

The Quran and its Message

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Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

FOOD PERMISSIBILITY AND PROHIBITIONS

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The following article covers the subject from a Quranic perspective.

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QURANIC EXCEPTION

Anyone who is compelled by hunger, not by will to eat what is forbidden, not intending to commit sin, will find God Merciful and Forgiving (5:3)

(1) GENERAL PROHIBITIONS

The main food group which is made lawful for consumption for believers is 'grazing livestock' (Arabic: **bahimatu l'anaami**) in verse 5:1. Dietary laws are then further expounded in verse 5:3 with notable exceptions and repeated in verses 2:173; 6:145 and 16:115. With these verses, we are also informed **not** to make lawful or forbidden anything other than what is mentioned in the Scripture. Please see verse 16:116.

In general, prohibitions and permissibility of food groups can be captured as follows.

PROHIBITED

- Carrion (Dead Animals).
- Blood.
- Flesh of Swine.
- Any animal dedicated to any **other** than God (Or the One True God - Lawfulness of the meat of those that follow the previous scripture must be understood within the Quran's own context).
- Animals strangled.
- Animals killed through beating or a violent blow (stunned etc).
- Animals killed through falling.
- Animals killed due to goring of horns.
- Animals devoured by other wild beasts (unless one slaughters it before it dies).
- Animals offered to idols on altars or divided by raffling of arrows (divining, superstitions, foretelling etc).

Exception: Anyone who is compelled by hunger, not by will to eat what is forbidden, not intending to commit sin, will find God Merciful and Forgiving (5:3).

As mentioned above, these prohibitions are repeated in verses 5:3, 2:173; 6:145 and 16:115.

LAWFUL

- Any animal within the category of 'grazing livestock' with the **exception** of what is forbidden above. (Please see section (2) below).
- Any lawful animal that hunting dogs (Arabic: mukalibayn) seize for consumption (which have been trained for the purpose) and one pronounces the name of God over it (5:4).
- The food of the righteous People of the Book who follow their laws and vice versa. Please see verse 5:5.
- All sea creatures (5:96) - Please note the word 'Bahr'. Lexicons agree that this denotes any large accumulation of water, whether derived from seas, rivers, lakes or ponds. The pronoun in 'ta'amuhu' (literally its food) relates to the word Bahr and this indicates all manner of seafood. (Please see section (3) below).
- Birds (Please see section (4) below).
- Fruits (Please see section (5) below).
- Vegetation and Herbage. (Please see section (6) below).

- For insects, please see section (7) below.

EXTRA PROHIBITIONS IN PREVIOUS SCRIPTURES

In verse 16.118, one notes that the extra prohibitions still stand for those that call themselves Jews until they accept as a matter of complete choice the veracity of the final messenger and the final revelation to him. These (and other) burdens will then be lifted (7:157). Until then, their Mosaic laws still apply. Specific food restriction imposed for the People of the Book can be noted in verse 6:146.

Please note that in verse 5:5, all good things are made lawful. This verse not only includes food, but also marriage. Therefore, it is plausible to assert that this verse is not restricted to food items.

All good things are created lawful and one should not impose prohibitions unless God has forbidden them through scripture. The opposite is also true with regards making lawful that which God has not permitted. This is as true for food items as it is for other matters such as garments.

HUMAN FLESH

Human life is sacred. Humans are not to take the life of another human being without just cause (capital punishment for murder and for spreading corruption in the land). Please see verse 5:32, 4:29, 4:92-93 and 6:151. Therefore, killing another human being for food remains prohibited. One could argue that it is permissible to consume human flesh after death has occurred naturally. However this is negated by verse 5:3 in which carrion (dead meat) is also prohibited.

There is an exception given in accentuating circumstances where dead meat can be eaten but such a situation would be extremely rare. However, there have been cases where stranded people have kept themselves alive long enough (only eating as much as they need) from the dead bodies of other humans. This is an extreme situation and as verse 5:3 stipulates: "Anyone who is compelled by hunger, not by will to eat what is forbidden, not intending to commit sin, will find God Merciful and Forgiving".

(2) ANIMALS

Please also see related article [1] below.

ONLY GRAZING LIVESTOCK IS LAWFUL

005:001

"O ye who believe! Fulfil your obligations. Grazing livestock (Arabic: bahimatu l'anaami) is made lawful (Arabic: uhillat) to you (for food) except that which is announced to you (herein), game being unlawful when ye are on the pilgrimage. Lo! God ordains that which pleases Him"

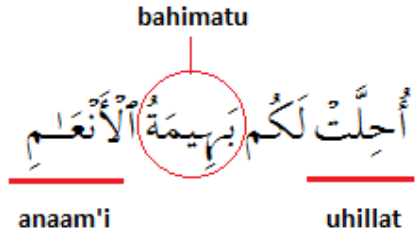


Illustration - Joseph Islam

UNDERSTANDING THE MEANING OF 'BAHIMATU L'ANAAMI' (Grazing Livestock)

'BAHIMA'

Root = Ba-Ha-Miim = animals that pasture/graze, lamb/goat/sheep, animals of the bovine kind, beasts/brutes.

It has always been clearly understood by the classical usage of the Arabic word 'Bahima' that beasts of pasture or grazing animals are implied. It is also interesting to note that pigs also pasture. Therefore it is only reasonable to deduce that by virtue of the swine flesh being mentioned as an exception, it is within the category of 'Bahima' (i.e. animals that pasture / grazing animals or beasts) that the **exception** is intended and **not** the animal kingdom as a whole.

bahimah (feminine noun) 5:1, 22:28, 22:34

LL, V1, p: 305, 306

pl. pl. [i. e. pl. of *بَهِيمَةٌ*]: (K:) *بَهِيمَةٌ* signifies *A lamb*, and is applied to the *male* and the *female*; (S, Mṣb;) or, accord. to a trad. in which it occurs, it is a name for the *female*; (IAth, TA;) but *بَهِيمَةٌ*, which is applied to *lambs when they are alone*, as *سَخَالٌ* is to kids when they are alone, is also applied to *lambs and kids together*: (S,* Mṣb:) or, accord. to IF, *بَهِيمَةٌ* signifies *young lambs or goats*: (Mṣb:) and accord. to AZ, (Mṣb,) or A'Obeyd, (TA,) † *بَهِيمَةٌ* is applied to a *lamb or goat*, whether *male or female*, after the period when it is termed *سَخَالٌ*, which is when it is just brought forth; (Mṣb, TA;) and its pl. is *بَهِيمَةٌ*: (Mṣb: [so in my copy of that work, as though meant for *بَهِيمَةٌ*; but perhaps a mistranscription for *الْبَهِيمَةُ*:]) or it is applied to a *lamb or goat when just brought forth*, i. e., before it is termed

سَخْلَةٌ: (Mgh: [and this is agreeable with its application in a trad. cited by I Ath:]) or to the *young one, not, as in the K, young ones, (TA,) of the sheep, and of the goat, and of an animal of the bovine kind (K, TA) both wild and not wild, alike to the male and the female, while small; or, as some say, when it has attained to youthful vigour: (TA:)* Lebeed applies بهائم to the *young ones of [wild] animals of the bovine kind: (S,*

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [1]

'ANAAM' (Cattle / pasturing livestock)

Root: N-AYN-MIM

نَعْمٌ Pasturing مَال [or cattle]; mostly applied to *camels, and neat, and sheep and goats: or applied to all these, and to camels when alone,*

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [2]

بِهِمٌ To wean lambs, or kids; the first form is wanting.
 بِهِمَةٌ An animal; بِهِمَةُ الْأَنْعَامِ Brute beasts,
بِهِمٌ cattle: the logical root is بِهِمٌ Lambs or kids.

Source: A Dictionary and Glossary of the Koran - John Penrice 1873 [3]

أَنْعَامٌ Cattle.

Source: A Dictionary and Glossary of the Koran - John Penrice 1873 [4]

Therefore, the term 'Bahimatu l-anaam' refers to grazing livestock / cattle. These are not predators but herbivores.

THERE ARE SOME GRAZING ANIMALS WHICH ARE SPECIFICALLY MENTIONED FOR TRAVEL AND NOT FOR FOOD

006.142

"Of the cattle (**Arabic: Anaam**) are some for burden and some for meat: eat what God has provided for you, and follow not the footsteps of Satan: for he is to you an avowed enemy"

016.008

"And (He has created) horses, mules, and donkeys, for you to ride (**Arabic: Litarkabuha**) and use for show (**Arabic: Wazinatan**); and He has created (other) things of which ye have no knowledge"

Please note that the animals above have been mentioned for travel and show and **not** as food. It is also interesting to note that the **camel** is absent from this list. In the context of the verse, this possibly alludes to the fact that the camel has a dual purpose whereby it can be used for transportation and for food.

OTHER USAGES

Other uses of grazing animals have also been mentioned such as milk, for example in what their stomachs provide (16:66) or usages from their hides (16:80).

DO NOT INVENT AND FORBID YOURSELF FOOD THAT HAS BEEN MADE LAWFUL TO EAT (AS THE LIKE OF THE PAGANS OF OLD)

006:143

"(Take) eight (head of cattle) in (four) pairs: **of sheep a pair, and of goats a pair**; say, has He forbidden the two males, or the two females, or (the young) which the wombs of the two females enclose? Tell me with knowledge if ye are truthful:

006.144

"**Of camels a pair, and oxen a pair**; say, has He forbidden the two males, or the two females, or (the young) which the wombs of the two females enclose? - Were ye present when God ordered you such a thing? **But who does more wrong than one who invents a lie against God**, to lead astray men without knowledge? For God guides not people who do wrong.

006.145

"Say: I do not find in what has been revealed to me anything forbidden to an eater to eat of except that it be what has died of itself, or blood poured forth, or flesh of swine - for indeed, that surely is impure - or that which is a transgression, is dedicated to other than God. But whoever is driven to necessity, not desiring nor transgressing the limit, then surely your Lord is Forgiving, Merciful."

The above verses clearly rebuke those that invent prohibitions without warrant.

However, there are also some Muslims that assert that verse 6:145 allows for the consumption of all animals **including those** outside the category of **grazing livestock**. As we will note, such an assertion also has no warrant from the Quran.

Keeping the verse in context, one notes that verse 6:145 is a clear response to the unwarranted claims in the previous verses (6:143-44) where some have forbidden certain animals from **within the category of grazing livestock (bahimatul-anaam)**. Verses (6:143-44) remain connected which mention such animals as sheep (da'n), goats (ma'z), camels (ibil), cow, kine, ox (baqarah) etc.

It is with a view to counter these unwarranted, self imposed restrictions **within** the category of **'grazing livestock'** that verse 6:145 responds.

Verse 6:145 is **not** to be understood as a response addressing the exception from **'all animals'**. In this way, verse 6:145 only serves to corroborate the instructions found in other verses such as 5:1-4.

Please see related article [1] below.

Furthermore, in responding to the baseless superstitions, the verses also make it clear what the lawful 4 pairs (8) actually allude to.

For superstitions, please see verses **6:139** and **5:103** below.

006.139

"They say: "What is in the wombs of such and such cattle is specially reserved (for food) for our men, and forbidden to our women; but if it is still-born, then all have share therein. For their (false) attribution (of superstitions to God), He will soon punish them: for He is full of wisdom and knowledge"

005.103

"It was not God who instituted (superstitions like those of) a slit-ear she-camel, or a she-camel let loose for free pasture, or idol sacrifices for twin-births in animals, or stallion-camels freed from work: It is blasphemers who invent a lie against God; but most of them lack wisdom"

(3) FISH AND WATER CREATURES

All seafood has been made lawful to eat.

- Please note that the Arabic word **'Bahr'** denotes any large accumulation of water, whether derived from seas, rivers, lakes or ponds. The pronoun in **'ta'amuhu'** (literally its food) relates to the word Bahr and this indicates all manner of seafood.

005.096

"Lawful (**Arabic: uhilla**) to you is the pursuit of game (**Arabic: saydu**) of the sea (**Arabic: bahri**) and its use for food (**Arabic: ta'amuhu**), for the benefit of yourselves and those who travel; but forbidden is the pursuit of game of the land as long as you are in the sacred precincts or in pilgrim garb. And fear God, to Whom you shall be gathered back"

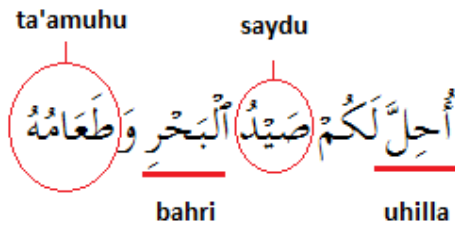


Illustration - Joseph Islam

بحر

1. **بَحْرٌ**, (TA,) [nor. ب ,] inf. n. **بَحَّرَ**, (K,) *He slit; cut, or divided, lengthwise; split; or clave; (K, TA;) and enlarged, or made wide. (TA.)* Hence the term **بَحْرٌ** [as meaning “a sea” or “great river”] is said to be derived, because what is so called is cleft, or trenched, in the earth, and the trench is made the bed of its water. (TA.) — **بَحْرَهَا**, (M,) or **بَحْرُ إِذْنِهَا**, (S,

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [5]

(4) BIRDS

No specific restrictions have been imposed with regards the consumption of birds.

However, it is important to note that the 'flesh of birds' (**lahmi tayrin**) have been mentioned as food for inhabitants in paradise (56:21).

056:021

"And the flesh of fowls / birds (**Arabic: lahmi-tayrin**) of what they desire"

Much akin to wine, which also finds mention as an item of consumption in paradise (47:15), the flesh of birds are **not** expressly prohibited on earth as are those consumables which cause intoxication such as wine (5:90-91). Therefore, the flesh of fowls / birds which could include poultry arguably remains lawful as consumables on earth as they will be in paradise.

Furthermore, there is also a specific mention of 'Salwa' being sent to the Children of Israel and classed as good things to eat (2:57; 7:160; 20:80) along with Manna. Salwa's classical meaning is a **certain bird** which in the present day applies to the Quail but is not restricted to it.

سَوِيّ [accord. to those who make the alif to be a sign of the fem. gender] or سَوِيّ [accord. to those who make that letter to be one of quasi-coordination] A certain bird, (S, M, Mṣb, K,) [in the present day applied to the quail,] i. q. سَمَانِيّ [which is also applied in the present day to the quail], (Ksh and Bḍ and Jel in ii. 54,) [or] white [?], resembling the سَمَانِيّ, (M,) or like the pigeon, but longer in the shank and neck than the latter, and of a colour resembling that of the سَمَانِيّ, quick in motion: accord. to Akh, the

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [6]

There is an interesting argument here that has merit. Livestock lawfulness is limited to grazing animals (herbivores) as noted above. Therefore, animals that eat other animals (carnivorous and omnivorous) are arguably forbidden by simple deduction. Therefore applying the same principle, one could argue that hunting predatory and scavenger birds that also eat dead carcasses and other animals are also forbidden on the same grounds.

(5) FRUITS

No restrictions have been imposed with regards the consumption of fruits.

016.069

"Then eat of all fruits (Arabic: kulli l-thamarati), and follow the ways of thy Lord, made smooth. There comes forth from their bellies a drink diverse of hues, in which there is healing for mankind. Surely! in that there is indeed a sign for people who reflect"

014.032

"God is He Who created the Heavens and the Earth, and causes water to descend from the sky, thereby producing fruits as food for you, and makes the ships to be of service to you, that they may run upon the sea at His command, and has made of service to you the rivers"

(6) VEGETATION & HERBAGE

No restrictions have been imposed with regards the consumption of vegetables and herbage

020.53-54

"Who has appointed the earth as a bed and has threaded roads for you therein and has sent down water from the sky and thereby We have brought forth diverse kinds of vegetation. (Saying): Eat ye and feed your cattle. Surely! in that there is indeed a sign for people who reflect"

032:027

"Have they not seen how We lead the water to the barren land and with it bring forth crops (Arabic: Zar'an) where from their cattle eat and they themselves? Will they not then see?"

(7) INSECTS

The Quran is silent on the matter.

Related Articles:

- (1) [Does the Quran allow the eating of Lions, Dogs, Cats, Rats etc?](#)
- (2) [Are Intoxicants Forbidden \(Haram\) in the Quran?](#)

REFERENCES

[1] LANE. E.W, Edward Lanes Lexicon, Williams and Norgate 1863; Librairie du Liban Beirut-Lebanon 1968, Volume 1, Page 268

Highlights marked in red on the lexicon excerpt 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.

[2] Ibid., Volume 8, Page 3035

[3] PENRICE, J, A Dictionary and Glossary of the Koran 1873; Reprint 1991 Adam Publishers & Distributors, Delhi, Page 20

Highlights marked in red on the lexicon excerpt 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.

[4] Ibid., Page 149

[5] LANE. E.W, Edward Lanes Lexicon, Williams and Norgate 1863; Librairie du Liban Beirut-Lebanon 1968, Volume 1, Page 156

Highlights marked in red on the lexicon excerpt 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.

[6] Ibid., Volume 4, Page 1417

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