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## MAIMONIDES ON "PHYSICAL HYGIENE"

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**M**AIMONIDES, the renowned Jewish physician and philosopher of the twelfth century, according to available records, wrote in addition to his various religious and educational works a number of treatises pertaining to medical topics. The range of subjects covered by him was exceedingly broad. Undoubtedly the most famous and best known of all is the "Treatise on Personal Hygiene,"<sup>1</sup> prepared for Alfadhel, the ailing son of Saladin, to whom he acted as personal physician. Almost equally as popular is his "Book on Poisons," written at the request of the Vizier Kahdi-el-Fadil.

Other of his titles include:<sup>2</sup> "Aphorisms From Various Medical Writers"; "Commentaries on Hippocrates"; "Compendium of Galen's Works"; "Translation of Avicenna"; "Etiology of Disease"; "Sanitary Regulations"; "Consultation on Various Accidents"; "Ethics"; and numerous writ-

ings on such topics as "Food"; "Medicaments"; "Hemorrhoids"; "Sexual Relations"; "Gout"; "Asthma"; "Physiology"; "Stomach" and "Brains." In addition there is his epic "Oath and Prayer for Physicians," which might well be placed along the side of the famous Hippocratic oath.<sup>3</sup>

It was through a desire to gain access to some of these writings that a small book entitled: "The Principles of Physical and Moral Health of Man," was obtained by courtesy of the Librarian of the Library of the Surgeon General of Washington, D.C. This work, consisting of forty-eight pages translated into French by M. Carcousse, and published in Algiers in 1887, is an extract of an abridgement of the Talmud which Maimonides prepared under the title: "The Second Law."

As epitomized in the introduction, the pages of the book "are full of truths, useful lessons, healthful advice, and gentle philos-



ophy, embracing at the same time what man owes to himself physically and morally and what he owes to others." The greater part of the book deals with moral precepts, offering a detailed study of character and conduct. It is in Chapter IV that valuable rules of "Physical Hygiene" are laid down and they are herewith submitted as translated:<sup>4</sup>

Section I. Since a healthy and strong body is a thing agreeable to God, and since it is impossible to understand God when one is sick, it is indispensable to avoid the things which impair the body and to direct oneself toward the practice of things which fortify it. They are as follows:

One should never eat except when he is hungry, nor drink except when he is thirsty, nor delay any of his excretions for even one moment.

Section II. One should excrete every time that he feels the need.

One should not keep eating until his stomach is distended, but should decrease his food to the proportion of one-quarter of his capacity.

During meals one should drink only a little water, or water mixed with wine.

When the food begins to be digested in the stomach one can then drink whatever he feels is needed; however he should not drink very much even then, even though he believes that doing so would be necessary to facilitate digestion.

One should not eat until after he has observed carefully whether he needs to satisfy his natural requirements.

One should eat only after having walked or undergone some form of exercise, and thus provided heat for the body.

In summing up, one should exercise and fatigue the body every day in the morning until he is warm; he should then rest a little to cool himself off, and then eat his meal.

If he washes himself with warm water (that is, takes a bath), after thus exercising himself, he will be acting wisely; he should then rest a while and then sit down to the table.

Section III. After the meal one should remain seated, or else lie down on the left side a while; he should not walk, or ride horseback, or fatigue or agitate his body in any way until the food has been digested. He who goes walking or tires himself out soon after eating exposes himself to serious illness.

Section IV. The day consists of twenty-four hours, one-third of which is sufficient for

sleeping, that is to say, eight hours, preferably at night, so that from the beginning of the sleep to the rising of the sun eight hours will have elapsed. In this way one will have left the bed at dawn.

Section V. One should not lie on the stomach or on the back, but on the side; in the beginning of the night on the left side, towards the end on the right side. One should not lie down immediately after the meal but should wait three or four hours.

It is bad to sleep during the day.

Section VI. One should eat those things which physic the body, such as raisins, figs, berries, peas, melons, cucumbers, and fruits of the same species before the meals and not mix them with other foods. It is best to wait a little while until they have gone from the superior stomach (the stomach proper); then one can eat the ordinary foods.

As for those things which bind and constipate, such as pomegranate, quinces, apples, etc., they should be eaten immediately after the meal, but with extreme moderation.

Section VII. If one should eat the flesh of birds at the same time as that of other animals, one should begin with the former of these meats.

If one is to eat the meat of small and large cattle it is advisable to begin with the former.

One should always begin with that which is light and finish with that which is heavy.

Section VIII. In the summer it is best to eat cold foods, not to use too much seasoning, and to make use of acid things.

In winter one should eat warm foods, with plenty of seasoning, including a little of mustard and asafetida.

These same rules should be followed in warm and cold climates because in each place it is necessary to do that which is best suited.

Section IX. Certain foods are deadly; one should not use them: old salted large fish, old salted cheese, truffles, champignons, old salted meat, wine just from the press, and food which has been kept until it has acquired a bad odor.

Foods which smell bad or taste bitter are poison for the body. One should eat very little of such, and then only at long intervals; one should be careful not to have them constantly for his meals, or to mix them with other foods for all his meals. Some of these are large fish, cheese, and milk that has stood for twenty-four hours.



The flesh of large oxen and of large goats, beans, lentils, chick peas, barley bread, leek, unleavened bread, cabbage, garlic, onions, mustard, black olives, all constitute bad food. One should eat very little of them in the winter, and never any of them in the summer; and as for the beans and the lentils, they should be eaten neither in the winter nor the summer.

Pumpkins should be eaten in the summer.

Section x. Other foods which are also bad, but to a lesser degree than the preceding ones are birds of the water, small pigeons, dates, dough which has been fried or kneaded with oil, farina which has been treated to the point of removing all traces of bran, brine, and sauces made with salted fish. It is best not to use these substances too often.

That wise man who knows how to control himself, who does not yield to his desires, and who refrains from eating these foods (unless he is forced to do so for the sake of his health and by the order of the doctor) is bound to be a strong man.

Section xi. One should abstain from the fruits of the trees, eating very little of them except when they are dry. It is unnecessary to add that they must not be eaten before they are ripe. When they are completely ripe they are very nourishing to the body. There are also some which are always unhealthy, such as locust beans and acid fruits. One should eat very little of them, and then only in the summer, and in warm climates.

Figs, raisins, and almonds are always good whether they are fresh or dry; one can take as much of them as one desires, but one must not eat them constantly. They are much better than the other fruits of the trees.

Section xii. Honey and wine are bad for children, but are healthy for old people, especially in the winter.

One should eat in the summer two-thirds of what he eats in the winter.

Section xiii. One should conduct himself so that his stomach is always relaxed, or at least it should be kept free to function properly. It is a fundamental principle of medical practice that if one is constipated or has great difficulty in moving the bowels, a dangerous sickness is imminent.

If one is constipated, how can intestinal evacuation be facilitated? If one is young, some herbs cooked in water and seasoned with olive oil, a sauce of salted fish, some salt, and no

bread should be taken. Or one can take some strawberry leaves or cabbage with olive oil, and the sauce of salted fish, with salt.

If one is an adult he should start the morning with honey diluted with water, and then wait four hours before taking the customary meal. He should repeat this for the next three or four days until his stomach becomes normal again.

Section xiv. Another great principle of bodily health is that when a man keeps occupied and tires himself out, and then relaxes, and keeps his bowels open, he is never sick. His strength remains unimpaired even though he uses unhealthy food.

Section xv. He who is always at leisure, and who does not keep busy, who does not excrete at the proper time, whose stomach is bound up, even though he does eat healthy food and conduct himself according to the rules of hygiene will always be weak and suffering.

Excess in eating is detrimental and the origin of many maladies. Many of the indispositions with which man is afflicted come from bad food, or superabundant consumption of food even though it is good and healthy. Solomon has said: "He who heeds his stomach and his tongue avoids many misfortunes."

Section xvi. One should take a bath every seven days, but never immediately after eating, or when one is hungry; it is best to wait until the food has been digested.

The body should be washed with warm water, but not boiling water. The head should be washed with water warm enough to burn the skin. The body should be washed first with warm water, then with water less and less warm, until cold water is attained.

Neither merely warm nor cold water should be used on the head.

Cold water should not be used on the body in the winter.

One should bathe only after having stimulated perspiration, and after having rubbed the body.

One should not remain long in the bath. Immediately after sudation and friction one should wash oneself and then go out of the bath.

Before entering the bath as well as after leaving it, one should observe whether he needs to proceed with the natural excretions. This should also be observed before and after meals, before and after copulation, before and after every exercise, before and after sleep, and in general under all circumstances.



Section xvii. On leaving the bath one should put on his clothes and cover his head even if he is inside, in order not to be cold. Even in the summer one should take these precautions.

After coming out of the bath one should wait a few minutes until the respiration is calmed, until the body is rested, and until the excess of heat has disappeared before eating.

It is an excellent thing to sleep a little on leaving the bath before eating.

One should not drink cold water on leaving the bath or even while in the bath. But if one can not resist thirst on leaving the bath, he should drink water mixed with wine and honey.

In winter it is advisable to rub oneself with oil after the bath.

Section xviii. One should not form the habit of bleeding oneself often, unless absolutely necessary. One should not do it in any case, either in the winter or in the summer, but a little in the first month of spring and the first month of autumn.

After the age of fifty bleeding should no longer be practiced.

One should never take a bath on the day of this operation, nor should one undergo it on arriving from a journey.

On the day of bleeding one should eat a little less than ordinary and obtain sufficient rest, not tiring oneself out nor giving oneself over to any work or movement.

Section xix. Copulation is the strength of the body; it is life; it is a light to the eyes. But when one abuses it the body is consumed in its vigor and life is crushed. Solomon has well said in his wisdom: "Give not your strength to women."

He who plunges himself into the abuse of women is assailed by decrepitness; his strength is lost; his eyes are weakened; and a bad odor exhales from his mouth and stomach. His eyebrows, his eyelashes, his hair, all fall out, but the hair of his beard, arm pits, and legs multiply on the contrary. The teeth loosen and fall out. In addition other grave conditions are imminent. Doctors have said: "One man in a thousand dies of an ordinary sickness; a thousand from the misuse of women." Therefore one should take precaution on this subject if one wishes to live without suffering.

One should not have sexual intercourse except when one believes himself to be healthy and very strong.

When erection occurs in a natural and unconscious manner, and when after directing one's thoughts towards other subjects one feels the erection persist, and if there is a sluggish sensation in the regions of the kidneys, and the cords of the testicles are tightened and the flesh is warm, then one needs to have sexual intercourse and it is hygienic to perform the act.

One should not have sexual intercourse either when the stomach is full or when the stomach is empty. It is always well to wait until digestion has commenced.

Before as well as after sexual intercourse one should observe whether there is a need of urinating or moving the bowels.

One should never have intercourse standing or seated, or in the bath, or on the day when one has bathed, or the day of bleeding, or on setting out or returning from a journey.

Section xx. To him who conducts himself according to all the preceding rules we guarantee that he will never be sick until he becomes old, and that he will die without needing a doctor. He will enjoy a healthy body and all the vigor of his resources, unless he has a body badly constituted from birth, or unless he has been accustomed to bad things since he came into the world, or unless he has been stricken by a disease or a famine.

Section XXI. The rational rules which we have presented should be followed only by a healthy man; the invalid, the sick one who has contracted bad habits for a long time, must follow the special rules which will be given in our work "On Medicine."

Section xxii. The changing of clothes is the beginning of a sickness.

In localities where there are no doctors the healthy man and the sick man should not depart from the precepts which we have placed in this chapter. The consequence will be good for them.

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