

REASONS FOR THE PROHIBITION OF SPECIFIC FOODS IN THE QUR'AN

KANIKI JAMA NAQUL AWA

TRANSLATED BY MAHBOOBEH MORSHEDIAN

ABSTRACT: God has created man in the way that what he eats and drinks influences his mind, body, and soul. Hence, God declared certain edible materials prohibited (*haram*) and others permissible (*halal*). This paper lists the foods that are impermissible as mentioned in the Qur'anic Chapters *al-Baqarah* and *al-Ma'idah*. 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 was created, God created his sustenance as well. As food contributes to the growth and strength of man's body, it also considerably influences his mind and soul. Hence, God, the Wise, has forbidden people from eating certain foods so as not to negatively affect our souls.

Although modern scientists have not discovered the negative effects of impermissible foods on people's minds and souls, there are scientific findings that confirm the harmfulness of impermissible foods to physical health, this is some evidence for the scientific miracle of the Quran. In this paper, impermissible foods in the Quranic chapters *al-Baqarah* and *al-Ma'idah* are discussed.

Impermissible Foods

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

1. Carrion

Carrion refers to any dead body of any animal – either four-footed animals or bird, wild, or tame – whose meat is considered permissible by God. 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,...*”¹

The reason behind prohibiting carrion

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

¹ Ma'idah, 3, also see Baqarah 173 and Nahl, 115.

Imam Sadiq said, “Nobody eats carrion, but he becomes feeble and has no offspring; the one who eats pork may die unexpectedly.”²

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 forbidden to eat it as it is also impure (*najis*); thus, Muslims are to avoid it altogether.³

2. Blood

Allah says in the Quran, “*Forbidden to you [for food] are...blood...*”⁴

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 the one hand, blood is a haven for microbe growth. All microbes entering the body concentrate in the blood, and white blood cells fight body toxicities by destroying bacteria and help remove unwanted material.. When blood stops

² Shaikh Saduq, al-Amali, p. 666; Ilal-u-Saharayyi’, vol.2, p. 484.

³ Nasir Makarim Shirazi, Nemuneh Qur’anic Commentary, vol.1, p.585.

⁴ *Ma’idah*, 3, also see *al-Baqarah* 173 and *al-Nahl*, 115.

circulating in the body, white blood cells are destroyed. Thus, the microbes that face no opposition 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, through influencing glands and producing hormones, foods affect man's temperament and conduct, and eating blood leads to cruelty and hard-heartedness.⁵

In this regard, Imam Sadiq 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. Due to drinking blood, one may even kill his father, friend, and spouse.⁶

3. Pork

In this regard, Allah said in the Glorious Quran, "*Forbidden to you [for food] areand the flesh of swine,...*"⁷

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

⁵ Nasir Makarim Shirazi, *Nemuneh Quranic Commentary*, vol.1, pp. 585-586.

⁶ Shaikh Saduq, *Ilal-u-sharayi'*, vol.2, p.484; Shaikh Hurr Amili, *Wasa'il-u-Shi'ah*, vol.24, p.100.

⁷ *Ma'idah*, 3, also see *Bagharah* 173 and *Nahl*, 115.

dogs, cats, and monkeys. However, pork is specified because people tend to eat it more than animal meat.

Why pork is forbidden

Even some of those who eat pork consider pigs as dirty animals. They're 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.*"⁸ Moreover, in the Gospels, sinners are likened to pigs, and in their stories, pigs are introduced as the symbol of Satans.⁹

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 and 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.

⁸ Leviticus, 11:7-8.

⁹ Nasir Makarim Shirazi, *Nemuneh Quranic Commentary*, vol.1, p. 585.

Some may say that all these parasites can be killed and pork can be cleansed of them with modern technologies. However, there might remain germs that cannot be killed by using conventional methods and even if we assume that the parasites can be killed through cooking pork at high temperatures using hygienic devices, the harmfulness of 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 animal's glands secreting hormones. 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.¹⁰

4. 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."*¹¹

This verse implies that if a halal animal is killed a) to [the name of] any other than Allah, b) while Islamic rules have not been observed during the process, or c) by disbelievers, it becomes prohibited to eat.

The philosophy of animals not slaughtered based on Islamic rules

¹⁰ Nasir Makarim Shirazi, *Nemuneh Quranic Commentary*, vol.1, pp. 586-587; also see Fakhr Razi, *Mafatih-ul-Ghayb*, vol.11, p.283.

¹¹ *Ma'idah*, 3, also see *Baqarah* 173 and *Nahl*, 115.

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 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 its polytheistic tradition of idol-worship, reinstating idolatry.¹²

The above items, namely carrion, blood, pork, and animal not slaughtered based on Islamic legal rules are prohibited in four Quranic chapters; two in Mecca (*An'am*, 145; *Nahl*, 115), and two in Medina (*al-Baqarah*, 173; *al-Ma'idah*, 3).

It seems that the first time the prohibition of these kinds of meats was proclaimed in early Islam; the second time through the end of the Prophet's residence in Mecca; the third time in his early migration to Medina; and the fourth time in his late life in the chapter *al-Ma'idah*, which is among the last chapters revealed.¹³

5. Strangled Animals

In this regard, Allah said in the Glorious Quran, "*Forbidden to you [for food] are carrion....., and the strangled.*"¹⁴

¹² Nasir Makarim Shirazi, *Nemuneh Quranic Commentary*, vol.1, p.588.

¹³ Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabatab'î, *Tafsir al-Mizan*, vol. 12, p.365.

¹⁴ *Al-Ma'idah*, 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 the animal and eat its meat.”¹⁵ And according to some narrations, the Zoroastrians in particular strangled animals to death to use their meat.¹⁶ Thus, the above verse may apply to them as well.

6. Animals’ death through beating

Allah says in the Quran, “*Forbidden to you [for food] are carrion...and the dead through beating,*”¹⁷

“*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.

7. 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.*”¹⁸

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

¹⁵ Fadi ibn Hasan Tabarsi, *Majma’-ul-Bayan*, vol.3, p.243.

¹⁶ Shaikh Saduq, *al-Khisal*, vol.2, p.451.

¹⁷ *Al-Ma’idah*, 3.

¹⁸ *Al-Ma’idah*, 3.

target a large knife at it, leading to its death; in this way its meat becomes permissible.¹⁹

8. 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.*”²⁰

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

9. 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].*”²¹

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

The possible philosophy of prohibition of these five kinds of animals' meat, namely a) the meat of the animal strangled to death, b) the dead animal through beating, c) the dead animal through falling from a height, d) animals that are gored to death, and e) animals that are hunted and killed by another wild animals is that they do not bleed enough after being killed; as long as the main blood vessels of the throat are not cut, insufficient blood pours out. On the other hand, since blood

¹⁹ Shaikh Tusi, al-Tibyan, vol.3, p.430; Fadl ibn Hassan Tabarsi,

²⁰ Al-Ma'idah, 3.

²¹ Al-Ma'idah, 3.

is a haven for microbes, after the death of an animal, blood is the first thing that is infected in its body; thus these meats are poisonous. In particular, if the animal is killed due to being tortured, contracting a disease, and being chased by a wild animal, it is more poisonous. What is more, the spiritual aspects of slaughtering the animal, reciting the name of God, and facing the *qiblah*²² are not observed in the above-mentioned types of death.

Of course, if animals can be Islamically slaughtered before they die, and enough blood pours out of them, they will be permissible. Thus, following the prohibition of the above meats, God said, “*Save that which you make lawful [by finding it alive and beheading it].*”²³

10. Animals slaughtered unto idols

*“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.”*²⁴

During the Age of Ignorance, idol-worshippers used to construct shapeless stones called “Nusub” around the Ka’bah. They would slaughter an animal on a Nusub and daub its blood on it. What distinguished them from idols were their unique shapes. In this verse, God prohibited this meat, saying, “*That which has been slaughtered unto Nusub [shapeless idols].*”

²² The direction in which a Muslim faces when praying (*salat*), towards the Ka’bah in Mecca.

²³ Nasir Makarim Shirazi, *Nemuneh Quranic Commentary*, vol.4, p. 295.

²⁴ *Al-Ma’idah*, 3.

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.*”²⁵ This was a common practice among the Arabs of Age of the Ignorance or pre-Islamic era.²⁶

11. Animals killed through lottery

“(Forbidden) also is that which you divide by gambling arrow.”²⁷

Another kind of animal whose meat is prohibited in Islam is slaughtered one whose meat is distributed on the basis of lottery. In the Ignorance Era, 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 were called “*azlaam*” plural of “*zalam*.” Islam forbade the meat of these bets not because the very meat was forbidden but because they are a result of gambling and lottery.

Prohibition of gambling and the like is not limited to animals’ meat; rather, it is also prohibited in other cases, and gambling lies at the root

²⁵ Al-Ma’idah, 3, also see *al-Baqarah* 173 and *al-Nahl*, 115.

²⁶ See Fakhr Razi, *Ma’atih-ul-Ghayb*, vol. 11, p. 285; Nasir Makarim Shirazi, *Nemuneh Quranic Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 260.

²⁷ Al-Ma’idah, 3.

of all harm resulting from baseless social activities and superstitious pursuits.²⁸

Thus, Islam takes a moderate position on eating different kinds of meat. That is, it neither resembles the ideas of people during the Age of Ignorance whose diet consisted of lizards, carrion, and blood, nor those of some who eat crabs, worms, and cats, nor those of Hindus who prohibit eating any kind of meat. Instead, Islam considers the meat of animals that have received pure nutrition. It rejects extreme measures and includes regulations on eating different kinds of meat, as listed in the following:

1. 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 carrion and other unclean meat.

As mentioned above, the features of every animal are transmitted to the one who consumes 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.

2. Islamic rules require that animals whose meat is consumed are not unpleasant or disgusting.
3. The meat should not harm man physically or spiritually.

²⁸ Nasir Makarim Shirazi, *Nemuneh Quranic Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 260; also see Sayyid Muhammad Hussain Tabataba'i, *al-Mizan*, vol. 2, p. 192, Mahmood Alusi, *Ruh-ul-Ma'ani*, vol.3, p.233.

4. 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.
5. Heeding to Islamic guidelines regarding the legal slaughter of animals that have hygienic or moral effects on consumers of meat.²⁹

12. Wine

According to Raghīb Isfahānī, “khamr” (خمير), meaning “wine” literally means “covering something;” thus, “khamr” (خمار) refers to “cover” [as a noun], the cloth with which a woman covers her head is also called “khamr.”³⁰

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 a specific term.³¹

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

²⁹ Nasir Makarim Shirazi, *Nemuneh Quranic Commentary*, vol.4, pp.261-262.

³⁰ Raghīb Isfahānī, *Al-Mufradat*, the entry of “khamr” (خمير); also Turayhī, *Majma’ul-Bahrayn* & ibn Manzūr, *Lisan-ul-Arab*, the entry of “khamr.”

³¹ Nasir Makarim Shirazi, *Nemuneh Quranic Commentary*, vol.2, p. 118.

*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 have wisdom.*³²

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, as “strong drinks” are placed opposed to “good nourishment,” it implicitly indicates the prohibition of intoxicating drinks and their undesirability. Thus, it is not necessary to say that this was revealed before the prohibition of intoxicating drinks and referred to their being halal. In contrast, it indicates their being haram and is the first warning on prohibiting wine.³³

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.”³⁴

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.”³⁵

³² Nahl, 67.

³³ Nasir Makarim Shirazi, *Nemuneh Quranic Commentary*, vol.1, p.274.

³⁴ Nisa, 43.

³⁵ Baqarh, 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.³⁶ However, God specified that the consequential harms far outweigh the benefits. Then in the chapter *al-Ma'idah*, He said:

“O you who believe! Intoxicants and gambling,...are an abomination, of Satan’s work: eschew such [abomination], that you may reach salvation”³⁷ ...“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?”³⁸

After referring to these verses and comparing them with each other, Allamah Tabataba'i pointed out ten features that highlight the prohibition of wine: 1) The word “verily” (إِنَّمَا) is used, 2) wine is called an abomination, 3) it is called a work of Satan, 4) God explicitly prohibits people from drinking it, 5) when it is avoided, one can hope for and expect salvation, 6) this verse includes the evils which result from drinking wine, 7) there is a question as to whether this warning causes those who commit this sin to abstain from it, 8) after much emphasis on this issue, people are invited to obey God and His

³⁶ Shaikh Tusi, *al-Tibyan*, vol.2, p. 213; Fadl ibn Hassan, *Majm-ul-Bayan*, vol.2, p.557.

³⁷ *Ma'idah*, 90.

³⁸ *Al-Ma'idah*, 91.

Messenger and are discouraged from opposing them, 9) God does not need our obedience, and 10) in the next verse, God says, “*On those who believe and do good there is no blame for what they eat...*”³⁹

As mentioned above, the prohibition of wine was declared by God gradually and in stages, perhaps because the Arabs during that time were heavy drinkers, making it difficult for them to break the habit and hence convenient to deliver the verdict of its prohibition 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 the diseases resulting from drinking wine. These illnesses 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 its negative effects on man’s soul, it may lead to a person’s gracelessness, or committing unintentional actions such as insulting, harming others, committing crime or murder, divulging one’s and others’ secrets, and trampling on human rules and sanctity which form the basis of man’s happiness.

³⁹ Sayyid Muhammad Hussain Tabataba’i, *Tafseer al-Mizan*, vol. 6, p.122-125.

As for the intellectual harms of drinking intoxicating beverages, it dissipates one's wisdom, disrupts rational decision-making, and mars perception and discretion. Drinking intoxicating beverages is the worst sin and evil because all evils are rooted in it.⁴⁰

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

1. According to some statistics released in England on insanity due to drinking intoxicating beverages, comparing it with other kinds of insanity, there have been only 53 insane people because of other reasons and 2249 insane people due to intoxication.
2. 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."⁴¹

⁴⁰ Sayyid Muhammad Hussayn Tabataba'i, *al-Mizan*, vol. 2, p. 290.

⁴¹ <http://www.facs.org/trauma/alcoholinjury.pdf>

3. 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."⁴²
4. According to statistics in the United States, mental illness annually 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.
5. 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.
6. As per statistics published in connection with the losses arising as a result of alcoholic beverages 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.

⁴² *Tafsit Tantawi*, vol. 1, p. 165

Evidently, the number of mental patients, mental hospitals, murders, thefts, rapes, and accidents is proportional to the number of bars.⁴³

Conclusion

The chapters *al-Baqarah* and *al-Ma'idah* mention twelve edible and drinkable materials that are both physically and spiritually harmful and are thus prohibited. Islam holds that purpose of creating human beings is for them to reach perfection, and food influences people's physical and spiritual health. Islam offers guidelines with respect to what can and cannot be eaten so as not to hinder people's growth and perfection.

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⁴³ Nasir Makraim Shirazi, *Nemuneh Quranic Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 75.

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