

Miswak



SECOND EDITION



In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

The *miswak* is commonly used throughout the Muslim world and is seen as an item of everyday use, regardless of one's age. Onlookers to the Muslim population, however, might be slightly bemused to see people go about their daily lives with a twig in their mouths, rubbing away at their teeth!

“Were it not for the fact that I did not want to make things too hard for my Ummah, I would have commanded them to use the siwak at every time of prayer.”

[Bukhari and Muslim]

People have been cleaning their teeth since the very beginning and used a variety of methods to do so. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said of the previous prophets:

“Four things are amongst the practices of the Anbiya (previous prophets) – circumcision, application of perfume, miswak and marriage.”

[Ahmad and Tirmidhi]

Although we do not have a great deal of evidence as to how the generations prior to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) cared for their teeth, there is much discussion to be found amongst the later civilisations. Looking at recent history in many non-Muslim countries, you would find a variety of practices of dental hygiene. Indeed, before the invention of the toothbrush, there were many natural objects that were used to clean the teeth, including rubbing them with a cloth and using mixtures of herbs or abrasives such as the ashes of burnt rosemary. When teeth eventually rotted they were simply pulled out!

Throughout the Muslim population, however, the *miswak* was recommended as a part of basic hygiene by the living example of the Qur'an, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

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What is Miswak?

Miswak, otherwise known as ‘*Siwak*’, is a piece of bark, measuring approximately 1cm in diameter, from a plant known as ‘*Salvadora Persica*’. In English, this plant is known as the ‘peelo tree’, ‘mustard tree’, ‘salt bush’, or ‘toothbrush tree’. The *Salvadora Persica* is commonly found in the Middle East, especially in Makkah, Saudi Arabia, and, as its name suggests, in Persia.



Salvadora Persica is a small evergreen plant, approximately 6-7 metres tall, with wide, almost dropping, branches. Flowers appear on this tree in greenish-yellow colours. It is named after a Spanish pharmacist, Juan Salvador y Bosca (1598-1681) and was first known in the botanical world in Persia.

Fruits often appear on the plant, which have a sweet, aromatic taste and along with its leaves and young shoots, the plant is edible by humans and cattle. The plant itself reproduces from the seeds of the fruit, although it is a slow grower. The oil from *Salvadora Persica* can be used as an alternative for soap and detergents. In fact, you could say this plant is an overall best seller when it comes to its uses. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) knew the *Salvadora* as the peelo tree and recommended its bark to be used as the best type of *miswak*, followed by the olive tree. Other recommended trees included the walnut and those that are bitter. It is narrated that Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said:

“And the best of miswaks is the peelo, then the olive.”

[Kabiri]

“Use the miswak of the olive tree. It is the miswak of a Mubarak (auspicious or gracious) tree. It purifies and makes wholesome the mouth. It removes the yellowishness of the teeth. It is my miswak and the miswak of the Anbiya (prophets) who came before me.”

[Muntakhab]

How Miswak is used

The wood used for the teeth is cut from the roots and small branches of the plant, approximately 3-10mm in diameter. It has been found to harvest antimicrobial agents which suppress the growth of bacteria and the formation of plaque.

This is why *miswak* does not require either water or toothpaste, as it is the natural elements found in the wood itself which clean and refresh the teeth and mouth. It also helps relieve toothache and aids in restoring healthy gums.

The user of the bark would chew the outside wood, shaping the end into separate fibres, to look and be used much like a regular toothbrush. Because it is cut into short pieces (approximately 8 inches long) the wood is portable and can be used at any time. The wood can be cut whenever the user wishes to refresh the bark.

When choosing the wood, the user should select a straight twig, being not too hard or soft, and should be cleaned before first use, and then rinsed after each use thereafter. When cleaning the teeth and mouth, the user should avoid sucking the fibres of wood and make sure they know it is from the correct type of tree, as many trees have poisonous bark or agents inside.

Miswak is the Way of Prophet Muhammad (Sunnah)

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)said:

“Make a regular practice of the miswak, for verily, it is healthy for the mouth and it is a pleasure for the Creator (i.e., Allah is pleased with the Muslim who uses the miswak).”

[Bukhari]

Although many who use the *miswak* in modern times only use it at certain times of their day, the origins of the *miswak* being used more frequently date back to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), who used it throughout his day, for many different purposes. These included; before he would recite the Qur’an, when he felt his mouth emitted an odour, before he would teach the virtues of Islam, before he would make remembrance of Allah, and after entering his home. Shuraih narrated that he asked Aisha:

“What was the first thing Rasulullah did upon entering the house?” Aisha replied: “Rasulullah would use the miswak.”

[Muslim]

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) would also use the *miswak* before he would enter any beneficial gathering, whenever he would experience the pain of hunger and thirst, at the time of *Suhoor* – eating before sunrise in the month of Ramadhaan – and before he would eat a meal.

Abu Hurairah said:

“I have used the miswak before sleeping, after rising, before eating and after eating, ever since I heard the Prophet advising so.”

[Ahmad]

The list doesn’t stop there! Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) would use the *miswak* before he would undertake a journey, upon returning from a journey, before he would sleep and upon awakening.

“The Messenger of Allah would use the miswak (regularly) prior to sleeping and after rising from sleep.”

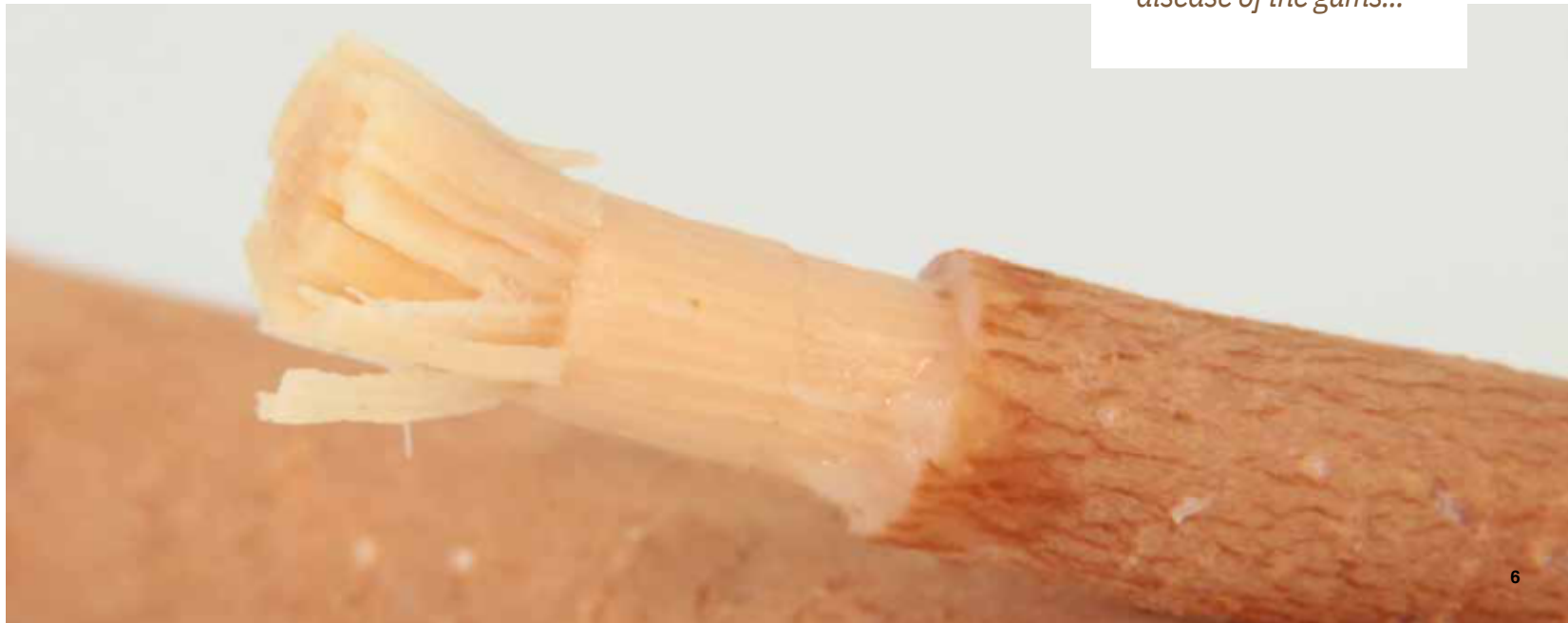
[Muntakhab]

Benefits of Miswak

As a dentist will tell you, the recommended method to keeping your mouth fresh and teeth clean is to brush twice a day at least, with brushing after every meal and snack the preferred way. Using the *miswak* brings with it various benefits. These include strengthening the gums and preventing tooth decay, eliminating toothaches and preventing further disease of the gums, freshening of the breath, causing the teeth to produce a healthy glow and improving one’s sense of taste. The *miswak* is also known to help sharpen one’s memory, help people who suffer with headaches and help to strengthen one’s eyesight. Its properties assist in the process of digestion, and can help clear one’s voice. The reward of a Muslim’s prayer is multiplied 70 times if *miswak* is used before it.

So that’s it! Now you can see the origins, benefits and uses that the little piece of twig has, maybe you can use the *miswak* to benefit your own teeth and overall dental hygiene. Happy brushing!

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