

# Islamic Perspective On Divine Provisions Of Foods And Drinks, And Eating Habits For Health

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*Abstract: Islam calls upon all mankind to recognize the essence of exclusive Divine creations of Allah the Most High, including the composition of man and all provisions required for his existence, survival and healthy conditions of life. It has been stated in the Glorious Qur'an that you cannot exhaust counting the favours of Allah the Most High, even if you want to do so. In addition to His creations and provisions, He also sent Prophets and Messengers to guide man on proper ways of Divine worship and best ways of living, including specifications for the permissible and prohibited items of food and drink, as well as etiquettes of eating and drinking, which were taught by the Prophet Muhammad (Peace of Allah be Upon him). For all these, it could be stated that in order to appreciate Allah's Mercy and Blessings, man owes the duty of exclusive worship to Him alone during his worldly life.*

*Keywords: Divine Provisions, Nutrition. Food substances, Health, Permitted foods and drinks, Prohibited foods and drinks, Eating habits, Divine worship.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Glory be to Allah the Most High Who in His Divine Wisdom and Infinite Mercy Created man in the best mould endowed some vital signs in the composition and requirements for life, survival and healthy condition of the human body, among which are intake and output of air (respiration), consumption and excretion of foods and drinks (nutrition). Islam is a comprehensive way of life. Thus, there is no aspect of life of man and other creations of Allah the Most High that are left untouched within the scope of its teachings in the Qur'an and *Sunnah* of the noble Prophet Muhammad (Peace of Allah Be Upon Him). In this direction, this paper attempts to highlight on Islamic aspects of general provisions of foods and drinks by Allah the Most High for their significance on health, as well as Islamic moral aspects of eating and drinking. To achieve this, it is divided into six sections which are the Introduction, nutritional composition and health requirements of the human body, provisions of foods and drinks to mankind by Allah the Most High, lawful and prohibited items of foods and drinks, recommended habits of eating and drinking from the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the conclusion.

## II. NUTRITIONAL COMPOSITION AND HEALTH REQUIREMENTS OF THE HUMAN BODY

The World Health Organization (W.H.O.) defined health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". This definition indicated that three fundamental aspects are required for the achievement of health in a person, which are physical and physiological fitness (normal structure, processes/functions of the body), mental capability (a sound mind, free from pathological deviations of normal thinking) and social well-being (a hitch free cohesion of interpersonal relationship). Furthermore, the office of Health Economics of the World Health Organization stated that a person should be regarded as healthy if he is socially and economically active, even though he may suffer from some health disabilities or discomforts. However, this paper is more concerned with the first aspects of health indicated above, which are physical/physiological well-being, for the achievement of which nutrition is very essential.

Nutrition is defined as the sum-total of processes by which the living organism receives and utilizes materials necessary for survival, growth and repair of worn-out tissues.

A nutrient is a substance serving as, or providing nourishment to the body. In the contemporary period, medical scientists observed the Wisdom of Allah the Most High in the Creation of the human body when they analysed a 65kg weight of human cadaver (dead body) and found that it consists of the following components in their respective weights and percentages:

- ✓ Water – 40kgs, constituting 61.6%
- ✓ Carbohydrate – 1kg, constituting 1.5%
- ✓ Fat – 9kgs, constituting 13.8%
- ✓ Protein – 11kgs, constituting 17.0%
- ✓ Minerals and Vitamins – 4kgs, constituting 6.1%.

Let's have a look on the significance of each of the above mentioned nutritional components for the life of man.

#### A. WATER

The major source of water for human consumption is rainfall. Allah the Most High stated that He sent pure water from the sky. From rainfall other sources of water emerged, such as wells, springs, streams, rivers, lakes, seas and oceans, which are used for drinking and other human activities. The body of a 65kgs weight of a man (which is the average) contains approximately 40 litres of water, of which 25 are within the cells (intracellular) while 15 are outside the cells (extracellular).

#### B. CARBOHYDRATES

These are organic compounds containing carbon, hydrogen and oxygen. They are heat producing and energy providing substances obtained from plant products such as starches, sugars and celluloses.

#### C. FATS (LIPIDS)

Fats are substances which cannot dissolve (insoluble) in water, but can dissolve in organic solvents such as Ether, Chloroform and Benzene. They provide a convenient and concentrated source of energy. They are available in oils obtained from plants and animals, and after digestion, are reserved in the human body as adipose tissues.

#### D. PROTEINS

Every cell in the human body is composed of proteins, which are continuously wearing and being replaced. They provide 10 – 15% energy value of a balanced diet. They are classified into first class (animal proteins such as all kinds of meat and fish), and second class (plant proteins such as beans).

#### E. MINERALS AND VITAMINS

Man's food whether of vegetable or animal origin is derived from soil or sea, which are composed of chemical substances depending on the rocks that lie beneath them, which consists of mineral salts of many elements. Some of these elements are of nutritional value to the human body. Deficiency or excess of these substances causes health

problems. For instance calcium, magnesium, phosphorus and sulphur are important components of the bone and other supporting tissues. Iodine and fluorine are important for the formation of Haemoglobin, which is necessary for production of blood cells, blood clotting mechanism in injuries, respiration and digestion.

Vitamins are organic substances which the body requires in small amounts for metabolism. Examples are vitamins A, B, C, D, E and K.

### III. DIVINE PROVISIONS OF FOODS AND DRINKS TO MANKIND

Allah the Most High and Exalted is the Provider of everything for sustenance of life of man and His other creations. There are numerous indications in the Glorious Qur'an in this direction. For instance, in the verse which stated that: For Allah is He who Gives (all) sustenance Lord of power, steadfast (Forever).

Sustenance refers to all things that are necessary for survival and development of life in all its spheres; spiritual, physical and mental. Water is the most basic component and requirement of all creations of Allah the Most High. The stated thus: We made from water every living thing.

Grains, cereals, vegetables and proteins, which are required for human and animal consumption depends on water for their germination, growth, cultivation, and utilization. None except Allah the Most High is the Provider of water. This is attested in the following verses of the Qur'an:

Have you seen the seeds that you sow in the ground? Is it you that cause it to grow, or are We the cause? Were it Our will, We could crumble it to dry powder, and you would be left in wonderment.

Have you seen the water which you drink? Do you bring it down (in rain) from the cloud or do We?

Were it Our Will, We could make it salt (and unpalatable): Then why do you not give thanks?.

Say: Have you seen? If your stream be some morning lost (in the underground earth), who then can supply you with clear flowing water?.

Reflections on the contents of the above mentioned verses would certainly make a Muslim believer to offer thanks in the form of total submission for worship to Almighty Allah the Exalted alone for His Blessing in the provision of water. The following verses are further indications of Allah's Provisions to mankind, which are all inter-connected with water and agriculture:

Then let man look at his food (and how We provide it). For that We pour forth water in abundance. And We split the earth in fragments. And produce therein corn. And Grapes and nutritious plants. And Olives and Dates. And enclosed Gardens, dense with lofty trees. And Fruits and Fodder. For use and convenience to you and your cattle.

Furthermore, the following verses from another chapter of the Qur'an are evidences of Allah's Provisions for our sustenance:

And a sign for them is the dead earth. We have brought it to life and brought forth from it grain, and from it they eat.

And We placed therein gardens of palm trees and grapevines and caused to burst forth there from some springs- That they may eat of His fruit, and their hands have not produced it, so will they not be grateful? Exalted is He who created all pairs- from what The earth grows and from what they do not know.<sup>19</sup>

#### IV. LAWFUL AND PROHIBITED ITEMS OF FOODS AND DRINKS

Within the provisions of food and drinks there are specifications of lawful and unlawful items. Muslims are commanded to take only the lawful and avoid the unlawful. Thus, Allah the Exalted stated that we should eat the lawful and good things which He Has provided for us.

In other places in the Qur'an it was stated thus:

So eat of the substance(s) which Allah has provided for you, Lawful and good: and be grateful for the favours of Allah, If it is He whom you serve.

This day are (all) things good and pure made lawful unto you. The food of the people of the book is lawful unto you, and yours Is lawful unto them.

Lawful unto you (for food) are all four footed animals. (Which includes cattle, camels, sheep, goats etc.).

O ye people! Eat of what is on earth lawful and good, and do not follow the footsteps of the evil one, for he is to you and avowed enemy.

Pure and lawful things on earth are those which do not cause any harm to the body or mind. *Tayyib* (good things) implies to those which are pure, clean, wholesome, nourishing and pleasing to taste. It is to be noted that eating from pure things and pure sources is a pre-condition for acceptance of supplications (*Du'a'*) by Allah the Most High, and the reverse is the case.

Meat, which is the major source of protein requirement for man, obtained from flesh of animals, is among the lawful items of consumption in Islam so long as the Name of Allah the Most High is invoked in the slaughter (or hunting) of an animal. However, the following verses of the Qur'an indicated for categories of prohibited meat:

Forbidden to you (for food) are: dead meat, blood, the flesh of swine, and that on which has been invoked the name of other than Allah, that which has been killed by strangling, or by a violent blow, Or by a head-long fall, or by being gored to death, that which has been (partly) eaten by a wild animal unless you are able to Slaughter it (in due form), that which is sacrificed on stone (altars). Forbidden also is the division (of meat) by raffling with arrows: that is impiety.

About eleven categories of items were mentioned as prohibitions in the Qur'anic verse quoted above. Among them is meat of un slaughtered dead animals (carrion), because of the physical harm which the clogged blood in its veins would cause. Same applies to animals whose death is caused by strangling, violent blow, head-long fall, goring of horns or those partly eaten and left by a wild animal.

Blood (liquid, dried or in any form) is prohibited for human consumption. Others are those which are spiritually prohibited, such as animals which the name of Allah the Most High is not invoked during their slaughter or killing, those which are sacrificed to other objects of worship than Allah the

Most High, or by stone alters and raffling with arrows. Pork (pig meat) is prohibited in Islam because it is a filthy animal, the meat of which causes infections of many diseases such as trichinosis, which is a disease characterised by hair-like worms in the muscular tissues. and intestinal worms like tapeworms. Prohibition of swine meat also includes its fat. It is to be noted that prohibition of dead meat does not include fish, locust and other sea animals which are lawful without slaughter, or even after dying. Likewise, Allah the Most High and Merciful has permitted consumption of a dead animal without slaughter in situations of extreme hunger without any other food substance available.

Concerning prohibited drinks the most outstanding are blood (which was indicated above), urine and wine or alcohol in all its ramifications. The Qur'an states thus:

O you who believe, intoxications and gambling, dedication of stones and divination by arrows are an abomination of Satan's handwork: Eschew such abomination, (so) that you may prosper.

Wine is an intoxicant which causes loss of sense and so many diseases of the heart, liver and nervous system such as hypertension, liver cirrhosis, and parkinsonism as confirmed by medical scientists. Intoxicants causes loss of sense, which also leads to committing lots of evil deeds such as fornication, quarrels, fighting, murder and stealing, to mention just a few. Thus, any substance in the form of solid, liquid or gas that is causing intoxication (like Indian hemp, rubber solution, mentholated spirit or coffin) is prohibited by the *Shari'ah* (Islamic law).

It is to be noted that consumption of wine and other intoxicants leads a person to deviate from the five principles of the *Shari'ah*, which are protections of religion (*Al-deen*), life, sense, dignity and wealth. Thus, a drunkard or drug addict is exposing himself to attacks of diseases (such as those mentioned above) which are dangerous to his own life, has gone away from commandments of prohibitions of his religion (*Al-Islam*), has lost his sense and reasoning capacity, his honour and respect from his community and his wealth with regards to useless expenses for purchasing prohibited intoxicants.

Allah the Most High Has provided all solid and liquid substances lawful for consumption of man, except those specified as unlawful in the Qur'an and *Sunnah* of the Prophet (P.B.U.H.), some of which were indicated in this paper. Thus, Muslims are strongly warned to desist from saying that something is lawful or unlawful (forbidden) by Allah the Most High without evidences from the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. Doing so will attract grievous penalty from Him on the Day of Judgement.

#### V. RECOMMENDED EATING AND DRINKING HABITS

Like any other action, eating and drinking are forms of worship to Allah the Most High if they are performed according to the Islamic guidance. There are numerous indications of eating and drinking habits of lawful foods and drinks in the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (P.B.U.H.). These includes washing of hands before and after eating, to begin with invoking Praise to Allah the Most High by saying

“*Bismillah*”, to use the right hand and to offer praise and thanks to Allah the Most High after eating or drinking by saying “*Alhamdu Lillah*”.

Abdullah Ibn Umar (May Allah be Pleased with him) reported a *hadith* where the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) said: when any one of you eats or drinks he should use the right hand, for *satan* (the Devil) eats and drinks with the left hand.<sup>37</sup> In addition to this, Jabir Ibn Abdullah (May Allah be Pleased with him) reported that the Apostle of Allah (P.B.U.H.) forbade eating with the left hand, walking while wearing one pair of shoes, wrapping oneself in one cloth from head to foot, sitting on heels and buttocks and wearing a cloth so that the private parts are exposed.

Islam teaches moderation of eating. A Muslim is recommended to eat when he is hungry, and should not eat or drink in excess. In a *hadith*, Abu Hurairah (May Allah be Pleased with him) narrated that the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) said: a Muslim eats in one intestine (that is, he is satisfied with little food), while an unbeliever (*kafir*) eats in seven intestines (that is, eats a lot).<sup>39</sup> To explain this further, Abu Hurairah narrated that one day an unbeliever came to the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) as a guest. The Prophet (P.B.U.H.) ordered for a goat to be milked. It was given to the guest and he drank all. The second, to the seventh goats were milked and he (the guest) drank all. Next morning he became a Muslim. The Prophet (P.B.U.H.) gave him one goat's milk and he couldn't finish it. Then he (the Prophet P.B.U.H.) said: A Muslim drinks with one intestine, while an unbeliever drinks with seven.

The Prophet (P.B.U.H.) emphasized for the habit of eating less as a method of preventing sickness when he said that nothing is worse than a person who fills (brimful) his stomach. It is enough for the son of Adam to have a few bites (little food) to satisfy his hunger. If he wishes more, it should be one third (1/3) for his food, one third (1/3) for his liquid and one third (1/3) for his breath. (Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah). In another version, Abu *Qatadah* narrated that Allah's Apostle (P.B.U.H.) said that whenever you drink (water or any liquid) do not breathe in the vessel and when you urinate do not touch your private part with the right hand, and when you clean yourself after defecation, do not use your right hand. In the above mentioned *ahadith* it is to be observed that nutritional requirements, comfort, personal hygiene and prevention of cross-infection of diseases are lessons to be taken into consideration. When a person fills one third of his stomach with food and one third with liquid (water) the nutritional requirements of food substances and water (liquid) for digestion are fulfilled. If he reserves one third empty, he would safeguard against discomfort of over-feeding, which may not allow him to perform his daily activities immediately at ease. Avoiding breathing in a vessel or cup while drinking would safeguard against transfer of respiratory tract infections such as tuberculosis and catarrh from one person to another by using the same drinking utensil. As the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) instructed for using the right hand while eating and drinking, he also instructed for avoiding touching the private part with it while cleaning them after urination or defecation. This would also safeguard against transfer of disease producing micro-organisms in urine and faeces from the right hand to foods and drinks while using it for eating or drinking.

Muslims were instructed that when it is in the night they should shut their doors, tie the mouth of water skins, cover the plates and put out the lamps because the *Satan* (devil) does not open the door, does not take out (uncover) the stopper (of water skin) and does not uncover the plates. Also that sometimes the mouse carries wicks (burning materials) which could set fire in the house. Implications of this *hadith* are that it teaches precautionary and preventive measures against various hazards while sleeping in the night, specifically against entrance of harmful animals or thieves by shutting the doors, safeguard against intrusion of pathogenic (disease producing) micro-organisms from domestic animals like rats, and dust, into uncovered left-over food substances by covering plates and water in containers, and safeguard against fire outbreaks.

Other etiquettes are that a healthy Muslim is not recommended to eat or drink while lying down or leaning on something, and not to criticize any lawful food that is offered to him, despite his personal dislike of it. These were attested in a *hadith* narrated by Abu Juhafah which the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) said that he did not take meals while leaning down, and another *hadith* narrated by Abu Hurairah where the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) said that he never criticized any food he was offered, but he used to eat it if he liked, or leave it if he disliked. These are some of the recommended habits for eating and drinking as taught and practiced by the most noble of characters among all mankind, Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.).

## VI. CONCLUSION

In the foregoing discussions it has been highlighted that Allah the Most High and Exalted is the Creator and sustainer of body and souls of all mankind, composing of different elements in their right proportions according to His Divine Wisdom. In His Infinite Mercy He also provided all substances necessary for survival, growth and health of mankind, such as water, air, carbohydrates, fats, proteins, minerals and vitamins. All these provisions were created for man to consume, live a healthy life condition, consider them as Divine Gifts and to offer thanks by worshipping Allah alone, without associating any partner, according to commandments in His Divine Scriptures and examples from teachings in the practical life of our noble Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.).

The Glorious Qur'an enumerated some food and drink substances as prohibitions because of their health hazards to the human body and mind, some of which were mentioned in this paper. Additionally, the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) taught Muslims many etiquettes with regards to eating and drinking, most of which are also preventive measures against health hazards, as documented in many *ahadith* for Muslims to abide in order to live a healthy and moral life style. All these are within the contexts of the following verses of the Glorious Qur'an:

On the earth are signs for those of assured faith. As also in your own selves: Will you not then see?.

You have, indeed, in the Apostle of Allah a beautiful pattern (of conduct) for any one whose hope is In Allah and the final Day, and who engages much in the Praise of Allah.

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