

The Concept Of
Halal & Haram in Islam

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The Concept Of Halal & Haram in Islam

Dr Irfan Jehangir



ISLAMIC OUTREACH
P R O J E C T

Published & Distributed by:
Islamic Outreach Project

First Print October 2017
2nd Edition Feb 2019
3rd Edition November 2019

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CONCEPT OF HALAL & HARAM IN ISLAM

BY DR IRFAN JEHANGIR

Halal is a Quranic term that means permitted, allowed, lawful, or legal. Its opposite is Haram (forbidden, unlawful or illegal). When God sent His last Messenger Muhammed pbuh in the 6th century CE the world was torn between two extremes- On the extreme right was India's ascetic Brahmanism and Christianity's self-denying monasticism. In addition, other religions were based on mortifying the flesh, abstaining from good food, and avoiding other enjoyments of life that God has provided for humanity. On the extreme left was Persia's Mazdak philosophy, which advocated absolute freedom and allowed people to take whatever they wanted and to do whatever they pleased. It even exhorted them to violate what is naturally held inviolable (Like marrying their own mothers!).

One of Islam's initial accomplishments was, therefore, to establish certain legal principles and measures for rectifying this situation. These principles were made the determining criteria on which defining Halal and Haram were based. Thus this vital aspect was determined according to the correct perspective, and the related rules were established on the basis of such principles as balance, justice, morality, righteousness, and perfect goodness.

The Quran clarified:

“Ask them, "Who has made it unlawful to maintain beauty and to eat the pure foods which God has created for His servants? They are made for the believers in this world and are exclusively for them in the life hereafter." Thus do We explain Our revelations to the people who have knowledge”. (7:32)

As a result, the Muslim community occupied a position between the extreme deviations mentioned above and was described by God as a middle community, the best community that has ever been brought forth for humanity (3:110).

Basic Principles Concerning Halal/Haram

The first principle and the default position in all aspects of an Islamic way of life is that all that God has created and the benefits derived from them are for the use of all humanity and are fundamentally Halal or permissible. Nothing is Haram except what is forbidden by a sound and explicit Nass (i.e., either a Quranic verse or a clear, authentic, and explicit Sunnah [practice or saying] of the Prophet, upon him be peace and blessings. These are the two sources of Islamic law.

In Islam, the sphere of forbidden things is very small, while that of permissible things is vast. In relation to acts of worship, the principle is limitation: Nothing can be legislated in this regard except what God Himself has legislated. But as far as living habits are concerned, the principle is freedom, because nothing can be restricted in this regard except what God Himself and the Messenger, as based upon His Revelation, have forbidden. No Rabbi, Priest, King, Imam, Scholar or Sultan has the right to forbid something permanently to God's servants. The Quran took to task the People of the Book (the Christians and Jews) for giving their priests and rabbis the power to make things and actions lawful or forbidden.

Adi Ibn Hatim, who was a Christian before accepting Islam, once came to God's Messenger, pbuh. When he heard him recite:

“The Jews take their scholars (teachers of law), and the Christians take their monks, as well as the Messiah, son of Mary, for Lords beside God, whereas they were commanded to worship none but the

One God. There is no deity but Him. Glory is to Him, that He is infinitely exalted above that they associate partners with Him (9:31),

He said, "O Messenger of God, but they do not worship them." The Messenger replied, "Yes, but they (give them the right to) forbid to the people what is Halal and permit them what is Haram, and the people obey them. This is indeed their worshipping of them."

(Tirmidhi)

One of Islam's beauties is that it forbids only that which is unnecessary, harmful, and discardable (useless and unwanted), while providing alternatives that are better and give greater ease and comfort. God forbids usury but encourages profitable trade; forbids adultery and fornication but encourages lawful marriage; forbids intoxicating drinks but provides other delicious drinks that are wholesome for the body and mind; and forbids unclean food but provides alternative wholesome food.

Thus, when we survey all of Islam's injunctions, we find that if God limits His servants' choice in some matters, He provides them with a still wider range of more wholesome alternatives. Assuredly, God has no will to make peoples' lives difficult, narrow, and circumscribed; on the contrary; He wills ease, goodness, guidance, and mercy for them.

The Quran explains:

"He has chosen you and He has not laid upon you any hardship in Deen (Way of Life)" (22:78)

That is, the creed you have been given is very simple and straightforward and the laws and regulations you have to obey are practicable. You are free within its bounds to make as much progress as you can. This was to impress that the lives of the Muslims were

free from all those useless and unnatural restrictions which had been imposed upon the former communities by their priests and law givers. The negative aspect of the same thing has been mentioned in the following verse:

“He enjoins upon them what is good and forbids them what is evil. He makes the clean things lawful to them and prohibits all corrupt things, and removes from them their burdens and the shackles that were upon them” (7:157)

The Israelites had fettered their lives by undue restrictions which had been placed on them by the legal hair-splitting of their jurists, the pietistic exaggerations of their spiritual leaders, the introduction of superstitions and self-contrived laws and regulations by their masses- in total contradiction of the original message and laws sent down by God through Moses and Jesus peace be upon them. Prophet Muhammed pbuh was given the final message and with a view to relieving mankind of every unnecessary burden and releasing them from every unjustified restriction, in fact liberated their shackled lives; from that which was propagated as God’s laws and way of life.

Halal and Haram Types:

The Quran and Sunnah use the word Halal and Haram in two different meanings:

- 1) Moral Conduct
- 2) Material products including food

It is very common to hear in Muslim societies the connotation of Halal or Haram. Or this is not Halal. Even to a certain extent, in some multi-religious societies the word Halal becomes the first thing to be noticed by non-Muslims about Islam. The concept of Halal plays a bigger role in the life of businessmen where they have to

satisfy the demands of their Muslim customers for example to get the confidence in buying and selling in this sensitive part of Muslim belief.

Unfortunately, the word Halal which means legal or lawful is being narrowly understood by many Muslims. A lot of them comprehend Halal as to be limited to foods only and that before any animal becomes Halal, it must be slaughtered according to the Islamic way and the food should not contain any forbidden elements.

The Quran and Sunnah's concept of Halal, as a matter of fact consists of two components. Even though, slaughtering animals according to the Islamic way is very important and crucial to making any meat Halal, the Quran and Sunnah emphasize heavily on the source of earnings of a Muslim being Halal and corruption-free.

It is encouraging to know that Muslims generally are very concerned about the Halal and Haram material everywhere. They are very strict in looking for Islamic symbols of Halal in any products or finding about E numbers, gelatine and the like. Some of them will refuse to eat any food unless he is certain and sure that it is of Muslim-slaughtered food or it does not contain any supposedly forbidden elements. As one of the students reported:

“I was informed by a religious teacher that some young boys after stealing a chicken, requested him to slaughter it according to Islamic way to make it Halal for them!”

This paradoxical behaviour is a result of ignorance, the stolen animal does not become Halal by being slaughtered by a religious teacher neither by an ordinary man as its very source is Haram. The Quran and Sunnah emphasize more on the moral Halal and Haram which touch directly on the public or human rights (Haququl Ebaad),

whereas the Halal and Haram material are God's rights (Haququ Allah).

The Quran and Sunnah, knowing the sensitivity and impact of money on people, have protected it with a fence of ethics and rules. In addition, the longest verse in Quran is about money.

The Prophet pbuh, because of its importance, insisted on it in his farewell sermon.

"It is unlawful for you to shed the blood of one another or take (unlawfully) the fortunes of one another". [Muslim/ 1218]

These divine rules and regulations are to organize people's business transactions and all dealings related to money to avoid quarrels and clashes. These rules and regulations are not restricted to the ordinary Muslims, but also include prophets. The Prophet said:

"O people, God is Generous and He therefore, accepts only that which is good. And God commanded the believers as He commanded the Messengers by saying: O Messengers, eat of the good things, and do good deeds; verily I am aware of what you do" [Muminun: 51].

And He said:

"O those who believe, eat of the good things that We gave you" [2: 172].

He then made a mention of a person:

"Who travels widely, his hair dishevelled and covered with dust. He lifts his hand towards the sky (and thus makes the supplication):" O Lord, O Lord" whereas his food is unlawful, his drink is unlawful, and his clothes are unlawful and his nourishment is unlawful. How can then his supplication get accepted?" [Muslim/ 1015]

The Prophet pbuh in his last sermon five days before his demise taught the practical implementation of justice and moral uprightness; he said:

“Anyone whom I might have accidentally lashed his back; I offer him my back so that he may avenge himself on me. He whom I have ever caused disrespect about his honour, here I am offering my honour so that he may avenge himself” Then he descended, and performed the noon prayer. Again he returned to the pulpit and sat on it. *He resumed his first speech about enmity and some other things. A man then said: "You owe me three Dirhams." The Prophet said: pay him the money”*. [Ar-Rahiq Al-Makhtum, p. 400]

The Quran and the Sunnah, in their efforts to guide Muslims and inculcate these teachings in their minds, use clear and strong words which does not carry any other meanings or interpretations but Halal in both, materials and moral conducts.

Haram Material/Food

Haram material is referring to Maytah (dead animals) and pork and any meat that is not slaughtered in the name of God. It is mentioned in four places in the holy Qur’an.

“He has forbidden you the Maytah (dead animals), and blood, and the flesh of swine, and that which is slaughtered as a sacrifice for others than God. But if one is forced by necessity, without wilful disobedience, or transgressing due limits, - then is he guiltless. For God is Oft-forgiving Most Merciful” [2: 173]

“Forbidden to you (for food) are: Al-Maytah (the dead animals), blood, the flesh of swine, and that on which God’s Name has not been mentioned while slaughtering (that which has been slaughtered

as a sacrifice for others than God, or has been slaughtered for idols) and that which has been killed by strangling, or by a violent blow, or by a headlong fall, or by the goring of horns and that which has been (partly) eaten by a wild animal. ...But if any is forced by hunger, with no inclination to transgression, God is indeed Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful” [Al-Maida: 3]

“Say: I find not in that which has been revealed to me anything forbidden to be eaten by one who wishes to eat it, unless it be a Maytah (dead animal) or blood poured forth (by slaughtering or the like), or the flesh of swine (pork); for that surely is impure or impious (unlawful) meat (of an animal) which is slaughtered for idols or on which God’s Name has not been mentioned while slaughtering). But (even so), if a person is forced by necessity, without wilful disobedience, nor transgressing due limits, - thy Lord is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful” [Al-An ‘am: 145]

“He has forbidden you Al-Maytah (the dead animal), blood, the flesh of swine, and any animal which is slaughtered as a sacrifice for others than God. But if one is forced by necessity, without wilful disobedience, nor transgressing due limits, - then God is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful” [An-Nahl: 115]

It is stated at the end of the above four verses that a Muslim can consume a forbidden meal, such as Maytah or pork under necessity and emergency, whereas there is not a single verse or Hadith (saying of Prophet) where it is allowed for a Muslim to take someone’s money or belongings without his permission or consent, except in one situation as reported by Bukhari and Muslim in the Hadith.

Narrated by `Uqbah bin `Amir: We said, “O God’s Messenger! You send us out and it happens that we have to stay with such people as do not entertain us. What do you think about it?”

God's Messenger said to us:

“If you stay with some people and they entertain you as they should for a guest, accept it; but if they do not do then you should take from them the rights of the guest, which they ought to give”

Moral Aspects of Haram:

Moral Haram refers to all sorts of cheating and fraud conducts in business transactions and other dealings related to public interactions and money. The Quran specifies:

“And do not eat up your property among yourselves for vanities, nor use it as bait for the judges, with intent that ye may eat up wrongfully and knowingly a little of (other) people's property” [2:188]

“O ye who believe! Eat not up your property among yourselves in vanities: But let there be amongst you Traffic and trade by mutual good-will: Nor kill (or destroy) yourselves: for verily God has been to you Most Merciful!” [4:29]

“O ye who believe! There are indeed many among the priests and anchorites, who in Falsehood devour the substance of men and hinder (them) from the path of God. And there are those who hoard gold and silver and spend it not in the way of God: announce unto them a most grievous penalty” [9:34]

These three verses in a very unambiguous and clear manner prevent Muslims from exploiting each other in all forms and types of activities related to monetary aspects. The Prophet pbuh warned that if a person wilfully earns in a Haram manner and makes no effort to change the nature of his or her earnings then:

“All flesh feed by Haram deserve nothing but hell” [At-Tirmizi/ 641]

Unfortunately, some Muslims do not bother to take similar or better precautions or make more efforts to abide by the Islamic rules and ethics in relation to their means of earnings as they would do to ensure the Halal nature of the chicken they eat for example! This is due either to ignorance or negligence, regardless of whether they are businessmen, academicians, politicians or belong to any other category of the society.

In order to keep all business transaction corruption free the Quran advises:

“Woe to Al-Mutaffifin (the defrauders) those who, when they have to receive by measure from people, demand full measure, but when they have to give by measure or weight to (others) give less than due. Do they not think that they will be resurrected (for reckoning)” [83:1-4]

The offence of such wrong-doing is so abhorrent morally and ethically that it was included in the mission of God’s messenger, Prophet Shoaib. He was to eradicate such diseases in his community. He is quoted by the Quran as saying:

“O my people! Worship God alone; You have no other god but Him. Now has come unto you a clear (Sign) from your Lord! Give just measure and weight, nor withhold from the people the things that are their due; and do no mischief on the earth after it has been set in order: that will be best for you, if you have Faith” [7: 85]

The Prophet pbuh said in a hadith reported by `Abdullah bin Masud:

“He who deceives us is not from us, fraud and delude are in fire”. [Sahih Ibn Hibban/ 572]. He said in another hadith reported by `Aisha

“Muslims are upon their agreements” [Sunan Dar Qutni/2538].

The agreement upon which the employee is requested to abide by is well determined in the letter of appointment, failure to fulfil that agreement in dishonest way is considered as breach of the agreement and cheating to the employer. In consequence, any earnings of this kind of behaviour will be dubious to say the least.

In hadith reported by Abu Hurayrah, the Prophet pbuh said:

“A time will come when one will not care how one gains one’s money, legally or illegally” [Bukhari/ 2059, 2083]

A Muslim should worry more about the source of his earnings rather than worrying about finding Muslim food or restaurants. To create a prosperous society, a better Islamic environment free from fraud and cheating or greed, employee as well as the employers at all levels should perform to the best of their abilities and consider the duty as a moral as well as a legal binding on each other. Such attitude will help bring about a miraculous change for the economic development of the whole world.

In order to maintain absolute trust and good reputation the prophet advised total abstinence from all forms of defrauding and cheating:

Once, when passing by a grain merchant, the Prophet (p.b.u.h) thrust his hand into the heap of grain and found it wet.

“What is this, O merchant? he asked. “It is because of the rain,” the man replied. The prophet pbuh then said to him:

“Why did you not put it on top so that people could see it? He who deceives us is not among us” [Sahih Muslim/147]

In another Hadith reported by Abu Hurayrah, the Prophet passed by a heap of grain which was made to look good by the merchant. The

prophet pbuh put his hand into it and found it to be bad. He told the merchant:

“Sell the good and the bad separately. He who deceives us is not among us” [Ahmad/ 5113]

The Quran further explains:

“O ye who believe! Eat not your property among yourselves in vanities: But let there be amongst you Traffic and trade by mutual good-will: Nor kill (or destroy) yourselves: for verily God has been to you Most Merciful!” [4:29]

The Prophet pbuh said:

“Whoever takes the property of a Muslim by taking a false oath, will meet God Who will be angry with him. Then the Prophet recited the verse: “Verily those who purchase a small gain at the cost of God’s Covenant and their oaths, they shall have no portion in the Hereafter, neither will God speak to them, nor look at them” [Bukhari/ 7445]

Narrated Umm Salamah, the Prophet said:

“You people present your cases to me and some of you may be more persuasive in presenting their argument. So, if I give some one’s right to another (wrongly) because of the latter’s (trickily) presentation of the case, I am really giving him a piece of fire; so he should not take it” [Bukhari/2680]

Those easily trapped in this kind of misbehaviour to earn and accumulate Haram wealth are politicians and holders of high ranking positions in both public and private sectors. Some of them try to legalize this illicit act by calling it gifts or commission, but whatever they name it, the facts and realities can’t be altered by mere use of

jargon. The only name for this kind of act is corruption, any cent earned beyond the official salary is corrupt and therefore Haram. The Prophet pbuh said:

“When we –prophet- appoint a person to a position, we take care of his provision. If he takes anything beyond that it is an illegal gain”
[Abu Dawud/ 2943]

The Prophet pbuh said:

“God curse the one who offers the bribe, the one who receives it, and the one who arranges it” [Tirmidhi/ 1336].

The concept and purpose of having the criteria of Halal and Haram is to make life easy for all mankind. The Quran makes it clear that it is the ease that is desirable and not difficulty or hardship; in the sight of God.

The Qur’an reads:

“God intends for you ease and does not intend for you hardship”
(2:185)

The Quran further elucidates:

“We have sent down the Book to you which manifests the truth about all things and as guidance and mercy and good news for Believers.”
(16:89)

These verses explain very clearly that Islam is easy to follow and rather encourages us to create ease in religion. Unfortunately some Muslims, including some reverts, are under the misconception that the more stringent they are in following some aspects of worship, the more pious they become. This is in contradiction to what Islamic teachings are. The misconception is a result of lack of understanding

of Deen and at times drives some people away from religion, mainly because of the way it is presented to them. Sometimes people are brought up with certain cultural baggage and they follow their cultural practises believing them to be part of Islam, thus causing confusion to those who may be new to Islam and its teachings. It is known in fact that Prophet Muhammed (peace be upon him) always resisted any tendency toward religious excessiveness. He once said to his close companion Abdullah Ibn Amr:

“Have I heard right that you fast everyday and stand in prayer all night?” Abdullah replied: “Yes, O Messenger of God”

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

“Do not do that. Fast, as well as, eat and drink. Stand in prayer, as well as, sleep. This is because your body has a right upon you, your eyes have a right upon you, your wife has a right upon you, and your guest has a right upon you.” (Bukhari, 127)

This Hadith indicates that it is significantly important to maintain a delicate balance between the various obligations that demand our attention; between our obligations to God, our obligations toward others and our obligations toward ourselves. This is also demonstrated in many verses in the Quran illustrating that God is both merciful and kind.

In sharing the message of Islam with people, the Prophet Muhammed (peace be upon him) was advised in the Quran:

“It is part of the mercy of God that you deal gently with them. If you were severe or hardhearted, they would have broken away from you” (3:159)

It is on this note that when the Prophet sent his companions to teach Islam to the people he advised them:

“Facilitate matters to people and do not make things difficult. Obey each other and do not differ amongst yourselves.” (Bukhari, 69)

God has created a natural balance between what is easy to follow for humans and what is the minimal requirement needed to be a morally, ethically and spiritually pious person. This can be shown for example when we increase the price of a commodity, or make things more stringent, as mentioned earlier, in religion we will find lesser people wanting to buy that commodity.

However, we must remember that easiness in religion has to be done in the way that God wants us to do it. It should not be mistaken for casualness.

A balanced religion

One of the main features of Islam is that it is a balanced religion. It is known that whenever the Prophet had to choose between two options, he always chose the easier, unless it was explicitly forbidden. This again proves the beauty of Islam and God’s mercy toward us.

While aiming to reach the afore mentioned balances between human spiritual needs and material needs it can be done by simplifying our life and lightening our material baggage by focusing more on our spiritual and mental needs. Balancing between individual rights and responsibilities, we find that as life continues to take us down many familiar journeys, one of those being a quest of living, we must work toward making everything simpler including our worships if we are to continue on our steady pace toward our ultimate goal, Heaven.

Bear in mind we must allow others to influence us positively whenever we are going wrong. After all, God has promised that He is

not going to make any soul accountable for anything more than what his potential is, promising that He will forgive those who repent.

Prophet pbuh said:

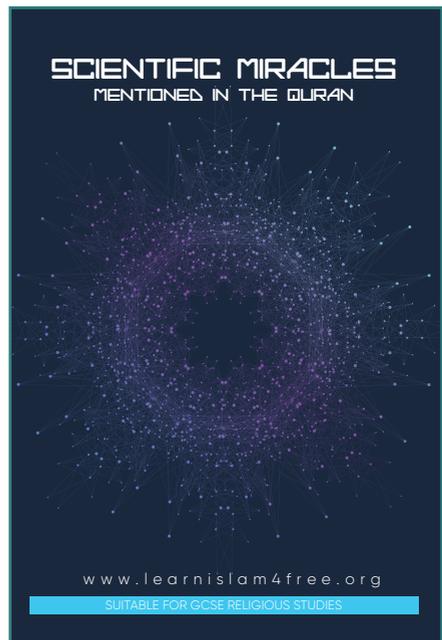
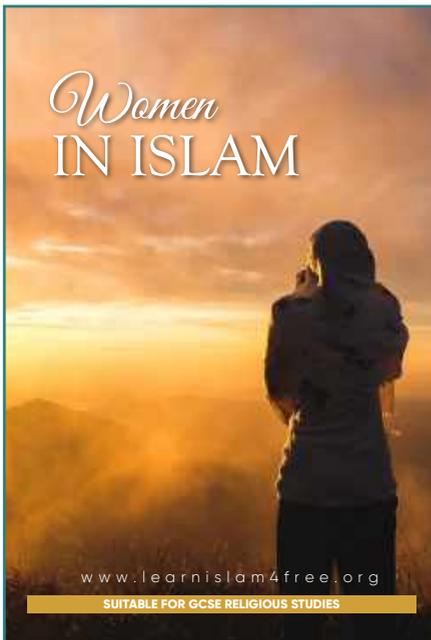
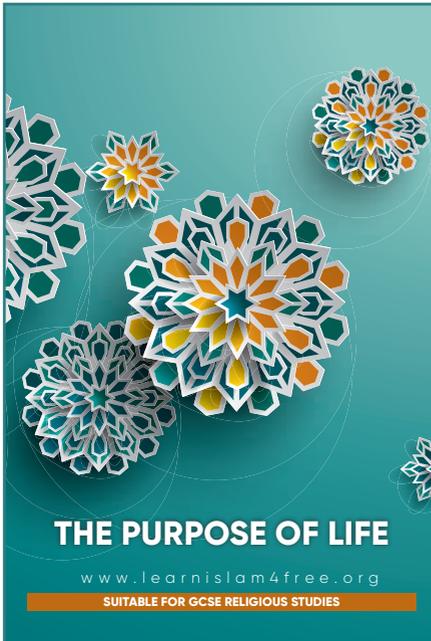
"Religion is very easy and whoever overburdens himself in his religion will not be able to continue in that way. So you should not be extremists, but try to be near to perfection and receive the good tidings that you will be rewarded; and gain strength by worshipping in the mornings, the afternoons, and during the last hours of the nights." (Bukhari)

The Quran makes clear the way to approach the Halal and Haram issue avoiding all kinds of extreme views and positions:

"God does not burden any soul with more than it can bear: each gains whatever good it has done, and suffers its bad" (2:286)

Islamic way of life is easy and the area of permitted or Halal is much wider than the tiny aspect that is forbidden or Haram, we have to strive to keep it that way in order not to fall a prey to the same mistakes that the children of Israel made by giving their priests and Rabbis the right to decide what is allowed and what is not! Thus they ended up following the opinions and rulings of varying shades of their scholars and in the process ignored the true message and the ease which was contained in the original books sent down by the creator. We are blessed that we have the book of God-The Quran- in its original form available to us-which should suffice to establishing what is forbidden rather than the opinions of scholars!

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1. The Quran
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3. World's First Written Constitution
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5. The Purpose Of Life
6. The People Of The Book
7. What Is Islam?
8. The Concept Of God In Islam
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28. Islam Against Sectarianism
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35. The Wakeup Call
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40. The Rights Of Parents And Children
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