

## Food And Hygiene In Islam: An Analytical Approach To The Teachings Of The Qur'ān And Ḥadīth

Dr Nazir Ahmad Zargar\*

\*Assistant Professor and Coordinator, Department of Religious Studies, Central University of Kashmir, India, Email: drnazirzargar73@gmail.com

### Abstract

*As Islam guides towards good in both physical and spiritual life, balanced and healthy nutrition has been taken very well in the Qur'ān and the Sunnah. Food not only affects the human body; it has a significant impact on man's spiritual life as well. The recommendation for healthy nutrition in Islam can be viewed from the perspective of Maqāsid al-Sharī'ah, which constitute the prime objectives of the Islamic Sharī'ah aimed to preserve one's Dīn, life, progeny, property, honour, and intellect. Hence Islamic injunctions regarding food, its nature, and ways and means of its consumption assume primary importance for physical health and religious and spiritual well-being. In Islam, the aim of eating is the obedience of Allāh. This study aims to assess analytically the nature and importance of healthy food and nutrition in Islam. It is an approach for understanding diet and nutrition in Islam and its effects on promoting health within society. Based mainly on the primary sources of the Qur'an, Ḥadīth, and other Islamic literature, the significance of the use of a diet compatible with the nature of the human body, manners of fostering hygienic principles, and ways and means of improving nutrition in the society are discussed.*

**Keywords:** Food, Nutrition, Islam, Sharī'ah, Maqāsid

### INTRODUCTION

Food is the basic necessity of life that humans or animals eat or drink for nourishment. It gives the body strength and power from which the body can function, its growth and development can take place, and thus health and well-being are maintained. As nutritionists emphasise not just a diet but a balanced diet that includes all the essential nutrients in specific amounts, Islam goes a step further by emphasising a balanced diet and orders that the food should be *ḥalāl* before it is balanced. The Sharī'ah binds Muslims to eat a balanced food which is *ḥalāl* according to the commandments of the Qur'ān and the Sunnah. Islam is a living universal religion. It not only guides the mundane spheres of life but regulates its spiritual realms as well. Islam has offered a complete program for food and nutrition which is highly appropriate and compatible with the purpose of life, and Muslims are given particular guidelines regarding food and its nature and consumption.

### DISCUSSION

Today, people, in general, are suffering from various problems — economic, moral, social and so many others. Maintaining good health in such conditions has become a big challenge. Islamic teachings regarding diet and health guarantee sound physical as well as spiritual well-being. Regarding food habits, the fundamental teaching of the holy Qur'ān is enunciated in the following *āyah*:

وَكُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا وَلَا تُسْرِفُوا<sup>1</sup>

*And eat and drink, and don't be extravagant.*

Allah has set abundant food resources on the earth. The Qur'an mentions these food resources in the following words:

وَهُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَخْرَجْنَا بِهِ نَبَاتَ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ فَأَخْرَجْنَا مِنْهُ خَضِرًا نُخْرَجُ مِنْهُ حَبًّا مَثْرًا كَبِيرًا وَمِنَ النَّخْلِ مِنْ طَلْعِهَا قِنْوَانٌ  
 ۞ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكُمْ لَآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ ۙ أَنْظُرُوا إِلَى ثَمَرِهِ إِذَا أَثْمَرَ وَيَنْعِهِ فَإِنَّهُ يُجَنَّبُ مِنَ الْأَشْنَابِ وَالزُّيْتُونَ وَالرُّمَّانَ مُشْتَبِهًا وَغَيْرَ مُتَشَبِهٍ ۚ  
 ۞ يَوْمُنَّ

*He it is Who sendeth down water from the sky, and therewith We bring forth buds of every kind; We bring forth the green blade from which We bring forth the thick-clustered grain; and from the date-palm, from the pollen thereof, spring pendant bunches; and (We bring forth) gardens of grapes, and the olive and the pomegranate, alike and unlike. Look upon the fruit thereof, when they bear fruit, and upon its ripening. Lo! herein verily are portents for a people who believe.*

Similarly, mention has been made of food derived from animals and honey bees:

نُسْقِيكُمْ مِمَّا فِي بُطُونِهِ مِنْ بَيْنِ فَرْثٍ وَدَمٍ لَبَنًا خَالِصًا سَائِغًا لِلشَّرَابِ ( ٦٦ ) وَمِنْ ثَمَرَاتِ النَّخِيلِ وَالْأَعْنَابِ وَإِنَّ لَكُمْ فِي الْأَنْعَامِ لَعِبْرَةً  
 ۞ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَةً لِّقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ ( ٦٧ ) وَأَوْحَىٰ رَبُّكَ إِلَى النَّحْلِ أَنْ اتَّخِذِي مِنَ الْجِبَالِ بُيُوتًا وَمِنَ الشَّجَرِ وَمِمَّا تَرْتَفِدُونَ مِنْهُ سَكْرًا وَرِزْقًا حَسَنًا  
 ۞ يَخْرُجُ مِنْ بُطُونِهَا شَرَابٌ مُخْتَلِفٌ أَلْوَانُهُ فِيهِ شِفَاءٌ لِّلشَّجَرِ وَمِمَّا يَعْرِشُونَ ( ٦٨ ) ثُمَّ كُلِي مِن كُلِّ الثَّمَرَاتِ فَاسْلُكِي سُبُلَ رَبِّكِ ذُلُلًا  
 ۞ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَةً لِّقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ ۙ لِلنَّاسِ ۙ

*And lo! in the cattle there is a lesson for you. We give you to drink of that which is in their bellies, from betwixt the refuse and the blood, pure milk palatable to the drinkers. (66) And of the fruits of the date palm, and grapes, whence ye derive strong drink and (also) good nourishment. Lo! therein is indeed a portent for people who have sense. (67) And thy Lord inspired the bee, saying: Choose thou habitations in the hills and in the trees and in that which they thatch; (68) Then eat of all fruits, and follow the ways of thy Lord, made smooth (for thee). There cometh forth from their bellies a drink diver of hues, wherein is healing for mankind. Lo! herein is indeed a portent for people who reflect.*

The spiritual sustenance which Allah gives is typified by the wonderful ways of sustenance in the physical world, which figure forth Allah's providence and loving care for His creation. And the wonderful transformations in the physical world, which all tend to the benefit of man, are also Signs of His supreme wisdom. Milk is a ... wholesome, complete food, ... and agreeable diet for man.... It is pure, as typified by its whiteness. There are wholesome drinks and foods that can be got out of the date-palm and the vine: e.g., non-alcoholic drinks from the date and the grape, vinegar, date-sugar, grape-sugar, and dates and grapes themselves for eating.<sup>5</sup>

Although man is not different from other creatures as for the need for food is considered, yet, as *Ashraf al-Makhlūqāt* (the best and the most honoured of the whole creation), he is different from other creatures in so far as the purity of food and laws pertaining to nutrition are concerned. Human beings have been given neat and clean food while other creatures fill their belly without any consideration of whether the food is clean or not. The Qur'an says:

وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ وَحَمَلْنَاهُمْ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ وَرَزَقْنَاهُمْ مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَفَضَّلْنَاهُمْ عَلَىٰ كَثِيرٍ مِّمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا تَفْضِيلًا ۙ

*Verily we have honoured the children of Adam. We carry them on the land and the sea, and have made provision of good things for them, and have preferred them above many of those whom We created with a marked preferment.*

The distinction and honour conferred by Allah on man are recounted in order to enforce the corresponding duties and responsibilities of man. He is raised to a position of honour above the brute creation: he has been granted talents by which he can transport himself from place to place by land, sea, and now by air: all the means for the sustenance and growth of every part of his nature are provided by Allah; and his spiritual faculties (the greatest gift of Allah) raise him above the greater part of Allah's Creation. Should he not then realise his noble destiny and prepare for his real life in the Hereafter?<sup>7</sup>

In the above Qur'ānic *āyah* it has been mentioned that humans eat neat and clean food while dirty, foul, and unhealthy things essentially do not form human food. Moreover, among the neat and healthy things, humans consume only palatable parts and leave away other things for animals. Yet another thing that makes humans different from other organisms is that, unlike other organisms, they mostly cook their food to make it easily digestible, tasty, and healthy (Jalāl 2002, 91).<sup>8</sup>

Explaining the above-quoted *āyah* of Banī Isrā'īl, Qurtubī (1987, 191) says that clean food refers to tasty eatables and liquids, whereas other organisms' food constitutes husk and even bones.<sup>9</sup>

Imām Rāzī says that man is unique among all creatures in that, unlike others, he cleans and cooks his food to make it delicious and digestible (Rāzī 1308H).<sup>10</sup>

Animals eat and drink. But they need to think about what, how much, and how to eat and drink. They consume food incessantly without considering whether it is harmful or beneficial for them. Man has been guided in the Qur'ān not to eat and drink like animals do. Allah says:

وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا يَتَمَتَّعُونَ وَيَأْكُلُونَ كَمَا تَأْكُلُ الْأَنْعَامُ وَالنَّارُ مَثْوًى لَهُمْ<sup>11</sup>

*Those who disbelieve take their comfort in this life and eat even as the cattle eat, and the Fire is their habitation.*

Beasts of the field eat their fill, but have no higher interests.

Men who worship the world exclusively are no better: their pleasures and enjoyments rise no higher than those of the beasts of the field.

They have no inkling of spiritual happiness. On the contrary, as they were endowed with spiritual faculties which they misused, they will not escape the Fire of Punishment, the Penalty of Sin.<sup>12</sup>

It means that even though food is the backbone of health and no one can survive without it, one should not eat food like animals. Moderation is very important. According to the Qur'ān, Rasūlullāh ﷺ taught people to take always that food which is pure and *halāl* and abstain from that food which is impure and *harām*. Allah says:

وَيُحِلُّ لَهُمُ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَيُحَرِّمُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْخَبَائِثَ<sup>13</sup>

*He will make lawful for them all good things and prohibit for them only the foul.*

This *āyah* explains that only pure and *ḥalāl* food has been allowed in Islam because food has a direct impact on the body and soul of a person. Contrarily, impure and *ḥarām* is disallowed for while impure food harms the body, *ḥarām* food harms both, body and soul. While directing people to take only good food and abstain from bad one, Islam does not leave a person to decide himself what is *ḥalāl* and what is *ḥarām*. The Qur'an explicitly says:

وَلَا تَقُولُوا لِمَا تَصِفُ أَلْسِنَتُكُمُ الْكَذِبَ هَذَا حَلَالٌ وَهَذَا حَرَامٌ لَتَفْتَرُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ الْكَذِبَ<sup>14</sup>

*And speak not, concerning that which your own tongues qualify (as clean or unclean), the falsehood: "This is lawful, and this is forbidden," so that ye invent a lie against Allah.*

Men are apt to create taboos for themselves, out of superstition. and often for selfish ends, and enforce them in the name of religion. Nothing can be more reprehensible.<sup>15</sup>

Islam teaches that asceticism to such level where a person does not eat even that much of food which is necessary for his normal living and health is disallowed. Allah has made all good and pure things available for mankind and man should benefit from these blessings. As food is a great blessing of Allah, one should not deprive himself from this blessing thereby rendering himself a soft target for disease and weakness. Enjoying what Allah has made *ḥalāl* is not against *taqwā* and making oneself feeble by not taking adequate quantity of food is no piety. The Qur'an clearly mentions that even the Prophets had been commanded to eat pure things and do good deeds:

يَا أَيُّهَا الرُّسُلُ كُلُوا مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَاعْمَلُوا صَالِحًا<sup>16</sup>

*O ye messengers! Eat of the good things, and do right.*

Negative approach toward Allah's bounties has been outrightly rejected and has been termed as machination devil to seduce man:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ كُلُوا مِمَّا فِي الْأَرْضِ حَلَالًا طَيِّبًا وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا خُطُوَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ<sup>17</sup>

*O mankind! Eat of that which is lawful and wholesome in the earth, and follow not the footsteps of the devil.*

The prophets of Allah do not pose as ascetics, but receive gratefully all Allah's gifts, and show their gratitude by their righteous lives.<sup>18</sup>

All impure and harmful things, both for spiritual and physical health, are prohibited to eat or drink for the preservation of human health and life apart from the spiritual life, is one of the foremost objectives of the *Shar'īḥah*. The Qur'an says:

إِنَّمَا حَرَّمَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْمَيْتَةَ وَالْدَّمَ وَالْحَمَّ الْخَنزِيرِ وَمَا أَهْلَ لِعَیْرِ اللَّهِ بِعَفْوٍ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ<sup>19</sup>

*He hath forbidden for you only carrion and blood and swine flesh and that which hath been immolated in the name of any other than Allah; but he who is driven thereto, neither craving nor transgressing, lo! then Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.*

Similarly, getting benefitted from the bounties of Allāh is not only a blessing that keeps one healthy but then remaining grateful to Allāh for his blessings and favours enriches one in faith and mental and spiritual well-being. Sense of gratefulness and thanksgiving provide mental peace and solace which turn have a good effect on physical health also. After eating pure and healthy food, the Qur'ān teaches people to be grateful to their Creator for giving them such beneficial things:

فَكُلُوا مِمَّا رَزَقَكُمُ اللَّهُ حَلَالًا طَيِّبًا وَاشْكُرُوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ إِنَّ كُنْتُمْ لِيَاءَهُ تَعْبُدُونَ<sup>20</sup>

*So eat of the lawful and good food which Allah hath provided for you, and thank the bounty of your Lord if it is Him ye serve.*

Ingratitude for Allah's sustenance (in the literal and figurative senses) may be shown in various ways. *e.g.*, (1) by forgetting or refusing to acknowledge the true source of the bounty, *viz.*, Allah, (2) by misusing or misapplying the bounty, as by committing excesses in things lawful. or refusing to share them with others of Allah's creatures when the need arises, or (3) by falsely ascribing to Allah any prohibitions we may set up for ourselves for special reasons or because of our special idiosyncrasies.<sup>21</sup>

Since a balanced diet is necessary for good health, the holy Prophet ﷺ has given great importance to this aspect of nutrition. Although he lived an ascetic life, he loved honey for being nutritious as well as delicious.<sup>22</sup> His usual meals would include good, pure, sweet and above all nutritious and healthy things like pure water, milk and honey.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, he ate fish, meat, date, cheese, curd also. But if he did not find anything to eat, he would remain without food.<sup>24</sup> One must know that according to the experts remaining empty stomach for some time and giving a rest to the digestive system is not only beneficial for physical health but also for spiritual health.

An important aspect of food is that it must be according to the principles of nutrition and hygiene otherwise it can be harmful. The holy Prophet ﷺ has taught that one should eat such things for which one has a natural yearning. Those things which one doesn't generally love and one's natural desire is not for such things should not be consumed. Whenever any food was offered to the holy Prophet, ﷺ he would enquire about it whether he was familiar with it or not. Unless it was desirable, he would not extend his hand to it.<sup>25</sup>

When one has more than one food item to eat at a time, he must see whether they are compatible and not contradictory in their nature to each other. For example, it is beneficial to combine food that has high calorific value with food that has low calorific value to balance the oner impact of both. It is in *Bukhari, Muslim, Abū Dawūd, and Ibn Mājah* that the holy Prophet ﷺ combined cucumbers with ripe dates saying the heat of the latter is reduced by the coolness of the former. Scavengers that eat dead flesh and filthy food are not allowed for their meat and milk are potential carriers of disease.<sup>26</sup>

Even if the food is Keeping food *halāl* and nutritious but not kept in clean and safe utensils, it can become a breeding ground for germs. The holy Prophet ﷺ has taught that the utensil of food must be covered by any kind of lid to keep the food protected from germs and impurities.<sup>27</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Islam places a high value on nutrition and food for maintaining physical health, spiritual well-being, and moral issues. The sacred texts of the Qur'ān and *Hadīth* strongly emphasize eating with moderation, thankfulness, and awareness. Muslims are advised to follow a healthy, balanced diet that nourishes the body while abstaining from overeating and wasting food.

Islamic dietary regulations, such as those detailed in *Ḥalāl* and *Ḥarām*, direct adherents in their food selections and support cleanliness, health, and the humane treatment of animals. Islam strongly emphasizes sharing meals and helping those in need, which promotes a sense of community and compassion.

Furthermore, *Ṣawm* (fasting) throughout Ramaḍān is a fundamental aspect of Islamic practice that fosters self-control, compassion, and a deeper spiritual connection. This practice emphasizes the relationship between physical and spiritual well-being and caring for both.

Muslims today are urged to change their eating habits to live a healthy lifestyle and preserve Islamic beliefs. This can entail incorporating regional foods while observing Ḥalāl regulations and considering the dish's nutritional worth.

In the end, Muslims are urged to approach their diets with awareness, thankfulness, and a feeling of responsibility towards their Creator, their bodies, the environment, and others. Food and nutrition are connected with faith, ethics, and overall well-being in Islam.

---

## REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> Qur'ān 7:31.
- <sup>2</sup> Qur'ān 6:99.
- <sup>3</sup> Qur'ān 16:66-68
- <sup>4</sup> Qur'ān 16:66-69.
- <sup>5</sup> 'Alī, Abdullāh Yūsuf, *The Holy Qur'ān: English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary*, The Presidency of Islamic Research, IFTA, Call and Guidance, Madīnah, n.d., Ex. Note: 2095,96.
- <sup>6</sup> Qur'ān 17:70.
- <sup>7</sup> 'Alī, *Ibid*, Ex.Note: 2265.
- <sup>8</sup> 'Umrī, Jalā al-Dīn 'Anṣar. (2002). *Ṣiḥat wa Marḍ awr Islāmī Ta'īmāt*: Delhi, Markazi Maktabah Islami.
- <sup>9</sup> Qurtubī, Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad. (1987). *Al-Jāmi' li Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* (vol.10): Egypt, Maṭba'ah al-Ilāhiyah al-Misriyyah al-'Āmmah.
- <sup>10</sup> Rāzī, Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad. (1308H.). *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* (vol. 5): Egypt, al-Maṭba'ah al-'Āmirah al-Sharfiyah.
- <sup>11</sup> Qur'ān 47:12.
- <sup>12</sup> 'Alī, *Ibid*, Ex.Note: 4830.
- <sup>13</sup> Qur'ān 7:157.
- <sup>14</sup> Qur'ān 16:116.
- <sup>15</sup> 'Alī, *Ibid*, Ex.Note: 2153.
- <sup>16</sup> Qur'ān 23:51.
- <sup>17</sup> Qur'ān 2:168.
- <sup>18</sup> 'Alī, *Ibid*, Ex.Note: 2908.
- <sup>19</sup> Qur'ān 16:115.
- <sup>20</sup> Qur'ān 16:114.
- <sup>21</sup> 'Alī, *Ibid*, Ex.Note: 2151.
- <sup>22</sup> Bukhārī, No. 5268.
- <sup>23</sup> Muslim, No. 2008.
- <sup>24</sup> Muslim, No. 2970.
- <sup>25</sup> Bukhārī, No. 256.
- <sup>26</sup> Ṣaḥīḥ Albānī, No. 1420.
- <sup>27</sup> Bukhārī, No. 5623.