

Is Meat Slaughtered by Jews and Christians Permissible

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The following discourse is found in al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an by al-Allamah as-Sayyid Muhammad Husayn at-Tabataba'i

The portions containing information not related to the subject at hand have been extracted from this translation. For the full text of this section, [click here](#).

Begins under the commentary on 5:5

At-Ta'am according to philology refers to all that is eaten and taken as nourishment. But it is said that it is used to wheat and other such grains only. Lisanu 'l-Arab says: "When the people of Hijaz use the word at-ta'am without any restriction or association, they mean wheat exclusively." He further says: "Al-Khalil has said, 'In high Arab language at-ta'am is wheat in particular.'" The same meaning has been given by Ibnu 'l-Athir in an-Nihayah. It is for this reason that in most of ahadith narrated from the Imams of Ahlu 'l Bayt (a.s.) it has been declared that at-ta'am in this verse means wheat and other grains, although a few traditions give another meaning; and we shall talk about it under "Traditions".

In any case, this permission does not cover those animals whose meat is forbidden and slaughtering them can make no difference like pig, nor does it cover those lawful animals, which have not been slaughtered properly like the one over which the name of Allah has not been recited and which has not been slaughtered according to Islamic rules. Allah has counted the above-mentioned unlawful items in the verses of prohibition (that is, the four verses in the chapters of "The Cow", "The Table", "Cattle" and "The Bee") describing them as uncleanness, transgression, and sin, as we have explained earlier. Far be it from Allah to allow what He has called uncleanness, transgression, and sin and then to mention it as a favour to the believers.

Moreover, these forbidden things have been enumerated in this very chapter a few lines before this verse. And nobody can claim abrogation in such cases and especially in the chapter of "The Table" about which the traditions say that it is an abrogating chapter, not abrogated....

Continued under the category "Traditions"...

Al-ʿAyyashi narrates from Hisham ibn Salim from Abu Abdillah (a.s.) that he said explaining the Divine words: and the food of those who have been given the Book is lawful for you. It refers to lentils, grains, and similar things of the People of the Book. (at-Tafsir al-ʿAyyashi).

The author says: Ash-Shaykh has narrated it in at-Tahdhib from the same Imam and the wording there is, "lentils, chickpeas, etc."

There are traditions from ʿAmmar ibn Marwan and Sama'ah from Abu ʿAbdillah (a.s.) explaining what is lawful from the food of the People of the Book. The Imam said, "Grains." (al-Kafi; at-Tahdhib).

Al-Kulayni narrates through his chain from Ibn Mskan from Qutaybah al-A'sha that he said, "A man asked Abu Abdillah (a.s.), and I was present there. He said to the Imam, 'A Jew or a Christian releases (a dog) on goats or sheep and it attacks it, then it is slaughtered. Should his dhabihah (slaughtered animal) be eaten?' Abu ʿAbdillah (a.s.) said, 'Do not enter its price in your property and don't eat it because it is the (Divine) name (which is important) and no one can be trusted in this matter except a Muslim.' That man said to the Imam (a.s.), 'Allah has said: This day have been made lawful for you (all) good things and the food of those who have been given the Book is lawful for you.' ʿAbu Abdillah (a.s.) said, 'My father used to say that it refers to grains and similar things.'" (al-Kafi).

The author says: This tradition has been narrated by ash-Shaykh in at-Tahdhib and by al-ʿAyyashi in his at-Tafsir from

Qutaybah al-A'sha from the Imam (a.s.).

As you see, the traditions explain the lawful food of the People of the Book as being confined to grains, and similar items. It is the meaning that is understood from the word: at-ta'am when it is used without any contextual restriction as it appears from the traditions and the stories narrated from the early days of Islam. That is why a great majority of our ?ulama believes that the lawfulness is confined to the grains, and similar things and the food prepared from them.

Some people (Rashid Rida in Tafsiru ?l-manar) have forcefully rejected this interpretation, saying that it is against the usage of the Qur'an concerning the word: at-ta'am. He further says, "In the Qur'anic language, cereal grain is not the overwhelming meaning of at-ta'am. Allah has said in this very chapter: Lawful for you is the game of the sea and its food, a provision for you and for the travelers. (5:96); and nobody can calim that the food of the sea means wheat and grain. Also, Allah says: All food was lawful to the Children of Israel-except that which Israel had forbidden to himself (3:93), and no one has said that the word food here means wheat or grain, because nothing of it was forbidden to the Children of Israel - neither before the revelation of the Torah nor after it. At-Ta'am basically refers to all that is tasted or eaten. Allah says narrating the story of the stream that Talut had said: whoever then drinks from it he is not of me, and whoever does not taste of it (lan Yat'amhu), he is surely of me (2:249). Also, Allah says: when you have taken the food (ta'imtum), then disperse (33:53)."

Comment:

Would that I could know what did he understand from the sentence: at-ta'am when used without any contextual restriction refers to the grain, and similar things. It is amusing that he has tried to refute it with the verbs yat'amhu and ta'imtum while the scholars had talked about the noun at-ta'am and not about the verbs derived from that root. Another of his arguments is based on the genitive construction "food of the sea" and this construction itself is a clear context, which shows that it doesn't refer to cereal grain because wheat or barley does not grow in the sea. Another argument is based on the sentence: All food was lawful to the Children of Israel, and he himself says that wheat and cereal grains were not forbidden in their religion. This context clearly shows that the talk is not about creal grains. He should have found out from the Qur'an examples where the word: at-ta'am is used in its generality without contrary context and then he should have spoken; like the Divine words: redemption by feeding a poor man (2:184); the expiation (of it) is the feeding of the poor (5:95); And they give food out of love for Him (76:8); Then let man look to his food (80:24). [In all these verses the noun at-ta'am has been used free from contextual restrictions and it all refers to the food prepared from cereal grains.]

He further says, "There was no confusion regarding cereal grains whether they were lawful or not. The question arose only about meat when something happens to create doubt about its lawfulness, e.g. if the animal dies a natural death or if it is slaughtered as an offering to the idols or without invoking the name of Allah. That is why Allah has said: Say: 'I do not find in that which has been revealed to me anything forbidden for an eater to eat of except that it be what has died of itself or blood poured forth...' (6:145); and all this is related to animals. It clearly shows that unlawfulness is restricted to this group only and unlawfulness of other things requires similar clear declaration."

COMMENT: This talk is more amusing than the previous one. He says that cereal grains is not the subject of doubt that it is lawful or not; the doubt occurs about the meat only. We should ask him: Which time is he talking about? Is he looking at these times of ours when people are familiar with Islam and its general regulations since so many centuries or is he talking about the times when the Qur'an was being revealed and the religion was just a few years old? Does he not know that the people had asked the Prophet [s] about the subjects, which were clearer than the rules of cereal grains? Allah has quoted some of their questions. For example: They ask you as to what they should spend (2:215). 'Abu ibn Hamid has narrated from Qatadah that he said, "We have been told that some people had said: 'How can we marry their women and they are on a (different) religion and we are on a (different) religion.' Then Allah sent down the verse: And whoever denies faith, his work is indeed forfeited..." You will find similar questions and objections in the traditions as we have quoted some in the subject of hajju 't-tamattu', etc.

When they could raise such objections after the verse as revealed allowing the marriage with chaste women of the People of the Book, then what was there to prevent them, before the verse was revealed, from asking about eating together with the People of the Book, or to eat the cereal grains purchased from them or the meals prepared from it like bread or other dishes; or other items prepared from cereal grains when these things were made by the People of the Book, because: they have their own religion and we follow a different religion! Especially so when Allah had warned the believer in so many verses against establishing friendship and close relation with the People of the Book and inclining towards them.

Rather, we can turn the table against him when he says, 'There is a chance of confusion about meat whether it was lawful or not.' Fine. But how could they ask about it when Allah has described the general lawful items of meat in the chapter of "Cattle": Say: "I do not find in that which has been revealed to me anything forbidden for an eater to eat of except that it be what has died of itself, or blood poured forth, or flesh of swine -

for that surely is unclean - or that which is a transgression other than (the name of) Allah having been invoked on it." (8:145); and then in the chapter of "The Bee". Both these chapters are of Meccan period. Then details have been given in the chapter of "The Cow" which was revealed in Medina long before the chapter of "The Table". And even in this chapter, before this verse, forbidden meat has been described. And this preceding verse according to Rashid Rida explicitly shows that the animals slaughtered by the People of the Book are not forbidden. Now, we may ask: How could they entertain any doubt about the lawfulness of the animals slaughtered by the People of the Book when verse after verse of Meccan as well as Medinite period was revealed declaring that it was lawful; and the Muslims were memorizing the verses and reciting them and teaching them and putting them into practice?

He has claimed that the verse of the chapter of "Cattle" confines the unlawful things to what has been mentioned therein; accordingly, unlawfulness of animals slaughtered by the People of the Book will require a clear proof. Well, there is no doubt that every rule needs a proof to support it and his claim clearly shows that this exclusive confinement will be valid only when there is no other proof to show that some other things too are forbidden.

Now, if he wants proof from traditions then those who say that the animals slaughtered by the People of the Book are unlawful rely on the traditions, which are narrated in explanation of this verse, and we have quoted some of them earlier.

And if he wants proof from the Qur'an, then, first of all it is an unjustifiable arrogance, because tradition is the companion of the Qur'an and they are not separate from each other in being authoritative sources of the law. Secondly, we shall ask him what are his views about the animals slaughtered by unbelievers other than the People of the Book like idol-worshippers and atheists. Will he say it is unlawful because it is a dead body, which has not been slaughtered according to the shari'ah? In that case, let us look at two slaughtered animals: On one of them the name of Allah was not invoked at all and it was not slaughtered facing the qiblah; and the other was not slaughtered in the Islamic way. What is the difference between the two? Allah is not pleased with either, both are unclean in the eyes of the religion, and Allah has forbidden unclean things. Allah says: (Who) enjoins them good and forbids them unclean things (7:157); and He has said in the preceding verse: They ask you as to what is made lawful for them. Say: "The good things are made lawful for you." This question and answer is a clear proof that lawfulness is confined to the good things and even in this verse, the words: This day have been made lawful for you (all) good things, point to this exclusiveness especially when they describe the favor of Allah on the believers.

If he says that the animals slaughtered by those unbelievers are unlawful because they invoke on it the names of other than Allah, like their deities, then there is no difference whether a name of other than Allah is invoked on it or the name of Allah is invoked but in a way which has been abrogated and with which Allah is not pleased.

Rashid Rida further says, "Allah has very forcefully forbidden the Muslims to follow the idolators of Arab in eating dead animals of all different categories mentioned earlier and sacrificing animals on their idols. It was done in order that the early Muslims should not treat it as an easy matter according to their earlier habit. As for the People of the Book, they were far from eating dead bodies or sacrificing for idols."

He has forgotten that the Christians among the People of the Book eat pork and Allah has mentioned and forcefully condemned it. In fact, they eat all things the Idol-worshippers eat because atonement of Jesus Christ has made all things lawful for them. In any case, this is an absurd reasoning that should not be used in exegesis of the Book of Allah or in understanding the laws of His religion.

Finally, he says, "It was the policy of Islam to deal very strictly with polytheists of Arabia in order that everyone in the Arabian peninsula should feel compelled to enter into the fold of Islam; but it was very lenient to the People of the Book." Then he quotes the rulings of a few companions who believed that the animals sacrificed in synagogues and churches were lawful to eat.

The basic idea lurking behind this speech is, as appears from some traditions, that Allah has chosen the Arabs over other nations and the Arabs were superior to others. That is why they used to call non-Arabs as al-mawali (plural of al-mawla; clients) but the Qur'anic verses apparently do not agree with it. Allah has said: O you people! Surely We have created you of a male and a female and made you nations and tribes that you may recognize each other. Surely the most honorable of you with Allah is the one among you who is most pious...(49:13); a lot of ahadith giving this connotation have been narrated from the Imams of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.)

Islam while calling people to the right path had not put the Arabs on one side and the non-Arabs on the other. It had put the polytheists - be they Arab or non-Arabs on one side, and they were given no choice except that they should accept Islam; and it had put the People of the Book, Arabs and non-Arabs alike, on the other side and if they did not enter in Islam, they were given an option to come under the protection of Islam by paying jizyah. All that can be seen in this treatment is some leniency shown to them; but it doesn't mean that their slaughtered animals should become lawful to the Muslims when they have killed it according to their own custom and ritual.

As for the practice of fatawa of some companions, it has no authority at all in Islam.

It is clear from the above discussion that this verse does not show that the animals slaughtered by the People of the Book are lawful when killed in un-Islamic way; nor is there any other proof to prove it. If anyone insists on lawfulness of the animals slaughtered by them (because of the generality of the verse), then we have to restrict it to the case when it is known that the animal was slaughtered according to the rules of Islamic shari'ah, as may be inferred from the words of as-Sadiq (a.s.) quoted above from al-Kafi and at-Tahdhib: "It is the (Divine) name which is important) and no one can be trusted in this matter except a Muslim." Further details may be seen in the books of fiqh.