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Reasons for the Prohibition of Specific Foods in the Quran

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Abstract

God has created man in a way that whatever he eats and drinks has an influence on his mind, body and soul. Hence, God declared certain edible materials as prohibited (*haram*) and others permissible (*halal*). This paper lists the foods that are impermissible as mentioned in the Quranic Chapters al-Baqarah and al-Maidah.

In these chapters, twelve impermissible foods are listed, some of which are carrion, blood, pork, and wine, in addition to the meat of animals that have been strangled, gored to death, and not slaughtered based on Islamic rules. Moreover, brief reasons as to why they are forbidden are also presented.

Introduction

Once man had been created, God created sustenance for him as well. Just as the food contributes to growth and strength of a man's body, it also influences his mind and soul considerably. Hence, God – the Wise, has forbidden people from eating certain foods so as not to negatively affect our souls.

While modern scientists have not yet discovered the negative effects of impermissible foods on people's minds and souls, there are scientific findings, which confirm the harmful effects of impermissible foods on physical health. This provides some evidence for the miracle of the Holy Quran. In this paper impermissible foods mentioned in the Quranic chapters al-Baqarah and al-Maidah have been discussed.

Impermissible Foods

The foods which God has forbidden us from eating in the chapters al-Baqarah and al-Maidah consist of the following:

Carrion

Carrion refers to dead body of any animal whose meat has been considered permissible by God – either four-footed, bird, wild or tame. In other words, eating carrion or making any use of it is forbidden. God says in the Quran,

***"Forbidden to you* (*for food*) *are carrion…"* (*Maidah, 5:3, al-Baqarah 2:173 and al-Nahl, 16:115*)**

The reason behind prohibiting carrion

No doubt, God - the Wise, does not make something such as eating carrion prohibited without a reason unless it has harmful effects. In addition to hadiths on the detrimental effects of carrion, scientific advances have also revealed its damaging effects.

Imam Sadiq said, "Nobody eats carrion, but he becomes feeble and has no offspring; the one who eats pork may die unexpectedly."[1]

The reason behind this may be that the stomach cannot make fresh blood out of carrion. In addition, carrion is the center of various microbes. Besides prohibiting the consumption of carrion, it is forbidden to eat it because it is also impure (*najis*). Thus, Muslims are to avoid it altogether.[2]

Blood

Allah says in the Quran,

***"Forbidden to you* (*for food*) *are …blood…."* (*Maidah, 5:3, al-Baqarah 2:173 and al-Nahl, 16:115*)**

During the Age of Ignorance, people used to cook and consume the large intestine of an animal with its blood poured over it. After the revelation of the Quran, the oozed blood was forbidden. However, a little blood remaining in the animal's meat after it is slaughtered or the blood that has turned into meat in the liver are considered permissible.

The reason for forbidding the consumption of blood

When restricted to the areas where blood should be, such as the heart and vessels, blood is necessary for life. However, eating blood is detrimental to both the body and spirit.

On one hand, blood is a haven for microbial growth. All microbes after entering the body, concentrate in

blood first. The white blood cells fight body toxicities by destroying bacteria and helping to remove unwanted material. When blood stops circulating in the body, white blood cells are destroyed. Thus, the microbes that have no opposition any more, tend to multiply rapidly. And when blood stops circulating in the body, it becomes the filthiest part of a human or animal's body.

On the other hand, foods affect a man's temperament and conduct through influencing glands and their hormone production. Consuming blood thus leads to cruelty and hard-heartedness.[3]

In this regard, Imam Sadiq has said: God has made (drinking) blood prohibited because it ruins body…and causes one's mouth and body to give an unpleasant odor cause bad-temperedness, hard-heartedness, and being less affectionate to others. One who drinks blood, may even kill his father, friend and spouse.[4]

Pork

In this regard, Allah said in the Glorious Quran,

"Forbidden to you (for food) are ……and the flesh of swine…"(Maidah, 5:3, al-Baqarah 2:173 and al-Nahl, 16:115)

According to the above Quranic verse, pork is considered prohibited as a whole so it becomes evident that pork is basically haram whether it is carrion or not. This is also the case with the meat of animals such as dogs, cats, and monkeys. However, pork is specified because people tend to eat it more than animal meat.

Why pork is forbidden

Even some people those who eat pork consider pigs as dirty animals. They are also known for being extremely indifferent and irresponsible in sexual matters, and since food affects a person's conduct and mindset, it leads to this carelessness in those who eat pork.

Pork is also forbidden in Judaism. As written in the Old Testament, "…do not chew their cud; they are unclean for you. Do not eat their meat (i.e., pork) and do not touch their corpse."[5]
Moreover, sinners are likened to pigs in the Gospel. In the stories herein, the pigs are introduced as the symbol of Satans.[6]

It is surprising that some insist on eating pork while on the one hand they see pigs eating dirt and their excrement, and on the other hand, it has been scientifically proven that its meat contains two dangerous parasites, namely trichina and measles.

Trichina spawns 15,000 eggs every month, causing anemia, dizziness, diarrhea fever, rheumatic pains, nerve injury, itching, excess fat, bruise, fatigue, and difficulty in chewing, swallowing and breathing. There are 400 million larvae of Trichina in one kilo of pork. This is perhaps why eating pork was banned

in some part of Russia some years ago.

Some may say that all these parasites can be killed and pork can be cleansed of them using modern technologies. However, germs that cannot be killed by using conventional methods will still remain.

Even if we assume that the parasites can be killed by cooking pork at high temperatures using hygienic devices, the harm from pork cannot be denied because based on the aforementioned principle – the meat of every animal carries the features of that animal, and it influences the conduct of the one who eats it through the hormones secreted by the glands of the animal.

Consuming pork can lead to sexual laxity and indifference to reputation and chastity of one's wife and daughters, all of which are the prominent qualities of pigs and are transmitted to the one who consumes pork.[7]

Animals not slaughtered based on Islamic rules

Allah said in the Quran,

"Forbidden to you (***for food***) ***are carrion…and that which has been slaughtered to*** (***the name of***) ***any other than Allah."***(***Maidah, 5:3, al-Baqarah 2:173 and al-Nahl, 16:115***)

This verse implies that if a halal animal is killed either in the name of any other than Allah, or, when Islamic rules have not been observed during the process, or, by disbelievers – it becomes prohibited to eat.

The philosophy of animals not slaughtered based on Islamic rules

Does saying the name of God or any other name when slaughtering animals hygienically influence its meat?

Not necessarily so, because in Islam edible materials become forbidden for different reasons. Sometimes it is for good physical health, sometimes for self-purification, and sometimes for preserving social order.

Animals slaughtered to the name of idols, for example, are prohibited due to spiritual, moral, and pedagogical reasons. They separate man from God and have negative psychological and pedagogical effects due to polytheistic tradition of idol-worship, which reinstates idolatry.[8]

The above-mentioned items, namely carrion, blood, pork and animal not slaughtered based on Islamic legal rules are prohibited in four Quranic chapters – two in Mecca (Anam, 6:145; Nahl, 16:115), and two in Medina (al- Baqarah, 2:173; al-Maidah, 5:3).

It seems that the prohibition of these types of meats was proclaimed for the first time during early Islam.

The second time it was done when Prophet's residence in Mecca ended. The third time it was done during in his early migration to Medina and the fourth time in his late life in the chapter al-Maidah, which is among the last chapters revealed.[9]

Strangled Animals

In this regard, Allah said in the Glorious Quran,

***"Forbidden to you** [**for food**] **are carrion, ... and the strangled."**(**Al-Maidah,5:3**)*

The term strangled can sometimes refer to an animal whose head is put under pressure between two parts of a tree until it dies. Others maintain that it refers to an animal strangled to death with a rope or trap.

According to Ibn Abbas, "In the Age of Ignorance, people used to strangle an animal and eat its meat."[10] Also, according to some narrations, the Zoroastrians in particular, strangled animals to death to use their meat.[11] Thus, the above verse may apply to them as well.

Animals dying through beating

Allah says in the Quran,

***"Forbidden to you** [**for food**] **are carrion...and the dead through beating,"**(**Al-Maidah,5:3**)*

"The dead through beating" refers to any animal killed through many hits or a powerful blow with any device, or if an animal dies due to a disease.

Dead animals through falling from a height

God says in the Quran,

***"Forbidden to you** [**for food**] **are carrion..., and the dead animal through falling from a height."**(**Al-Maidah,5:3**)*

According to some, including Ibn Abbas, if an animal dies by falling, it is forbidden to eat its meat. However, if it falls into a well and still remains alive and it is not possible to slaughter it properly, one can target a large knife at it, leading to its death; in this way its meat will become permissible.[12]

Animals that have been gored to death

Allah says in the Quran,
***"Forbidden to you** [**for food**] **are carrion..., and that which has been gored to death."**(**Al-Maidah,5:3**)*

The meat of an animal which is gored or stabbed to death is also forbidden to eat.

Animals hunted and killed by wild animals

In this regard, Allah said,

***"Forbidden to you* [*for food*] *are carrion…, and the devoured of wild beasts save that which you make lawful* (*by finding it alive and beheading it*)*."*(*Al-Maidah,5:3*)**

Another forbidden edible material is the meat of an animal that has been hunted and killed by another wild animal.

The possible philosophy behind the prohibition of these five kinds of animal meat, namely – the meat of the animal strangled to death, the dead animal through beating, the dead animal through fall from a height, animals that are gored to death, and animals that have been killed by another wild animal – is that they do not bleed enough after being killed.

Unless as the main blood vessels of the throat are cut, insufficient blood pours out of the body. Since blood is a haven for microbes, after the death of the animal, it is the first thing that becomes infected in its body. Thus their meats is toxic for consumption. The meat is more toxic in particular, if that animal has been killed from being tortured, has contracted a disease, or has been chased by a wild animal during hunting.

What is more important that the spiritual aspects of slaughtering the animal, reciting the name of God, and facing the *qiblah*[13] etc have are not been observed in the above-mentioned instances.

Of course, if these animals can be slaughtered in Islamic way before they die and enough blood pours out of them, their meat will be permissible[14]. Thus, following the prohibition of the above meats, God has said,

***"Save that which you make lawful* (*by finding it alive and beheading it*)*."*(*Al-Maidah,5:3*)**

Animals slaughtered unto idols

Holy Quran says,

***"Forbidden to you* (*for food*)*… and that which has been slaughtered unto Nusub* (*shapeless idols*) *and* (*forbidden is it*) *that which you divide by gambling arrow."*(*Al-Maidah,5:3*)**

During the Age of Ignorance, idol-worshippers used to construct shapeless stones called "*Nusub*" around the Kabah. They would slaughter an animal on a Nusub and dab its blood on it. What distinguished them from idols were their unique shapes. In this verse, God prohibited eating of this meat, saying,

"That which has been slaughtered unto Nusub (shapeless idols)."

This prohibition is spiritually and morally motivated. There seems to be no worldly and physical philosophy behind it. It is a kind of

"That which has been slaughtered to (the name of) any other than Allah." (Maidah, 5:3, al-Baqarah 2:173 and al-Nahl, 16:115)

This was a common practice among the Arabs of Age of the Ignorance or pre-Islamic era.[15]

Animals killed through lottery

Holy Quran say,

"(Forbidden) also is that which you divide by gambling arrow." (Maidah, 5:3)

This is another kind of animal meat, which is prohibited for eating in Islam. Here the meat of slaughtered animal is distributed on the basis of lottery.

In the Era of Ignorance, ten people would bet to buy an animal and slaughter it. Then they would put ten arrows in a bag, and draw lots for each of the ten members. On seven arrows, it was written "winner" and on three others "loser." The winners received a share of meat while the other three received nothing; instead, they had to pay the price for one-third of the animal without receiving a share of meat.

These arrows have been called "*azlaam*" plural of "*zalam*". Islam forbade the meat from these bets not because the very meat was forbidden but because they are obtained through gambling and lottery.

Prohibition of gambling and the like is not restricted to animal meat. Rather, it is also prohibited in other gains from gambling as well because gambling lies at the root of all harm resulting from baseless social activities and superstitious pursuits.[16]

Thus, Islam takes a moderate position on eating different kinds of meat. It neither supports the ideas of people of the Age of Ignorance whose diet consisted of lizards, carrion, and blood; nor, of those of some who eat crabs, worms, and cats; nor, of Hindus who prohibit eating any kind of meat. Instead, Islam considers eating meat of animals that have received pure nutrition.

Islam rejects extreme measures and states regulations on eating different kinds of meat, as listed below:

i. The animals whose meat is to be eaten should be herbivorous since herbivores eat healthy, while the meat of carnivorous animals is unhealthy due to their eating of carrion and other unclean meat.

As it has been mentioned before, the features of every animal consumed are transmitted to the one who eats its meat. Thus, consuming the meat of wild carnivorous animals strengthens brutality and savagery in man. For this very reason, in Islam the meat of '*jalal*' animals, that is, those that eat excrement and

dirt is forbidden.

ii. Islamic rules require that animals whose meat is consumed are not unpleasant or disgusting.

iii. The meat should not harm man physically or spiritually.

iv. The meat of animals, which are sacrificed on the basis of polytheism, idol-worship and the like, is prohibited to eat because they are spiritually impure.

v. Heeding to Islamic guidelines regarding the legal slaughter of animals that have hygienic or moral effects on consumers of meat.[17]

Wine

According to Raghib Isfahani, "*khamr*" (خمر), meaning "wine" literally means "covering something;" thus, "khimar" (خمار) refers to "cover" [as a noun], the cloth with which a woman covers her head is also called "*khimar*."[18]

However, it should be noted that on the basis of Islamic rulings, "*khamr*" is not limited to wine (from grapes). Rather, it refers to any intoxicating liquid made out of either grapes, raisins, dates or any other substance that can be made into an intoxicating drink is literally referred to by this specific term.[19]

In the Quran, it is seriously prohibited to drink intoxicating drinks, and Muslims are forbidden to do so. However, God declared wine as haram in stages. He first said in the chapter al-Nahl:

And of the fruits of the date-palm, and grapes, whence you derive strong drink and (also) good nourishment. Lo! Therein is indeed a lesson for people who havewisdom" (Nahl, 16:67)

In this verse, "strong drink" refers to intoxicating drinks. Apparently, in this verse God does not permit Muslims to make wine out of dates and grapes. Rather, "strong drinks" are placed in contrast to "good nourishment," which implicitly indicates the undesirability and prohibition of intoxicating drinks.

Thus, it is not necessary to say that this verse was revealed before the prohibition of intoxicating drinks and has referred to their being halal. In contrast, it indicates that they were haram and this was the first warning about prohibition of wine.[20]

God also said the chapter al-Nisa,

"O you who believe! Do not approach prayer when you are drunken, until you know that which you utter."(Nisa, 4:43)

In this verse, God refers to the fact that prayer becomes null and void when one is intoxicated.

In the gradual course of prohibition of wine, God, the Wise, said,

"They ask you concerning wine and gambling. Say: "In them is great sin, and some profit, for people; but the sin is greater than the profit." (***Baqarah, 2:219***).

In this verse, God introduced wine as having some benefit for people. Its benefits perhaps include the money made through its sale, minor health benefits as offered by various scientific studies, and the pleasure one gains as a result of drinking it.21 However, God has specified that the consequential harms far outweigh the benefits.

Then in the chapter al– Maidah, He said:

"O you who believe! Intoxicants and gambling,...are an abomination, of Satan's work: eschew such [***abomination***]***, that you may reach salvation"...*** (***Maidah, 5:90***)

"Verily Satan wants to excite enmity and hatred between you, with intoxicants and gambling, and hinder you from the remembrance of Allah, and from prayer: will you then abstain?'(***Maidah, 5:91***)

After referring to these verses and comparing them with each other, Allamah Tabatabai pointed out ten features that highlight the significance of prohibition of wine:

i. The word "verily" (انما) is used,

ii. Wine is called an abomination,

iii. It is called a work of Satan,

iv. God explicitly prohibits people from drinking it,

v. When it is avoided, one can hope for and expect salvation,

vi. This verse includes the evils which result from drinking wine,

vii. There is a question which adds urgency to the warning to abstain from it, given to those who commit this sin

viii. After much emphasis on this issue, people are invited to obey God and His Messenger and are discouraged from opposing them

ix. God does not need our obedience, and

x. In the next verse, God says,

"On those who believe and do good there is no blame for what they eat,..."(***Maidah, 5:93***)22

As mentioned above, God declared the prohibition of wine gradually and in stages, perhaps because the Arabs during that time were heavy drinkers, making it difficult for them to break the habit. Hence there it

was made easy for them by delivering the verdict of prohibition of wine in stages.

Reasons for prohibiting wine

Drinking intoxicants is naturally, morally, and intellectually harmful. Its negative physical effects include the disorder of the stomach, intestine, liver, lungs, nerves, blood vessels, heart, and the five senses.

Both past and modern physicians have written and presented statistics that indicate a variety of illnesses result from drinking wine. These include throat cancer, breast cancer, stroke, heart disease, and high blood pressure. Overall, it harms organs such as the brain, heart, liver, and pancreas.

As for moral harms of drinking, intoxicating beverages, besides having negative effects on body also damage man's soul. It may lead to a person behaving without grace, or committing unintentional acts of insulting and harming others. They may commit crime or murder. They can divulge one's and others' secret and trample on human rules and sanctity, which form the basis of man's happiness.

As for the intellectual harms of drinking intoxicating beverages, it dissipates one's wisdom, disrupts rational decision-making, and mars their perception and discretion. Drinking intoxicating beverages is the worst sin and evil because many evils are rooted in it.[23]

Some Quranic commentators have provided some mind-boggling statistics on the consequences of drinking wine:

i. According to some statistics released in England, insanity due to drinking intoxicating beverages, compared it with other kinds of insanity, in that there have been 2249 insane people due to intoxication as opposed to only 53 insane people because of other reasons.

ii. According to the report of the American College of Surgeons Committee on Trauma and Injury, "Forty percent of motor vehicle crash deaths involve alcohol drinking, and 40 percent of pedestrians killed had been drinking.

The contributory role of alcohol in intentional trauma deaths is just as bad. The presence of alcohol in combination with easy access to a deadly weapon (most commonly a handgun) and often only a minor grievance is known as the deadly triad. These three factors together all too often result in tragedy for the victim as well as the assailant.

Alcohol is responsible for approximately half of all trauma deaths and nonfatal injuries in the United States—a very tragic and very expensive public health problem that continues every day and every night on our nation's highways, in our cities, and on our farms."[24]

iii. An English scholar by the name of Bentham writes: "In northern countries, alcoholic beverages make a person fatuous and imbecile, while in the southern countries, it makes them insane." He adds: "The religion of Islam has prohibited all kinds of alcoholic drinks and this is one of the distinctive features of

Islam."[25]

iv. According to statistics in the United States, every year mental illness leads to twice as many deaths as the American death toll in the Second World War. Scientists believe that drinking intoxicating beverages and smoking play a crucial role in mental illness in the United States.

v. From the economic point of view, in England itself, the losses incurred every year as a result of absenteeism on the part of employees due to alcoholism has been estimated to be around 50 million dollars, which, by itself, is sufficient for the building of thousands of kindergartens, primary, and secondary schools.

vi. As per statistics published about the losses arising from alcoholic use in France, alcohol burdens the French budget by 137 billion francs per year (not including the personal losses incurred by the individuals), details of which are as follows:

- 60 billion Francs spent towards courts and prisons.

- 40 billion Francs expended for social benefits and charities.

- 10 billion Francs utilized for covering the expenses of the hospitals for alcoholics.

- 70 billion francs for maintaining social security.

It is evident the the number of mental patients, mental hospitals, murders, thefts, rapes, and accidents is proportional to the number of bars.[26]

Conclusion

The chapters al-Baqarah and al-Maidah mention twelve eating and drinking substances, which are both physically and spiritually harmful. And so, they are prohibited.

Islam upholds that Divine purpose for creating human beings is for them to reach perfection, and food influences people's physical and spiritual health. Therefore, it offers guidelines with respect to what can and cannot be eaten so as not to hinder people's growth towards perfection.

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[1] http://www.facs.org/trauma/alcoholinjury.pdf