

CHAPTER FORTY

Yawning ¹

O Allah (The Exalted) bless our master Muhammad (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) and the family of our master Muhammad (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) blessings eternally acceptable and which discharge us of his overwhelming rights over us.

Yawning is a common physiological event that has been described since antiquity. Hypocrites described yawning as an exhaustion of the fumes preceding fever. Modern medicine did not pay a great deal of attention to yawning until the eighties, with advances in neuropharmacology.

Yawning can be divided into 3 distinct phases: a long inspiratory phase, a brief acme and a rapid expiration, frequently but not always associated with stretching, tears, shivering, obstruction of the Eustachian canal² (causing a reduction in audiologic acuity), followed with a feeling of comfort. The average duration of the yawn is 5 s, (range, 3 to 45 s). The earliest appearance of yawning was observed in a 15-week-old embryo.

This semi-voluntary event increases vigilance and aims to alert one when Drowsiness occurs. Yawning probably has an important role for social communication as well. Excessive or pathological yawning, "chasm," is defined as a compulsive, repetitive action which is not triggered by "physiological" stimuli such as fatigue or boredom, described in cases of frontal lobe tumours, encephalitis³, progressive supranuclear palsy, following thalamotomy⁴, after electroconvulsive⁵ therapy and as an early manifestation of vasovagal⁶ response.

When a person yawns, he deeply inspires breathing in the germs in the air. There are many germs in the air around us and by breathing through the nose the hair in the nose stops it from entering the lung. If the hand is placed before the mouth, the germs will not enter. The reason why the left hand is used is that the germs come onto the left hand and because we eat with the right hand we do not want the germs to enter via the right hand.

Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) narrates that, *"One should hold his hand over his mouth if he cannot help yawning."*ⁱ

Abu Hurairah narrates (may Allah be pleased with him) Allah's Messenger (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said "Yawning in prayer is an act of the Devil, so when one of you yawns he should restrain it as much as possible." In another version the words are; "He should place his hand upon his mouth."ⁱⁱ

Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) narrates, the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said that, *"Yawning is from Shaytan and if anyone of you yawns, he should check his yawning as much as possible, for if anyone of you (during the act of yawning) should say: 'Haa', Shaytan will laugh at him."*ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ Muslim

ⁱⁱ Tirmidhi & Ibn Majah

ⁱⁱⁱ Bukhari

1 See Volume One, Chapter Forty-Nine, Section Two for this Sunnah

2 The tube that connects the middle ear to the pharynx.

3 Inflammation of the brain.

4 An operation on the brain in which a lesion is made in a precise of the thalamus.

5 A treatment for sever depression and occasionally for schizophrenia and mania. A conclusion is produced by passing an electric current through the brain.

6 Relating to the action of impulses in the vagus nerve on the circulation.