

Halal in Syariah View

“Islamic Law is known as the Shari'ah (the 'way' or 'the path to the water source'), the legal framework within which Muslim public and private life and law, worship, and standards of morals are regulated. It guides Muslims as they strive to carry out God's will in every aspect of life, and helps them to judge what is right and wrong according to Islam. Islamic law is unique in that it claims to be of divine rather than human origin.”¹ It is compulsory for every Muslim to base halal (to be permissible according to the Shari'ah) his deeds, words and behaviour. From this argument, it also refers that food and usable goods should be halal for Muslims.

In Shari'ah, everything is allowed except what is expressly forbidden. Allowed activities for a Muslim are called halal, while prohibited ones are labeled haram. Everything in the universe has been created for the benefit of man and can be utilized by him unless a limitation is imposed upon its use through restrictive ordinances. The halal concept covers methods of preparation, supervision, processing, storage and transportation whether involving food, drinks and usable goods. It also covers certain aspects of economy, banking, business and so on which are practised in the life of Muslims.

In matters of food and drink, the Holy Qur`an has laid down a general rule in these verses:

“They ask you, Prophet, what is lawful for them. Say, ‘All good things are lawful for you.’ (5:4)²

The criterion of knowing if a thing is good or not, depends upon the good taste which a cultured man has developed and also upon the principles of the Shari'ah. The principle on which the law of prohibition is based in all matters relating to food and drink, is not of their material disadvantages as being injurious to one's health but of how they affect his character building, moulding his temperament and advancement of spiritual faculties. All the food which are likely to hinder the development of morality are haram, in accordance with injunctions of the Holy Qur`an and the sunnah. It may also be kept in mind that the consumption of food and drink is amongst the chief causes which lead a man either to vicious acts or virtuous deeds.

Halal applies not only to food products but to all aspects of life and social context. One may hear mention of halal money. What does this mean? For example, if a new religious center, school, hospital or any facility for social benefit is to be built, the funding must come from money sourced through halal means. Money derived from gambling, the selling of alcohol, drug trafficking, illicit social vices, or any illegal activity is considered haram or detrimental to society. Hence, such sources are not acceptable or considered a halal income.

In matters of trade and commerce, the Holy Qur`an says:
“God has allowed trade and forbidden usury.” (2:276)³

The Holy Prophet s.a.w.⁴ has laid a tremendous emphasis on taking up trade as a noble profession. The merchants who are pious, honest and generous shall attain a respectable position in this world and in the Hereafter. The basic conditions which make the trading process halal are that the things for sale and the money which is paid as the price should be acquired lawfully and legally obtained. The articles should not be sold before taking them into possession. Goods and commodities should be sold in the open market so that the buyer and the seller should be fully aware of the market. Both parties should not take undue advantages of the conditions and prices prevailing in the market. One should not deal in commodities of which use is haram in Islam.

Riba or usury literally means an increase or addition over and above the principal sum lent. It also includes an excess according to the legal standard of measurement and weight, in which one of the two articles is stipulated as an obligatory payment on one of the contracting parties. Those who charge interest, are oppressors as this has been strictly forbidden in Islam.

*“You, who believe, beware of God: give up any outstanding dues from usury, if you are true believers.
(2:278)⁵*

Based on these understandings, many institutions are gearing in setting up business models to be either Shari`ah-compliant or Shari`ah-based. Many banks now offer Shari`ah-compliant loans, investments, mortgages and services while many companies maintain their high food or cosmetics safety standards to meet the due requirements of the Shari`ah.

As a summary, the concept of halal in terms of Shari`ah covers explicitly and extensively with regards to a Muslim’s lifestyle, be it his physical needs such as food or clothing; or his transactions, occupation, lifestyle. It is the identity of a Muslim, to live his life based on his faith according to the ascribed divine law. The halal market is huge, and the boom it is currently experiencing is not just a global economic trend. The growing significance of Muslim consumers also represents a shift in self-perception. Adherence to Islam is about more than religion and politics, a Muslim lifestyle is also about making consumer choices.

1 Maqsood, Ruqaiyyah Waris. Need to know Islam? Understand the religion behind the headlines. London, Harper Collins:2008

2 Haleem, M.A.S. Abdel. The Qur`an A New Translation. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004, pg 68

3 Ibid, pg 32

4 salla Allahu `alaihi wassalam (peace and blessings upon him)

5 Ibid, pg 32