

# Dietary Laws of Islam and Judaism: A Comparative Study

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## 1. Introduction:

There are different religions and cultures found on the various parts of the globe of world. Understanding the religion, beliefs, laws, culture and people life helps us to understand one's own religion. Islam gives us the teachings that being a Muslim one must know about others and about those people who live besides us. *Allāh* (SWT) says in The Holy *Qurān*:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن جَاءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌ بِنَبَأٍ فَتَبَيَّنُوا أَن تُصِيبُوا قَوْمًا بِجَهَالَةٍ فَتُصْحِحُوا عَلَيْهَا مَا فَعَلْتُمْ نَادِمِينَ﴾

“O you who have believed, if there comes to you a disobedient one with information, investigate, lest you harm a people out of ignorance and become, over what you have done, regretful”.<sup>1</sup>

This verse emphasizes the believers to verify the facts before believing on them. According to this verse whenever a stranger take any piece of information the person must search about it and then after its authenticity accept it. All religions of the world imply that one should never blindly accept or reject the religion or its belief, practices and norms. One person understands ones religion more perfectly after comparing it with other because things are better understood by taking into account the opposite.

Comparison is a relatively new methodology of study of things as compared to other research methodologies. In comparison one should compare the things by their good and bad aspects on equal level. It is a new mechanism through which one gets to know about things more precisely and also know its logics<sup>2</sup>. This methodology is used in this article for studying of religions and their laws and beliefs on a comprehensive scale. By comparison of religions and cultures a brief account of knowledge of their norms, believes, practices and laws understood by others. This study describes that how one religion and its laws are better and harmonious with other religion and with its laws. It describes different aspects of dietary laws in the particular religion and compares it with other religion.

Judaism and Islam are two revealed religions and monotheist by nature. Judaism and Islam have a culture and society that is coherent with

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religious teachings and beliefs. Comparison between these two revealed religions is because of their unique and similar aspects such as both religions consist of laws, believe on one God (Monotheist), emphasis on the formulation of a society that conform to the commandments of *Allāh*, having revealed scriptures and also having a complete discipline of jurisprudence that make laws compatible with their religious text. These two religions are the religion of principles and rules set laws and principles related to every field of life as what to eat, what to wear, how to live and behave with other people what kind of laws applied for the formulation of a better society and state. The basic source of these laws in Judaism is their religious text *Torāh* (written and oral *Torāh*) and in Islam these laws are derived from The Holy *Qurān*, the last revealed book of *Allāh* and from the *Sunnah* of the Holy Prophet ﷺ.

Each religion has laws that are practiced by their believers. These laws give guidance related to every field of life including food and dietary laws. Food or diet plays a very important role in maintaining physical stability of body of an individual that is why Islam and Judaism prescribe a very comprehensive form of these laws and make them obligatory for their believers to observe them in their daily life practices<sup>3</sup>. In Islamic *Shari'ah* the laws of food and diet are called as *Halāl* (Permitted) and *Harām* (Prohibition) and in Judaism these laws are called as *Kosher* (Permitted) and *Trief* (Prohibited). There are some similarities as well as the differences between Islamic and Jewish dietary laws.

## 2. Similarities In Dietary Laws:

After describing the detail of the dietary laws of each religion through their religious texts there are lot of similarities found in their dietary laws practices by their believers. These similarities are as follows:

### 2.1. Obedience of Allāh

The first and foremost purpose of Islamic dietary laws is to obey the commandments of *Allāh* and to do not cross the limits which are set by *Allāh* for His people. *Allāh* describes what is lawful and what is prohibited for Muslims so that Muslim must follow these laws and never disobey these laws. A number of verses give details of permitted food to be taken by believers (6:145; 16:114; 5:5). Therefore by observing these dietary laws Muslims show their obedience toward their Lord *Allāh* alone. This purpose is also found in the practices of Jewish Kosher laws (Jewish dietary laws). For every Jew it is his first duty to observe the kosher food laws, which are derived from their religious text *Torāh* and *Mishna* and do not break these laws and must be obedient to god by observing them (Lev. 11:3 & 13-19 Deut. 14:6, 11-18 & 12:21)

## 2.2. Obedience of their laws

Muslims observe dietary laws of *Halāl* and *Harām* in their practical life which give the concept of their total submission of their religious laws and in Judaism. Jews also by observing their kosher laws present the impression of their obedience toward their laws.<sup>4</sup>

## 2.3. Means of identification

Islamic and Jewish dietary laws are a proper and strict set of rules and laws which are not found in any other religion of the world. Both religions describe rules concerning to what is lawful and forbidden for their people. And follower of Islam and Judaism observe these laws in their routine life. This thing describes that Muslims and Jews observe their religious dietary laws having a separate identity from other people. Muslims and Jews live anywhere in the world among any religious community they are identified because of their diet or food which they use according to their religious teachings<sup>5</sup>. Therefore Islamic and Jewish dietary laws became a source of their identity for Muslims and for Jews in the community of the world.

## 2.4. Means of Attaining Purity

The purpose of Islamic dietary laws is that *Allāh* wants to make the Muslims pure and clean from all kinds of dirt and impurities, whether these impurities affect Muslims physically or spiritually. Food is one way to pure ones physical body or spiritually. Therefore *Allāh* commanded Muslims to eat what is pure and clean and to abstain from unclean thing that are prohibited by *Allāh*. In Jewish *Shari'ah* the purpose of kosher food is also that people attain purity physically or spiritually. Jews must have to eat the kosher food that is clean and pure food for Jews and fit for them according to their religious commandments<sup>6</sup>.

## 2.5. Obligatory Laws

Islamic dietary laws are obligatory for every Muslim irrespective of their age, sex and cast. What *Allāh* made lawful Muslims do not have the right to make it prohibited for them and have to observe them and what *Allāh* made prohibited for people no one have the authority to make it permitted for one self or for others expect in the situation of danger and for saving one's life, and this relaxation is given by *Allāh* to His people<sup>7</sup>. It is because that *Allāh* never wants any kind of difficulties for people<sup>8</sup>. Therefore anyone who is not observing these obligatory laws that person became the subject of punishment whether it is physical or spiritual. In Judaism for Jews it is must to observe their dietary laws and do not violate them. The reason of it is that kosher laws having the status of obligatory, so if any one violate any rule of kosher dietary laws that person consider to be punished or to have to give the expiation<sup>9</sup>. So in both religions dietary laws are considered to be obligatory which must be observed by their followers.<sup>10</sup>

## 2.6. PERMITTED THINGS

*Allāh* (SWT) describes that people have to what eat and what kind of things are permitted for people that they have to use as for their diet and food. In Islam and Judaism there are some similarities among permitted things that *Allāh* (SWT) allows for them. These are as follows:

- Both religions are the religion of rules and principles that describe the rules about things. Islam describes rule or principle for permitted animals that Muslims eat only clean and pure things. Islam permitted all kinds of pure animals as lawful for Muslims. Jewish *Shari'ah Halacha* also describes the rule that only those animals are permitted which have cloven hooves and also chew their cuds.
- In Islam and Judaism except the birds of prey all kinds of birds are permitted for people to use as for their food.
- In Islam and Judaism dairy Products such as milk and eggs are permitted only if they come from the permitted animals. Other products which are prepared from milk and eggs also permitted if they do not contain any prohibition.
- In Islam all kinds of vegetables, fruits and crops are permitted that do not contain any kind of intoxication and this kind of permission is also found in Judaism that is known as “*parve*” that include all kinds of vegetables, fruits, crops or herbs.<sup>11</sup>

## 2.7. Slaughtering System

- To make the meat of animals as permitted and lawful for people there is a prescribed process and system in both revealed religions. In both religions animal's meat became lawful for people when it proper slaughtered<sup>12</sup>. In Islam this system is called as “*Dhabiha*” and in Judaism it is called as “*Shechita*”<sup>13</sup>. Therefore only that meat of animal is permitted for Muslims and for Jews that come after their religious slaughter system.
- In Islam and Judaism the person who slaughters the animal must be sane adult and religious person, who observe religious rituals of their own religion.
- The instrument for slaughter the animal or birds is must be sharp and this is the requirement of both religious slaughtering processes. Islam gives the order to their believers that they must use a sharp knife or any slaughtering instrument when they slaughter the animal<sup>14</sup>. In Jewish slaughtering system it is also asked to their slaughter person to have sharp knife or any sharp slaughtering instrument when they sacrificed their animals. The purpose of using sharp instrument for slaughtering animals in both religions is to give less pain to sacrificed animals and that the blood flow more quickly and immediately and animal became unconsciousness.

- To cut the neck during slaughtering of animal is same in Judaism as in Islam. That is to cut just below the glottis and the base of the neck. Both religions avoid the spinal cord of animal during cutting the neck.
- At the time of slaughtering to invoke the specific blessings and the name of *Allāh* (SWT) is also present in both religions Islam and Judaism.

### **2.8. Avoid Modern Slaughtering System (Stunning)**

Today west introduce a new system of slaughtering of animals which is called as “Stunning”. In this process animal kill with different kinds of stunning technique such as use of electric short, fire, pistol, carbon dioxide gas. This modern slaughtering system is disapproved by both religions Islam and Judaism. The meat of animal that comes through such kind of process is also prohibited for Muslims and also for Jews.

### **2.9. PROHIBITED THINGS**

As *Allāh* (SWT) describes the laws about permitted things the lawgiver the lord of the universe also discuss the rules and laws for prohibited things that are forbidden to be use as for food. In Islam and Judaism *Allāh* (SWT) also describes different similar rules for forbidden food. These similar prohibited things are:

- In Islam *Allāh* (SWT) prohibited all kinds of dead meat that never goes through the described slaughtering process. Whether the animal died by itself or by falling from a high place or drowned into water or being killed by other beast animal (6:145). This prohibition is same in Judaism that the meat of animal which is died by itself or by any other means but not through the *shechitah* process is prohibited for Jews to use that meat for their food<sup>15</sup>.
- Islam and Judaism both religions prohibited swine or pig (16:115; 5:3). All kinds of things of swine such as its meat, skin, hair, limbs, bones, and fats etc are forbidden for Muslims and also for Jews.<sup>16</sup> Both religions also forbade their followers not to use any products that include anything from swine body parts<sup>17</sup>.
- The use of blood of animals or of any living creature is prohibited by Islam and Judaism<sup>18</sup>.
- In Islam and Judaism all kinds of insects are forbidden except the locusts that are permitted for Muslims and also for Jews.

### **2.10. Consequences of Disobedience of these Laws**

In Islam someone does not observe the set dietary laws and crosses the limits of *Allāh* (SWT) that person becomes the subject of punishment and this punishment may be physical or spiritual. And in Jewish law if someone also does not follow their religious dietary laws their *Shari'ah* describes different kinds of physical and spiritual punishments for them<sup>19</sup>.

### 3. DIFFERENCES IN DIETARY LAWS

As there are many of similarities found in the dietary laws of Islam and Judaism there are also many points of difference. These differences are as follows:

#### 3.1. Religious Text for the Derivation of laws

The first difference in Islamic and Jewish dietary laws is the source of their laws. The source of law of both revealed religion is different Islamic dietary laws are derived from *Qurān* and *Sunnah* of The Holy Prophet ﷺ and Jewish dietary laws are derived from their religious scriptures *Torāh* and *Mishna*<sup>20</sup>. This difference makes Islamic dietary laws as more authentic and reliable than Jewish dietary laws because *Qurān* is the last message of *Allāh* (SWT) and its teachings are final and authoritative. Whatever *Allāh* (SWT) sent down before *Qurān* all of those scripture were abrogated. Since the original text of *Torāh* has been altered by their religious rabbis, the authenticity of *Torāh* is not as at the time of its revelation. In *Qurān* *Allāh* (SWT) says at various places of that if people want to live a better life and the life that is according to the will of *Allāh* (SWT) them they must live according to the laws and principles of *Qurān*. The teachings of *Qurān* are for whole humanity. This difference refers to the fact that Islamic dietary laws are perfect and comprehensive dietary laws for every human being.

#### 3.2. Ultimate Goal

The second basic difference in Islamic and Jewish dietary laws is their ultimate goal and purpose. In Islam everything is for a purpose and that purpose is not only concerned to this world but also have benefits for the eternal life. The concept of belief on hereafter is also found in Judaism but with different views and ideas. Muslims believe that to live life according to the commandments of *Allāh* (SWT) and observing all those things whose order is given by *Shari'ah* will earn benefits in this world as well as in the hereafter in front of *Allāh* (SWT). By observing dietary laws given by *Allāh* (SWT) Muslims not only live a better healthy life in this world but *Allāh* (SWT) also rewards His Believers in the next world. In the case of disobedience by the believers of the commandments of *Allāh* (SWT) He the Exalted also gives punishment in the next world. In Judaism the Jews observe their dietary laws because of worldly benefit that is of their separate identification from the rest of the world. And that the Jews are clean and chosen people of *Allāh* (SWT) so that they use clean and pure food in their diet. It became a symbolic representation of Jewish people in the society. The Kosher food is healthy and fit for them. So the goal of their dietary laws is confined only to the worldly life.

#### 3.3. Use of Different Terms

In Islam and Judaism the language of both religions is different. Islamic Basic language is "Arabic" and Jewish basic language is "Hebrew". Because

of this difference both religious Jurisprudence describe different terms for different things. Such as:

- Islam uses the word *Halāl* for lawful things. On the other hand Jewish law defines permitted things under the category of “Kosher” or “*Kashrut*”
- Islamic law uses the word *Harām* for prohibited things and the Hebrew word “*Trief*” used for forbidden food items by Jewish law.
- Islamic slaughtering process is called as “*Dhabīha*” and Jewish slaughtering system is called as “*Shechitah*”.
- Islamic discipline of law is called as “*Shari’ah*” and the discipline of Jewish law is called as “*Halacha*”.

### **3.4. PERMITTED FOOD**

There are some differences also found in the dietary laws of Islam and Judaism. These differences are:

- Islam describes that all clean and pure things are permitted for Muslims. It never defines any kind of characteristics for permitted animals<sup>21</sup>. But in Judaism only those animals are permitted and considered as clean and pure which have the two characteristics. One is that it has “cloven hooves” and the second is that it “chews its cud”. Because of these characteristics some permitted animals became prohibited for Jews such as camel, convey, hare and all those who do not have these characteristics.

### **3.5. Slaughtering System**

In Islam after slaughtering the animal and washing and removing unnecessarily things from its meat the flesh of animal becomes lawful for use. But in Jewish people after slaughtering the animal they follow the additional step for making the meat more pure and clean that is called as the “process of koshering”. In this process the blood is removed from the meat of the animal by soaking and salting it. After this process the meat of animal becomes lawful for Jews to eat it<sup>22</sup>.

### **3.6. Prohibited Food**

As there are some differences found related to the permitted things in Islamic and Jewish dietary laws like that there are also some points of differences too in the prohibited things in both religious dietary laws. These differences are as follows:

- Islam prohibited every kind of intoxication and it is very strict law of prohibition. No one is allowed to use any kind of thing that becomes the cause of intoxication even in a small quantity. Islam describes very serious consequences of its use and also prescribes punishment for using it. But in Judaism the wine that is prepared with grapes is allowed. And except it all those beverages are allowed that are

prepared under the Jewish supervision whether it contains intoxication or not it is allowed by Jewish law for their people.

- Islam does not impose any restrictions in the use of permitted food products. It is according to the wish of man that he may eat whatever he wants, may eat the meat along with milk of any other dairy product and cook them together or separately etc.<sup>23</sup> In Judaism regarding this kind of permission, Jews having very strict laws that they should not mix the dairy products with meat products and not to cooked them together at one place in one utensil and also prohibited to eat them together at one time. Their *Shari'ah* describes a time limit for their use that is different according to the different Jewish traditions. The most acceptable tradition is that one must wait for six hours after eating any one product among dairy and meat. Islam does not give such kind of concept that is related to the prohibition of mixing of two permitted things.<sup>24</sup>
- According to Jewish dietary laws there are specific additional restrictions about food for their holy festival “Passover”. In this festival Jews are forbidden to use five kinds of grains that are leavened. Islamic dietary laws never change on any occasion or festival. If Muslims are allowed to eat the meat of animal except prohibited animal than it implies on the days of Islamic festivals such as “*Eid ul Fitr*” and “*Eid ul Adhah*”. Likewise the use of wine is prohibited for Muslims and it does not become lawful for them on any religious festival or in any occasion. Islamic Laws never change according to the festivals but the Jewish dietary laws changed in *Seder* the Passover meal on their religious festival “Passover”<sup>25</sup>.

### 3.7. Reasons of Prohibitions in Islam

*Allāh* (SWT) prohibited all those things which are impure, unclean and having bad effects on physical, mental and spiritual health of human being. All prohibited things have some logical reasons for their prohibition. But in Judaism there were some permitted things that made by *Allāh* (SWT) unlawful for Jews because of their disobedience and their transgressor attitude toward the commandments of *Allāh* (SWT). As *Allāh* (SWT) says in The Holy Qurān:

﴿وَعَلَى الَّذِينَ هَادُوا حَرَّمْنَا كُلَّ ذِي ظُفْرٍ ۖ وَمِنَ الْبَقَرِ وَالْعِزْمِ حَرَّمْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ شُحُومَهُمَا إِلَّا مَا حَمَلَتْ ظُهُورُهُمَا أَوِ الْحَوَايَا أَوْ مَا اخْتَلَطَ بِعَظْمٍ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ جَزَيْنَاهُمْ بِبِغْيِهِمْ ۖ وَإِنَّا لَصَادِقُونَ﴾

“And to those who are Jews We prohibited every animal of uncloven hoof; and of the cattle and the sheep We prohibited to them their fat, except what adheres to their backs or the entrails or what is joined with bone. [By] that We repaid them for their injustice. And indeed, We are truthful.”<sup>26</sup>

This verse shows that *Allāh* (SWT) prohibited some foods for Jews as for their punishment but after the revelation of *Qurān* the punishment of Jews was finished and *Allāh* (SWT) allow them to eat what is permitted by *Qurān* and left whatever *Qurān* prohibited for people. But Jews did not accept Islamic injunctions and teachings and follow their own religious teachings that abrogated by *Allāh* (SWT) through the revelation of The Holy *Qurān*.

This difference describes that Islamic dietary laws are acceptable and better not only for Muslims but for every human being who wants to live a good life that became the source of their success not only in this worldly life but also for the life hereafter. Islamic dietary laws are derived from the authentic source and its practical implementation is taken from the life of The Holy Prophet ﷺ. These laws are complete, comprehensive, moderate, simple, applicable and universal. The teachings of Islam are applicable in all ages and in every circumstance. These laws contain visible and invisible benefits for the physical and spiritual growth and development of man so the laws described by Islam are equally applicable for everyone, no discrimination found in its practices. The universality of these laws provide a way of success in achieving the will of *Allāh* (SWT).

## References

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In Tafseer *Tafheef ul Quran* had written by Sayed Muadudi given the explanation of the verse 6 of Surah Al-Hujurat that on this critical occasion when on account of believing in a baseless report a grave blunder was about to be committed, Allah عزوجل gave the Muslims this guiding principle to be followed on receipt of news: 'Whenever you receive important news bearing upon a vital matter, you should not accept it immediately but should first examine the man who has brought it. If he is an evil man whose report that not to be authentic normally, you should inquire into it carefully to ascertain the truth instead of accepting it and acting on it immediately.' From this Divine Command an important legal principle is deduced, the sphere of application of which is very vast. According to it, it is not permissible for a Muslim government to take any action against a person or a group or a nation on the basis of the reports provided by the secret agents whose character might be doubtful.
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- 9 *Ibid.* Vol. I, p 357
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[http://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/222240/jewish/What-is-Shechita.htm](http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/222240/jewish/What-is-Shechita.htm) cited on: 11-02-15

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- 16 James M. Lebeau (1983) The Jewish Dietary Laws: Sanctify Life edited by Stephen Garfunkel, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, (USA, National Youth Commission, 1983), P. 7
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- 26 Al Quran 6:146  
In Tafseer *Tafheem ul Quran* had written by Syed Muadudi give the explanation of the verse 146 of Surah Al-Ana’m that it is discussed at three places in the Quran that all food was lawful to the Children of Israel except what Israel made unlawful to them before the revelation of the *Torah*. Allah عَزَّوَجَلَّ mention in Quran that because of the misdeeds of the Children of Israel He the Exalted forbade many clean things for Jews because of their disobedience and because of their transgression. In the light of Quranic verse it becomes clear that the differences between Islamic law and Jewish law with regard to what is lawful and what is unlawful in animal foods stem from two considerations. First, that several centuries before the revelation of the *Torah*, Israel (Jacob, peace be on him) had given up the use of certain things, which his descendants also abstained from consuming. The result was that Jewish

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jurists considered them to be absolutely unlawful and recorded their prohibition in the *Torah*. They included the camel, the hare and the rock-badger, the prohibition of which is mentioned in the fragments of the *Torah* embodied in the Bible. Second, when the Jews rebelled against the Law revealed by Allah and set themselves up as their own law-givers, they made several things unlawful for themselves, and as a punishment Allah allowed them to remain a prey to that misunderstanding. These include birds with claws such as the ostrich, seagull and water-hen, and also the fat of oxen and sheep.