

The Quran and its Message

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سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ

Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

IS KOSHER MEAT PERMISSIBLE FOR CONSUMPTION?

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KOSHER

Foods which conform to the regulations of the Jewish law and are fit for consumption by the Jewish community are known as 'Kosher'. Often the requirements for 'Kosher' are more stringent and detailed with greater prohibitions than that required by Islamic law.

kosher, Yiddish *Kosher*, Hebrew *Kāshēr*, (“fit,” or “proper”), in Judaism, the fitness of an object for ritual purposes. Though generally applied to foods that meet the requirements of the dietary laws (*kashruth*), kosher is also used to describe, for instance, such objects as a Torah scroll, water for ritual bathing (*mikvah*), and the ritual ram’s horn (*shofar*). When applied to food, kosher is the opposite of *terefah* (“forbidden”); when applied to other things, it is the opposite of *pasul* (“unfit”).

[1]

SHECHITA

Shechita or shehitah is the **process of ritual slaughter** according to Jewish Law much like the Islamic 'Dhiba'.

The laws of shehitah, the slaughter of animals for kosher meat, are particularly complex. They are strictly regulated by the rabbis. Special knowledge is required for the slaughtering of the animal, the examination of the lungs, and the removal of the blood and fatty tissues. Special licensing is required of the “shohet-bodek” (slaughterer and examiner). The certification for shehitah is known as “kabbalah,” meaning acceptance, since the shohet accepts the responsibility of reviewing the laws of shehitah every thirty days. The original law had no gender specifications for shohetim, yet today they are exclusively male. [2]

Many Muslims while relying on the following verse of the Quran, assert the permissibility of the consumption of Kosher meat.

005:005

"This day (all) the good things are made lawful for you; and the food of those who have been given the Book is lawful for you and your food is lawful for them..."

What is often not appreciated, is the context of the verse which first addresses the practices of those communities from the People of the Book which were **contemporaneous** to the Arabian Prophet's ministry. Whether or not today's Jewish practices conform entirely to those encountered and expected by the Quran in 7th century Arabia remains an area which requires some scrutiny.

There is no doubt that there is considerable overlap between the Jewish and Islamic dietary laws such as the prohibition of swine flesh. As Jewish 'Kosher' practice is far more complex, it is usually understood that a food type under Kosher requirements would have undergone a far more rigorous procedure to make it fit for consumption and would therefore, sufficiently satisfy the relatively less stringent requirements under Islamic law. This is usually cited as proof for its permissibility.

As we will note below, though the above is generally correct, there is an area of possible contention which must be satisfied for Kosher meat to be rendered completely fit for consumption by believers.

AN AREA OF POSSIBLE CONTENTION

One of the requirements stipulated by the Quran is that the ending of an animal's life for food must be done in the name of God.

ISLAMIC PRACTICE

022.036

"The sacrificial animals (**Arabic: Bud'na**) we have made for you as among the symbols from God: in them is (much) good for you: **then mention the name of God over them as they line up: when they are down on their sides (after slaughter), then eat from them and feed the needy that do not ask and the needy that ask. Thus We have subjected them to you so that you may be grateful.**

Please note that the Arabic word 'Bud'na' (from the root Ba-Dal-Nun) is not restricted to 'camels' as is often translated but the term covers any animal of sacrifice such as a cow, bull, goat or camel.

As it can be argued that the above is a requirement specific to sacrificial rites, the following verse imparts an example which does not pertain to sacrificial animals.

005.004

"They ask you what is lawful to them Say: lawful to you are (all) things good and pure: and what you have taught your trained hunting dogs in the manner directed to you by God: eat what they catch for you, **but pronounce the name of God over it: and fear God; for God is swift in taking account"**

Hunting animals (such as dogs) normally catch **prey** and this verse is not necessarily dealing with sacrificial animals. This verse also follows the verse which details food restrictions (5:3)

The verse is clear that one is to pronounce the name of God over the food that is caught. It can be argued that this verse simply requires one to pronounce the name of God before eating the animal and not during slaughter. However, as carrion (dead meat) is forbidden, the hunting animal will be trained to bring the prey alive or in a state where it can be made lawful to eat (by slaughtering it in a lawful manner). It is in this context that the pronouncement of God's name is being mentioned which is being posited as a requirement for slaughter.

Albeit, Jewish practice stipulates that it is necessary to recite a blessing before ritual slaughter, it is still considered permissible to eat the food **even if a blessing is not recited**.

JEWISH PRACTICE

"...The slaughterer (shohet) recites a prayer before the act of shehitah" [3]

"Before performing ritual slaughter, it is necessary to recite the blessing, "Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments and has commanded us concerning ritual slaughter." **However, if the blessing is not recited, it is still permitted to eat the meat**" [4]

A ritual practice which circumvents such a blessing in the name of God would be against the Quran's expectation of permissible slaughter.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The Quran provides clear guidelines which regulate a believer's life. Despite the rigid requirements under Jewish law for meat to be 'Kosher', the name of God or a suitable blessing in the name of God must be recited before ritual slaughter is complete for it to become fit for consumption for believers.

Unfortunately, there are Muslims that take a very cavalier approach to eating meat which may not satisfy Quranic requirements. A meat is no less fit for purpose because it has a 'Kosher' authentication symbol than it is because it may have a 'Halal' symbol. It is more important to understand the practices behind the claims (Halal or Kosher) and ascertain whether they fulfil the Quran's requirements as opposed to any other claims. Then a suitable choice can be made.

With regards Jewish Kosher meat, if a suitable blessing has been pronounced in the name of God before ritual slaughter, then such meat would arguably satisfy the Quran's requirement and therefore would not be prohibited for consumption.

Related Articles:

- (1) [Slaughtering of Animals - The Correct Method of Sacrifice](#)
- (2) [Thakaytum](#)
- (3) [Allah is Not an Exclusive Name for God](#)

REFERENCES

[1] Encyclopaedia Britannica [online] <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/322673/kosher> [Accessed: 29th January 2012]

[2] GURTMAN. R, Shehitah: Jewish Ritual Slaughter, (2005 Third Year Paper), Part I: The Laws of Shehitah, The Basic Laws, Page 6 Available at [online] leda.law.harvard.edu/leda/data/700/Gurtman05.rtf [Accessed] 29th January 2012

[3] Encyclopaedia Britannica [online] <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/322673/kosher> [Accessed: 29th January 2012]

[4] Yomatar's Laws of Religion, Laws of Judaism Concerning Food from the Biblical Books of Moses (Torah) and the Code of Maimonides (Mishneh Torah), 17. Ritual Slaughter of Animals From the Biblical Books of Moses, Available at [online] <http://www.religiousrules.com/Judaismfood17slaughter.htm> [Accessed: 29th January 2012] (*) MT Book 5, The Book of Holiness, Sefer Kedushah; Treatise 3, Laws Concerning Shehitah (Shechitah, Ritual Slaughter); Chapter 1, sec 2 (pages 506M 259Y)

Highlights marked in bold black are my own insertions. They have no bearing on the original text other than they emphasise relevance to the topic at hand. These are merely illustrations and have solely been utilised for educational and explanatory purposes.

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