

Staff Development  
Package



# Islam



## Food and Drink

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## Food and Drink

(All words within the text in **bold** are in the glossary)

"And so partake of all the lawful good things which God has provided for you as sustenance, and tender thanks unto God for His blessings, if it is Him that you worship. He has forbidden to you only carrion, and blood, and the flesh of swine, and that over which any name other than God's has been invoked; but if one is driven by necessity - neither coveting it nor exceeding his immediate need - truly, God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace."

(Q.16.114-115)

"O you who have attained to faith! Intoxicants, and games of chance, and idolatrous practices, and the divining of the future are but a loathsome evil of Satan's doing: shun it, then, so that you might attain to a happy state! By means of intoxicants and games of chance Satan seeks only to sow enmity and hatred among you, and to turn you away from the remembrance of God and from prayer. Will you not, then, desist?"

(Q.5.90)

### Halal & Haram

To understand how a Muslim decides what foods are fit to eat, it is useful to know the terms:

**Halal**

what is permitted  
(lit. "released")

**Haram**

what is forbidden

The first principle established by Islam is that the things which **Allah** has created and the benefits derived from them are essentially for man's use, and hence are permissible. Nothing is haram except what is prohibited by a sound and explicit "**nas**" (verse of Qur'an or explicit Sunnah) from the Lawgiver. If the nas is not sound, as for example in the case of a weak **hadith**, or if it is not explicit in stating the prohibition, the original principle of permissibility applies.

In Islam the sphere of prohibited things is very small, while that of permissible things is extremely vast. There is only a small number of sound and explicit texts concerning prohibitions, while whatever is not mentioned in a nas as being lawful or prohibited falls under the general principle of the permissibility of things, and within the domain of Allah's favour.



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The Prophet said: "What Allah has made lawful in His book is halal, and what he has forbidden is haram, and that concerning which He is silent is allowed as His favour. So accept from Allah His favour, for Allah is not forgetful of anything." He then recited " And thy Lord is not forgetful"

(Al-Hakim)

Prohibiting something which is Halal is considered similar to committing **shirk** (associating partners with God). Thus the great jurists, in spite of their scholarship, shied away from pronouncing judgement concerning matters of halal and haram, passing the problem from one to the other out of fear of committing the error of declaring halal what is actually haram and vice-versa.

وَلَا تَقُولُوا الْمَآءِصِفُ السِّنُّكُمْ  
 الْكَذِبَ هَذَا حَلَالٌ وَهَذَا حَرَامٌ لِنَفْتَرُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ الْكَذِبَ  
 إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَفْتَرُونَ عَلَى اللَّهِ الْكَذِبَ لَا يُفْلِحُونَ

"And do not say, as to what your tongues falsely describe, 'This is lawful, and this is forbidden' so as to ascribe false things to God; surely those who ascribe false things to God will never prosper." (Q.16.116)

### Forbidden foods

The prohibition of things is due to their impurity or harmfulness. Thus carrion is an obvious source of possible disease, as the reason for its death is not known and may be equally deadly to the eater. The practise of drinking blood drawn from a live animal can still be seen in certain tribes today, but the blood carries in it much that is harmful to the eater, as well as being cruel to the animal. Pigs would seem to have a closeness to humans that enables them to share diseases in a way dissimilar to other creatures. Indeed, man is known as "long pig" to certain South Pacific cannibals, who say that we have a similar taste, perhaps supporting a Muslim tradition that pigs were in origin a degraded form of human.

As for the prohibition of what has been dedicated to other than Allah, the polytheists of Arabia and other nations had made animal sacrifice an act of worship, or rather an integral part of their belief system and a pillar of their religion, seeking to propitiate their deities by sacrificing animals either at their special altars, or by mentioning their names over them. Islam abolished these pagan rites, and ordained that no name except that of the One God be mentioned while slaughtering, and it prohibited what was sacrificed at an altar or dedicated to anyone other than Allah.



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Apart from the prohibitions specified in Qur'an, the Prophet forbade other forms of food, such as the eating of wild animals and birds that prey on others and devour them by tearing them apart, but jurists such as Imam Malik consider such food to be "makruh" (detestable) rather than haram.

Depending on their habitats, animal life is either marine or terrestrial. Marine animals, that is, those which live in water and cannot survive outside it, are all halal.

"The game of the sea is permitted to you, and so is its food, a provision for you and for travellers by sea."

(Q.5.99)

Land animals are of two kinds, wild and domesticated, and as a general principle, for their meat to be considered pure their deaths should be of a fashion that allows the flow of blood from their bodies, as opposed to strangling, smothering or clubbing to death, for example. There is a recommended procedure for the slaughter of herd animals, but game may be taken by trained hunting beasts or weapons that pierce the flesh, but hunting purely for sport is condemned. The Prophet, who was a shepherd in his youth, frequently enjoined kindness to animals.

"The Prophet said: 'Whoever kills a sparrow or anything bigger than that without a just cause, Allah will hold him accountable on the Day of Judgement.' The listeners asked: 'What is a just cause?' He replied 'That he kill it to eat, not to simply chop off its head and then throw it away.'"

(Al-Nisai & al-Hakim)

### Food of the People of the Book

Now although the **People of the Book** (Jews and Christians), are essentially believers in the One God, some Muslims nevertheless supposed that in matters related to food they were to be treated in the same manner as idolaters. Thereupon Allah granted special permission to Muslims in the matter of eating with the people of the book and in the matter of intermarriage.

In Surah al Maidah, the last Surah of the Qur'an to be revealed, Allah says:

"Today whatever is good is made lawful to you. And the food of those who were given the scripture before you is permitted to you and your food is permitted to them"

(Q.5.6)

The application of the phrase "The food of those who were given the scripture" is general and includes their meats, produce, and other foods. All of these are halal for Muslims excepting what is haram in itself e.g. carrion, pork, and blood. These are haram whether they are obtained from Christian, Jew or Muslim.



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It is not required of the Muslim to inquire about what he has not witnessed, i.e. how was the animal killed, did the manner of slaughter meet the Islamic conditions, was the name of Allah mentioned while slaughtering or not. If the animal was slaughtered by a Muslim, even if he is ignorant or sinful, or by someone from among the people of the Book, eating it is halal. Scholars consider the actions and practices of people are ordinarily considered to be correct and appropriate, while deviation or error must be proved.

### Food of Necessity

Islam is not oblivious to the exigencies of life, nor to human weakness and capacity to face them. It permits the Muslim, under the compulsion of necessity to eat a prohibited food in quantities sufficient to remove the necessity and save himself from death. In this context after listing the prohibited foods, Allah says:

"but if one is driven by necessity - neither coveting it nor exceeding his immediate need - truly, God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace."

(Q.2.173)

This is repeated at four places in Qur'an after each mention of the prohibited foods. On the basis of these and similar verses of the Qur'an, Islamic jurists formulated an important principle, namely that "necessity removes restrictions"

Related by Aisha "Some people who had recently become Muslims said to the Prophet `People bring us meat and we do not know whether they have mentioned the Name of Allah over it or not. Shall we eat of it or not?' The Prophet replied `Mention the Name of Allah over it and eat.'"

(Bukhari)

### The Scottish environment

In Glasgow, Muslims wishing to be strict about their food need to be very alert to the lists of ingredients contained in proprietary brands. Pork products can be found in bread and biscuits, cakes and candy. Mr.Kipling has a tendency to use "animal fat", and Bernard Matthews injects many of his turkeys with pork to give "added flavour". Such concerns may seem niggling to a non-Muslim who does not understand that culturally ingrained attitudes (especially amongst those Muslims born and raised elsewhere) may well mean that a Muslim reacts to haram food such as pork with the same revulsion that a Scottish non-Muslim might have at the thought of eating dogs, or insects, or snails, let alone the monkey brains and snakes on offer to Indiana Jones!



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### Alcohol

The effect of alcohol is to veil or cloud the mind, and in the Arabic language both words have the same root. The Qur'anic prohibition of wine is therefore also applied by jurists to all substances that intoxicate the mind in this way,

In Scotland, alcohol is often seen as an integral part of the culture, although logical reasons against drinking are not unknown to drinkers. Few would argue that the drug does not carry health risks, damaging the liver, kidneys and brain. The social effects are also well documented, with a huge proportion of road accidents and incidents of family violence being clearly alcohol related. Yet the social pressures to drink are enormous, with prodigiously expensive advertising campaigns on TV and other media, and alcohol products frequently emblazoned on the chests of footballers and other sporting idols. Celebrating a victory at the local rugby club, a teetotaler might well feel rather estranged.

Businessmen often expect to do business over a liquid "business lunch", and many are the social occasions such as weddings where Muslims may find it hard to resist exhortations to take "just a glass of champagne to toast the bride". Indeed there are times such as Hogmanay when it is hardly safe for non-drinkers to leave their homes, as refusal to share a complete strangers scotch on that night could well be enough of an insult to start a serious fight.

The Prophet said:

"Of that which intoxicates in a large amount, a small amount is haram"

*(Al-Tirmidhi)*

On the principle that if you reject something as harmful to yourself you do not encourage its use by those around you, Muslims are expected to refrain from doing business in alcohol, as well as avoiding mixing with drinkers socially, or giving alcohol as a present. Some Muslims even try to avoid using perfume containing alcohol, but just as when it was mixed with herbs for use as an anaesthetic, alcohol has always been recognised as having legitimate uses, and it is often forgotten that the word alcohol, is drawn directly from the Arabic.

"It is reported that a man brought a cask of wine to the Prophet as a gift. The Prophet informed him that Allah had prohibited it. 'Shall I not sell it?' asked the man. 'The one who prohibited drinking it has also prohibited selling it.' said the Prophet 'Shall I not give it to a Jew as a gift?' asked the man. 'The one who has prohibited it has also prohibited that it be given as a gift to the Jew.' said the Prophet. 'Then what shall I do with it?' asked the man. 'Pour it on the ground.' the Prophet replied."

*(Al-Hamidi)*