

Bismillah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim

In the name of Allah, the infinitely compassionate, the uniquely merciful

All praise is only for Allah, the Lord, Protector, and Sustainer of all the worlds. Wherever we turn, be it inside of ourselves, toward that which lies directly in our path, or to the most distant horizon, we find nothing but Allah. From my deep heart, I ask that Allah give all the Muslims, all the *mu'min* (believers) of all of The One's religions and ways, and all of those who follow their own way of compassion and mercy, the *himma* (longing) and the strength to struggle and strive to see Allah in all places, in all faces, in all beings and in all circumstances. I ask that Allah guide us to clarity and discernment, that we might truly become the vice regents and stewards of this planet that we are created to be.

Seeing Allah in All Things

“There is not an animal (that lives) on the earth nor a being that flies on its wings, but they are communities like you. Nothing have We omitted from the Book, and they all shall be gathered to their Rabb (Lord) in the end.”

(Surat al-An'am 6:38)

Allah is the Uniquely Existent (*al-Wahid*). Allah alone exists without support. Everything but Allah is only contingent creation, temporarily real, destined for disappearance and return to that which alone is Real.

In this world of manifestation, our intention, our actions, and Allah's grace and mercy combine to form the bridge to our spiritual evolution represented by the promise of the next world. Therefore it is imperative that in all of our actions and interactions, we see that we are interfacing with nothing less than a divine manifestation, a physical expression of some or all of Allah's qualities and names. When we speak, we speak to Allah. When we think, we think through Allah. When we kill, we can kill only one of Allah's surrendered (*Muslim*) creatures. In fact, the Holy Qur'an teaches us that it is only people and *jinn* (energy beings) who are not perfectly surrendered as species.

“Have you not seen how what is in the heavens and what is in the earth and the sun and the moon and the stars and the mountains and the trees and the beasts and many of the people prostrate before Allah? And yet many of the people defy Allah and thus deserve punishment.”

(Surat al-Hajj 22:18)

“The seven heavens and the earth and all that is therein praise Him, and there is not a thing but hymns His praise; but you understand not their praise.”

(Surat al-Isra' 17:44)

Life and Death Without Mercy

Most Muslims are familiar with the concept of *halal* (lawful/permissible), the Islamic equivalent of kosher. But we tend to be less familiar with the concept of *tayyib* (pure/ethical/wholesome/good). Nearly everywhere that we are enjoined in the Qur'an to eat only of the halal, *tayyib* is explicitly mentioned as a necessary quality as well. But in this age, *tayyib* has been largely forgotten.

“Oh, you people, eat from the earth what is halal and *tayyib*, and follow not the footsteps of the Shaytan ...”

(Surat al-Baqarah 2:168)

Tayyib may have been forgotten by us, but the 10 billion animals that were slaughtered in 2003 in the U.S. aloneⁱ could not forget, not for a moment.

These holy and innocent creatures were, and are, the victims of the factory-farming industry, where most of them spend every moment of their lives in bleak, terrifying, disease-ridden conditions, deprived of everything that makes life bearable. The only relief comes through death, and even death is given without mercy, delivered in countless hideous and painful ways. They are out of our sight, and so they are largely out of our minds. But the fact that all we see is the neatly packaged meat at the store does not change the essential reality of what it is and the process that created it.

In addition to the unconscionable suffering that the system causes, industrial animal agriculture also creates enormous quantities of greenhouse gases, poisons the land with millions of tons of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and is the world's leading cause of water pollution and wastewater by far. It takes an estimated 12,000 gallons of water and up to 20 pounds of grain to produce one single pound of meat.ⁱⁱ And the wastewater from industrial agriculture is the main reason why 60 percent of America's rivers and streams are “impaired.”ⁱⁱⁱ The Holy Qur'an enjoins over and over, “Waste not by excess, for Allah loves not the wasters,” and, “Do not pollute the earth after it has been (so) wholesomely (set in order) ...”

(Surat al-A'raf 7:56)

The question that I humbly wish to put before us as believers is: Can we knowingly and willingly participate in this system and be in right relationship with Allah? God willing, the information here will help each of us find our own way.

Halal? Extremely Unlikely

“Halal” meat is largely a myth in the industrialized world. One study found that 75 percent of meat bearing “halal” certification was, in fact, not halal—it was simply standard factory-farmed (i.e., pork-, meat-, and feces-fed) meat bearing a “halal” label.^{iv} And it is well known that a large portion of the meat that may be halal by the letter of the law (i.e., slaughtered “Islamically”) does not meet any of the other requirements that jurists throughout the history of Islam have agreed are necessary for meat to be truly lawful to eat. These include the following, among others:

1. The animal must be raised in a humane and wholesome environment.
2. The animal must not be mishandled, stressed, or caused any discomfort during transport.
3. The animal must not feel stress or fear before death.
4. The animal must not be killed using continuous pain or injury.
5. The animal must be killed away from the view of other animals.^v

Clearly, none of the conditions requiring that the dignity of the creature be respected and maintained are met in today's world of industrial meat production.

The Prophets Ate Meat

It will be said that some, many, or most of the thousands of Prophets (peace be upon them all), messengers, warners, guides, and saints ate (and may continue to eat) meat. The fact that at least some have, and do, is beyond debate—the Holy Qur'an gives specific and repeated sanction for meat-eating, at least under certain conditions. But many believers see clearly that simply because a permission is given for an action, does not make that action required, nor does it make it the best or most appropriate action in all conditions.

Nomadic peoples of the deserts usually eat meat—there is very little else to eat there. In historical and geographic situations where eating meat is essential for survival, revelations have been given to regulate and mitigate that behavior. But for most of the world's people, in very different environmental circumstances than the Prophets of the ancient desert religions found themselves, meat production means industrial meat production. And these industrial practices are *haram* (Islamically unlawful) not only because they are so barbaric and cruel, but also because they lead directly to environmental degradation and destruction on a massive scale (including the mass cutting of trees—specifically forbidden in the Qur'an—and the near-total disappearance of entire forests on practically every continent).

Struggle

It will be said that plants and vegetables are also food, they are also grown in ways that are not, strictly speaking, Islamically acceptable, and science has shown that they may also feel pain when they are killed. These points are true, and we should strive to participate in clean and ethical practices regarding all of our food. Everything in creation partakes of the divine quality *al-Hayy* (The Living) to some extent and must be respected as a unique divine emanation. However, the Qur'an is also clear that there is a hierarchy of physical being, from the mineral, through the vegetable, through the animal to the human—and the animals are closest to us in the measure of their attributes and qualities. In addition, it should be remembered that plants differ fundamentally from animals in that many of them do not have to be killed to be used for food. Regardless, none of these points in any way contradicts or negates the fact that the suffering, misery, and terror experienced by billions of animals every year in the pursuit of profit is something that can and should be avoided. We are not charged with being perfect, but we are charged with struggling to perfect ourselves—this is the greatest *jihad* (struggle).

Compassion

Our master, Muhammad, peace be upon him, was sent as a mercy for the “whole universe,” not just for Muslims or even just for humans or jinn. He felt overwhelming concern for animals and was always their protector, defending their rights and speaking volumes about human beings’ responsibilities toward them. Not even the slightest instance of animal abuse or neglect escaped him. Below are just a few well-known examples from the *hadith* (traditions):

“There is a reward (ajr) for helping any living creature.” (Bukhari and Muslim)

“It is a great sin for man to imprison those animals which are in his power.” (Muslim)

“The worst of shepherds is the ungentle, who causes the beasts to crush or bruise one another.” (Muslim)

“You will not have secure faith until you love one another and have mercy on those who live upon the earth.” (Bukhari, Muslim, and Abu Dawud)

“Fear God in these mute animals, and ride them when they are fit to be ridden, and let them go free when ... they [need to] rest.” (Abu Dawud)

“There is no man who kills a sparrow or anything beyond that, without its deserving it, but God will ask him about it.” (Ahmad and al-Nasai)

“The grievous things are: shirk (polytheism); disobedience to parents; the killing of breathing beings ...” (Bukhari and Muslim)

“May god curse anyone who maims animals.” (ibn al-Athir)

“Whoever is kind to the creatures of God is kind to himself.”^{vi}

It could not be clearer that the current system of industrial agriculture, particularly animal agriculture, is totally un-Islamic and deeply contrary to the letter and the spirit of Islam.

What Can I Do?

It will be said that eating consistently halal and tayyib is nearly impossible in industrialized society. This may be true for most of us—we do not have the luxury of raising and growing all of our own food, or eating only the food that our neighbors grow and that we know for a fact has been grown wholesomely. So what are we to do? The answer lies inside each of us, but we must be willing to look deeply and unflinchingly at our hearts and what they tell us. We must be able to look critically at our own beliefs, assumptions, and behavior and be motivated to work with what we find. How much of how I eat is just habit? Addiction? Laziness? Cultural or “religious” conditioning? How much control do I actually have, and how much do I abdicate and why?

We must also be willing to try to look with our “deep intelligence” at the Holy Qur’an

and the *Sunnah* (example) of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. We do ourselves a disservice if we do not strive to avail ourselves of the vast range of meanings housed within the outside forms. What was *Rasulullah*'s (the Prophet of God's) deep Sunnah, his heart practice? What was the example he offered through and beyond the outward practices dictated by the time and place that he lived? What was appropriate there and then, and what is appropriate here and now?

Many Muslims who believe that, practically speaking, there is no meat available that is both halal and tayyib choose to eliminate it from their diets entirely. Some choose to simply cut down on their meat consumption. Some who can afford the cost choose to eat only certified organic halal meat. Others continue to eat meat occasionally, but no longer use it as a staple food. Some, of course, choose to make no changes. Others find other solutions. We must necessarily each arrive at our own answer to the problem. The point is not for us to determine what is eternally "right" or "wrong" and to subjugate others to our way of thinking. The point is to live consciously and intentionally—to walk on the path of continual, voluntary self-surrender, for this is what it means to be in Islam. First for the Creator, then for our own spiritual development, for the good of the beings we share this world with, and for the continued health of this delicate world itself.

I ask Allah and my gentle readers to pardon me for any errors. Please feel free to contact me with any thoughts or for details on any of my sources or citations.

Love, Peace, Mercy, Justice, and Freedom
Ezra Ereckson
November 1, 2004

"The real criterion of man's superiority in Islamic thought lies in his spiritual volition, called *taqwa*, in the Qur'an. This spiritual power bestows on humans a greater measure of balance between their conscious and unconscious minds, thus enabling them to make the best use of their freedom. They are considered the best of God's creation only because of this difference. Without the proper exercise of this power, our (claim to) superiority would be groundless."

—Imam al-Hafiz B.A. Masri, *Animal Experimentation: The Muslim Viewpoint*

Further Reading and Other Resources

www.islamicconcerns.com—Qur'an, hadith, and many links to other sites and articles including helpful tips on meat alternatives

www.ifees.org—The Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences, the world's leading Islamic environmental nongovernmental organization

www.fire.al-akbar.net—downloadable .pdf pamphlet of Imam al-Hafiz B.A. Masri's "Animal Experimentation: The Muslim Viewpoint"

www.jesusveg.com/abraham.html—Comprehensive essay on animal rights and vegetarianism in the three Ibrahimic religions

ⁱDena Jones, *Crimes Unseen*, *Orion*, July/August 2004.

ⁱⁱDr. David Pimentel, *Ecological Integrity: Integrating Environment, Conservation, and Health*: Island Press, 2001.

ⁱⁱⁱwww.factoryfarming.com, 2004.

^{iv}Dr. Stephen Emanuel, Agway Feed Company, quoted in *Mad Cow: It Is Time to Be Organic and Natural*, www.soundvision.com, 2004.

^vMuhammad Amin, *Wisdom of the Prophet Muhammad*: Pakistan, Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1965.

^{vi}Detailed information on these traditions, Islamic standards of husbandry, and legal rulings (*qwdidatul-fiqhiyah*) can be found in Imam al-Hafiz B.A. Masri's *Animals in Islam*: Athene Trust, UK, 1989.