

Transcript: Expressions, *Halal* and *haram*

Dietary laws

According to the Qur'an, certain types of food are forbidden or *haram* [Q. 5:1, 5:3a, 2:173].¹

Carrion describes any animal which has died from natural causes, disease, accident – or those animals which eat dead animals.

Blood includes liquid blood or food made from it.

Pork is anything from the pig.

Guided by this, Muslim scholars generally outlaw eating scavengers such as dogs or crows. Pigs are explicitly ruled out by the Qur'an, although there were many other practical reasons for avoiding pork in hot countries, such as its tendency to turn bad very rapidly. Modern industrialized food production has created problems for Muslims, as all sorts of additives are included in manufactured foods. The danger is that these have unacceptable elements such as pig products in them. Bread or cakes might contain lard or suet from a *haram* source. Sweets can contain gelatine from *haram* sources.

Alcohol in all its forms is forbidden under Islamic law, whether it is to drink or in cooking [Q. 5:90-91].² Even in medicines, an alcoholic base would be avoided if at all possible.

On the other hand, most foods are permitted or *halal*.

In the case of water-living creatures, most Muslim schools accept them as *halal* no matter how they were killed, provided that they are alive when they leave the water. For the Shi'a and the Hanafi schools of Islam, fish must have scales and fins to be *halal*, other schools generally approve seafood, as the sea is considered clean.

All vegetables, plants and fruit (apart from those substances that could be classified as “drugs”) are *halal* for Muslims with no particular rules about their preparation.

¹ Q. 5:1 O you who believe! Keep your agreements. You are permitted animals of grazing livestock, except what is [now] announced to you. You are also not allowed to hunt while dressed as a pilgrim. Indeed God decrees whatever he wants.

² Q. 5:90-91 O you who believe! Indeed wine, gambling, idols and the divining arrows are

seeks to cast enmity and hatred among you through wine and gambling, and to hinder you from the remembrance of God and from prayer. Will you, then, give them up?

Vegetarianism is permitted as long as one doesn't claim that meat-eating is wrong [Q. **5:87-88**].³

In the case of animals that have to be killed, there are strict regulations governing the way they are to be kept and slaughtered [Q. **6:118-121**].⁴ After being reared humanely, they are to be killed as quickly and painlessly as possible. Whilst they await slaughter, they are not to be allowed to see or hear other animals being killed. Then thanks must be given to God for its life before the animal is killed with a single cut to the throat by a skilled person. The effect is instantly to cut off the supply of blood to the brain, so that suffering is minimal. The blood must then be allowed to drain from the body. Methods of slaughter that do not allow the release of blood are not acceptable to Muslims.

Killing of animals should only be when necessary for food or other practical reasons – animals are part of God's creation. Hunting or shooting simply for sport is forbidden.

When giving a food gift to Muslim friends or providing refreshments for a meeting, it is important to check that all ingredients are *halal* and to make available the ingredients listings from packets so that Muslim guests can check for themselves.

Eating

Different Muslim cultures have different customs regarding eating. These are locally determined and are not part of Islamic practice. In some cultures, the custom is established of men and women (accompanied by the children) eating in separate places or of women waiting whilst the men are served first.

In many Muslim societies, people eat with their hands – as they do in many non-Muslim countries also. Because the left hand is traditionally employed when using the toilet, it's well established that the right hand should be used for contact with food. Muslims hold a spoon or fork in the right hand. This has a spin-off in other areas. For

³ Q. **5:87-88** O you who believe! Do not prohibit the good things that God has made lawful to you, and do not transgress. Indeed God does not like the transgressors. Eat the lawful and good things God has provided you, and be conscious of God in whom you have faith.

⁴ Q. **6:118-121** Eat from that over which God's name has been mentioned, if you are believers in his signs. What is it with you that you do not eat of the food over which God's name has been mentioned, although he has already clarified in detail for you whatever he has forbidden you, except that which you may be compelled to [eat]? Indeed many mislead [others] by their desires, without any knowledge. Indeed your Lord knows best the transgressors. Renounce outward sins and the inward ones. Indeed those who commit sins shall be punished for what they used to commit. Do not eat of anything over which God's name has not been mentioned, and that is indeed a great sin. Indeed the satans inspire their friends to dispute with you; and if you obey them, you will indeed be of those who give partners to God.

instance, it's customary to hand over money from right hand to right hand. To do so with the left could cause offence.

Classification of actions

Drawn from these sources (the Qur'an and Sunna), Islamic law came to recognise five categories of actions. These are:

- Those actions that are obligatory
 - for every Muslim individually or *fard 'ayn*
 - for the community but which can be performed by a group on behalf of the whole or *fard kifaya*
- Those recommended acts that carry a reward if performed but do not involve punishment if omitted or Sunna.
- Neutral acts which carry neither punishment nor reward as people are free to choose – or *mubah*
- Actions that are disapproved of but attract no specific punishment or *makruh*
- Any action that is clearly forbidden and carries a punishment if it is committed is classified as *haram*.

Example actions

Let's see how these classifications work out in practice. First, *fard 'ayn*, that is something obligatory for every Muslim, for example, the regular rhythm of prayer, and fasting during the month of Ramadan. Then, *fard kifaya*, those actions that a group can perform on behalf of everyone, such as looking for the new moon or taking part in funeral prayers. Examples of recommended or Sunna actions would be exchanging the greeting *salam alaykum*, performing additional *rak'at* before or after obligatory prayers, and visiting the sick. Things that are neutral or *mubah* would include styles of dress, types of diet, or tastes in literature. Smoking would be disapproved or *makruh*. And drinking alcohol, *haram* or forbidden.

Naturally, there are some variations of opinion regarding the three middle categories. Also, as time goes on and knowledge advances, some actions may well be reclassified. For example, some would classify smoking as forbidden, as it is now known seriously to damage health.

financial ethics

We are all the stewards of the goods of the earth. Everything belongs to God and we are really only the custodians of what we appear to own. Therefore it follows that we should use the goods of the earth for the benefit of all humankind and not for our own selfish ends. This is covered by the Islamic term *sadaqa*, which we can translate as 'bearing one another's burdens'. This is a humanitarian principle; there is no room for racial or any other kind of discrimination. All human beings are members of one family and therefore the suffering of anyone in need is a concern for the rest of us.

There is no limit set to the concept of charity in Islam, provided only that we discharge our family responsibilities first.

In accordance with this, all forms of economic exploitation are forbidden. There is a tradition that says, the labourer must be paid his wages before the sweat dries on his brow. One form of such exploitation is *riba*. The term *riba* is often translated as usury or the giving and taking of interest. Muslims are encouraged to lend money to those who need it, if they can do so, and they should receive it back in full, without making anything on the deal.

Capital must not be advantaged over human effort. In an interest-based system, the borrower is liable to repay a loan plus interest whether the business succeeds or fails. The lender cannot lose. Rather than taking a bank loan secured against assets, Islamic finance requires an injection of capital to be in the form of taking an equity stake in the business. In this way, the capital is put at risk and that risk is shared proportionally by both the lender and borrower. If the business prospers, the lender gets back their capital plus the increase in the equity. If things go badly, the lender must take a proportionate share of the loss.

In a society based around lending and borrowing at interest, it is very difficult to live according to Islamic economic principles. Bank accounts, credit cards, savings schemes are all likely to be based on interest and thus be forbidden (*haram*). In a society based on home ownership, there are real difficulties as to whether taking a simple repayment mortgage can be permitted as the only available means of housing one's family.

Muslims are naturally required to make provision for the future: pensions, savings, health and education funds. Such monies must be invested on a shared risk basis rather than in an interest-based system. Equity plans have been developed for Muslims to save for the future and many banks are trying to develop products based on Islamic financial principles.

There is a principle in Islam that if something is *haram* for me to do, it is *haram* for me to profit by others doing it. So for example, alcohol is forbidden for me to drink. That means I am forbidden to trade in alcohol or to invest my pension fund in alcohol-related businesses. This has given rise to ethical screening of investment plans according to Islamic principles; a practice shared by many other ethically conscious investors.

There is no sin in being wealthy in Islam, provided the money has been made in permitted (*halal*) ways and invested in *halal* funds. However those who have wealth surplus to the current and future needs of their family are encouraged to remember that they are only custodians of the good things of the earth. Such surplus wealth should be given to those who need it so they can become economically active, support

their families and in turn contribute to the whole of society – the Islamic principle of *infaq* [Q. 107:1-7].⁵

Making space for Islamic financial ethics is an on-going concern in many contemporary countries, which are run on interest-bearing principles. In societies run according to Islamic ethics, the social and welfare needs of people would be provided for by Islamic institutions such as a charitable trust or *waqf*, as happened in various pre-colonial Muslim communities.

Dr Buaben discusses bringing the whole of a Muslim's economic life under ethical scrutiny:

Islam affects every aspect of human life and therefore, the way a Muslim earns his money and spends it, and even saves it, is important, is significant. And therefore pious Muslims are always concerned as to where their money is coming from, how they are earning it, where they are keeping their money; and that money that they are keeping: what it is doing, what the banks are doing with it and also how they spend that money. And therefore, in the West especially now, there is an urgent need for Muslims to rediscover some of these theological teachings because they are concerned about the whole system which is based on something that Muslims will describe as problematic, especially with regard to interest. And therefore they are now debating the possibilities of establishing Islamic banks (there are a couple around in London and Birmingham and other places) and also ethical savings or ethical investment. I mean, of course, I have to accept that it's not just Muslims but non-Muslims are also finding that there are problems with the general financial system. And therefore they are finding ways of making ethical investments and earning ethically-based money.

⁵ Q. 107:1-7 Did you see him who denies the Judgement? That is the one who drives away the orphan, and does not urge the feeding of the needy. So woe to them who pray and pay no attention to their prayers, those who show off but deny aid.