tart to tangy, sour to spicy, sweet to salty, and sweet and salty (think salted caramel!), everybody's tongues and palates are attuned to their own 'tastes' and preferences.

Why is it that some people eat trips with relish while others prefer to pass on the platter? Why do some succor *malis* while others die for donuts or cruet cutouts?

Believe it or not, our taste preferences are not pre-programmed into our DNA and genetics, but are actually acquired and learnt. Furthermore, this process commences before we are even born.

When the foetus is just eight weeks old, it's only the size of a raspberry, but it begins to develop taste buds. At twelve weeks, the foetus begins to swallow, and on a daily basis, it swallows between 200ml to 700ml of amniotic fluid! At this juncture, it is interesting to note that the amniotic fluid in the womb is literally flavoured by the food which the mother ingests. This is why the foetus, at approximately twenty-six and thirty-two weeks respectively, changes its facial expression and even its frequency of swallowing, based on what its mother ate (swallowing less and making a 'furry face' if the mother ate something bitter). Hence, the taste buds of the child are 'habituated' (made to become familiar with certain tastes) even before birth, and it is the mother who largely influences the tastes that will become entrenched in the child's palate.

After birth, the food that the mother eats

even flavours the milk of the child, to the extent that just one to two hours after eating a dish containing garlic, its flavour is perceivable in the milk. Thereafter, it is the foods and flavours to which the child is constantly exposed throughout his childhood that define his taste preferences throughout life.

Why is this so important to note? The reason is that in the broad sense of the term, 'taste' is not restricted to the mouth. Rather, people have 'taste' in the company they like to keep, 'taste' in the literature they like to read, 'taste' in the clothing they prefer to wear, 'taste' in the minister they adopt and 'taste' in the beliefs they ascribe to.

Why is it that some people choose to recite the Quran Majid for hours, while others choose to read novels all night long? Why do some relish the moments spent in Talajid Salaah, while others prefer to party all night? Why do some happily attend the weekly *ta'lim*, while others make a trip to the mall instead?

The answer -

IT'S ALL TO DO WITH TASTE.

Those who have a taste for making Allah Ta'ala happy will only find enjoyment in His pleasure and will find all sins to be distasteful and repulsive, while those whose taste buds have been trained to enjoy the flavour of sin will only find satisfaction in evil. Hence, understanding how taste is developed and influenced will assist us to ensure that we train our taste buds to find only those things palatable which are acceptable in Deen and pleasing to Allah Ta'ala.

This brings us to the next point - training the taste buds.

Since taste commences before birth, the mother and father will have to ensure that the baby in the womb is only exposed to the correct 'tastes', be it the company, literature or even mindset of the parents - especially the mother.

Thereafter, throughout childhood, extra care and caution will have to be exercised to ensure that the correct Islamic taste is developed in the child.

At this point, one may wonder, "What if a person has already developed a taste for sin and vice?" The answer is that it's never too late to put a new flavour on your palate! It's not impossible to rehabilitate your taste buds!

Nevertheless, there are a few important guidelines that will assist us to understand how the liking for a new flavour can be acquired.

* **Repeated Exposure:** It is commonly witnessed that the majority of children are not eager to eat most vegetables (unless it's fried chips). However, research has proven that if a child is exposed to a vegetable by being made to taste it, between just eight to ten times, even if it be just a small amount at a time, the child thereafter finds the vegetable to be more palatable and begins to enjoy it. Hence, whether one is an adult or a child, exposure, in the form of the company of the pious, participating in Deeni programmes, conducting daily *ta'lim* in the home, etc, are a must to mould the taste buds. Even if one is not a

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