

# FOOD AND NUTRITION IN ISLAM

By Mohammad Mazhar Hussaini

## INTRODUCTION

Probably no topic has universally intrigued man more than food. Social and natural scientists are more and more involved and interested in the subject of food, studying man's food practices and beliefs in differing cultures.

There is a science of nutrition and a practice of nutrition and the same word is used for both. Looking historically at the development of the field of nutrition, we have to begin with the practice of nutrition.

In general the practice of nutrition is determined in innumerable ways by social, cultural and national traditions, moral commands and restrictions, individual psychological experiences and only incidentally by nutritional needs. However in case of Muslims, the nutritional practices (as their every other action) are expected to be predominantly determined by the injunctions and regulations of Islam as outlined by the Holy Book of Qur'an and explained by Sunnah. More than 900 million Muslims of different nationalities, societies and cultures of the world make this nutritional practice unique.

With an increasing growth in Muslim population in United States of America, there is an equally increased need of identifying dietary regulations of Muslims and understanding their food behavior. There are more than 3 million Muslims in United States of America and it is as important to food industries, restaurants, airlines as it is to dietitians, nutritionists and food service personnel to become aware of the regulations of food and nutrition in Islam. The ethno-scientific study reported herein reviews these regulations to enhance the cultural understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims.

While reviewing the Islamic nutritional practices in

this study, the author has used the scientific data as a major applied tool for the better understanding of the Islamic spirit. The objective examination of the Islamic Revelation in the light of the discoveries of science will surely help readers appreciate the wisdom and applicability of Islam.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF NUTRITION:

Islam, satisfying the needs and demands of all times, witnesses the importance of nutrition as rest of all aspects of life. It recommends eating of all that is good and pure. In this respect Allah says in the Qur'an:

يٰۤاَيُّهَا الَّذِيْنَ ءَامَنُوْا كُلُوْا مِنْ طَيِّبٰتِ مَا رَزَقْنٰكُمْ وَاَشْكُرُوْا  
لِلّٰهِ اِنْ كُنْتُمْ اِيَّاهُ تَعْبُدُوْنَ

*"O ye who believe, eat of good things that WE have provided for you and be grateful to God if it is HIM ye worship."*

...Qur'an, 11:172

Nutritional advantages have accrued through the injunctions of Qur'an from the beginning of life as the Qur'an recommends mothers to nurse their offsprings for two whole years.

وَالْوَالِدٰتُ يُرْضِعْنَ اَوْلَادَهُنَّ حَوْلَيْنِ كَامِلَيْنِ

*"The mothers shall give such to their offspring for two whole years"*

...Qur'an, 11: 233

Islam recognized the importance of infant nutrition some 1400 years ago although the uniqueness and special value of human milk has been scientifically

## EDITORIAL NOTE:

*Food and nutrition are very essential to human needs. Personality Character is influenced by the foods a person eats. Hence Islam has laid down great emphasis on the types of food to be eaten as well as on the quality and the means and methods of obtaining them.*

*In this article, Brother Muhammad Mazhar Hussaini has taken a lead in writing on the topic of "Food and Nutrition in Islam." The article is very interesting, informative and documentative from the Qur'an, the Sunnah as well as from scientific records and facts. In so doing, Brother Hussaini has played a positive role in bridging the gap between science and religion. He also bridged the gap between the Muslims and non-Muslims as the article is very helpful to both groups of people.*

*Brother Hussaini is to be commended for his move, his bravery and his lead in writing this article. We hope and pray that the wisdom will be shared by every reader and benefit will be transmitted to every concerned person in the world. May Allah bless the efforts of Brother Hussaini and make them fruitful. May Allah bless the efforts of every concerned person whose aims and objectives are for the pleasure of Allah. Ameen.*

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recognized in more recent years. Breast feeding is a natural system, a simple normal function of supply and demand that best serves mother and baby.

Mother's milk cannot be duplicated because any substitute even though composed of all things now known to be needed, will be lacking in some essential factor not yet discovered in human milk. The eighth Report of the Joint FAO/WHO expert Committee on Nutrition (1971) reported that even in less well fed communities of the world poorly nourished mothers lactate surprisingly well producing milk of normal protein content in quantities sufficient to ensure growth in exclusively breast-fed infants for 4 to 6 months. It has been shown that the breast feeding constitutes a significant protein supplement during the first two years of life.

Considering the extra nutritional requirements of expectant and nursing mothers, Islam relieves them from observing the obligatory fasting in the month of Ramadhan<sup>1</sup>. They can make up for the lost obligatory fasts when they attain normal health.

Considering the necessity of geriatric nutrition, Islam recommends old people to compensate their obligatory fasts with feeding poor and needy. The importance of therapeutic nutrition is realized and the provision is made for the sick and the convalescent to make up for their lost obligatory fasts when they resume normal health.

Islam recommends that its followers obtain and consume food of nutritional quality. In this regard, Allah says in the Qur'an:

فَابْعَثُوا أَحَدَكُمْ بِوَرِقِكُمْ هَذِهِ إِلَى الْمَدِينَةِ فَلْيَنْظُرْ أَيُّهَا أَزْكَى طَعَامًا فَلْيَأْتِكُمْ بِرِزْقٍ مِنْهُ

"Now send one of you with your silver coin into the city, and let him see what food is purest there and bring you a supply there of ..."

...Qur'an, XVIII: 19.

Maintaining a balance between the requirements of body and soul, Islam has laid down simple and reasonable dietary rules. Accordingly when Islam allows to eat all that is pure and nutritious, it also prohibits its followers certain categories of food and drinks..

### LAWFUL FOODS

For Muslims, all types of foods and drinks are considered lawful unless it is specifically prohibited, as the Qur'an stated:

<sup>1</sup>Ramadhan: The ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. Fasting is obligatory on every Muslim who is not a minor or insane in the month of Ramadhan each year

"This day all things good and pure are made lawful unto you."

(Qur'an, V:6)

Muslims are supposed to eat lawful (HALAL) food. The Qur'an uses the term "HALAL" for lawful food which has double significance

- a) Food to be earned lawfully.
- b) Food should conform to the Islamic laws relative to the mode of slaughtering.

The Islamic mode of slaughtering consists of mentioning the name of ALLAH<sup>1</sup> on the animal or the bird during slaughter. In this regard Allah says in the Qur'an:

فَكُلُوا مِمَّا ذُكِرَ اسْمُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ بِآيَاتِهِ مُؤْمِنِينَ

"So eat of meats on which God's name hath been pronounced if you have faith in His signs."

(Qur'an, VI: 118)

Muslims are reminded that God has command over the life of all creatures and they are taking the life of animal or bird by God's permission for the sole purpose of food for eating.

Slaughtering involves slitting of throat, wind pipe and the jugular veins in the neck without cutting the spinal cord. The purpose of this is to drain out all the blood which would otherwise serve as a good medium for the bacteria to grow. The spinal cord must not be cut because the nerve fibres to the heart may be damaged during the process causing cardiac arrest, stagnating the blood in the blood vessels of the animal.

### PROHIBITED FOODS:

Among the categories of food and drink that are forbidden according to the Quranic injunctions are

- 1) Meat of animal that dies of itself (carrion).
- 2) Blood that is poured forth as distinguished from the blood adhering to flesh or other organ.
- 3) Flesh of swine including all the products and byproducts prepared from swine.
- 4) Food on which any other name has been invoked besides that of God.
- 5) Intoxicants.

The first four categories of food are forbidden according to the following verse in the Qur'an:

إِنَّمَا حَرَّمَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْمَيْتَةَ وَالدَّمَ وَلَحْمَ الْخِنْزِيرِ وَمَا أُهِلَّ بِهِ لِغَيْرِ اللَّهِ

<sup>1</sup>ALLAH: The appropriate name of God used in Qur'an.

"He hath only forbidden you dead meat and blood and the flesh of swine and that on which any other name has been invoked besides that of God."

(Qur'an, II:173)

The fifth category of prohibition includes all the intoxicants, as God says in the Qur'an:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا إِنَّمَا الْخَمْرُ وَالْمَيْسِرُ وَالْأَنْصَابُ وَالْأَزْلَامُ  
رِجْسٌ مِّنْ عَمَلِ الشَّيْطَانِ فَاجْتَنِبُوهُ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

"O Ye who believe! intoxicants and gambling are an abomination of Satan's handiwork. Eschew such abomination that ye may prosper."

(Qur'an, V:93)

### SOME OF THE SCIENTIFIC FINDINGS:

The first category among the forbidden food item is dead meat. Dr. Kazim (1971), in his article, "Medical Aspects of Forbidden Food in Islam," commenting on the diseases caused to man by animals which dies of itself presented a partial list of diseases as causes, such as: Anthrax bacillus causing malignant pustules, Brucellosis causing undulant fever, Pasturella multicede causing hemorrhagic septicemia, Leptospirosis species causing fever, jaundice, headache, etc.

The second category is that of the blood. It is a good medium for flourishing and multiplication of bacteria and other micro organisms. When eaten, it might transmit the micro organisms into the body affecting the health adversely.

The third category among the prohibited foods is the flesh of swine and, by extension, all the products and byproducts of it. Up until a couple of decades ago there was no apparent scientific reason as to why the pork should not be used as food. Then a micro organism called trichinella, was found in the muscular tissue as the cause of trichinosis in humans. It was thought to be the reason why pork was prohibited. But when, by pasteurization process the problem of trichinella was eliminated there was no apparent reason for prohibition. Recently, however, it was found that the large fat content of the pork contributed to the development of obesity, atherosclerosis etc. in man.

The prohibition of food on which any other name has been invoked besides that of God emphasizes the very fundamental creed of Muslims that there is no God but ONE. All the intoxicants are forbidden in Islam as God ordained to eschew such abomination.

An Arabian al-chemist by the name of Jabir Ibn Hayyan is generally credited with the discovery of the process of distillation of alcohol in 800 A.D. He suggested the name "Alghul" (meaning 'ghost' or 'evil

spirit' in Arabic) for it. According to Dr. Marvin A. Block, an authority on alcoholism, every tissue and every organ is affected by alcohol in one way or other. When carried in the bloodstream, it reaches practically every tissue of the body. The World Health Organization of the United Nations described alcoholism as a chronic illness that manifests itself as a disorder of behavior... The annual loss to the economy of USA resulting from alcoholism is estimated at 15 billion dollars.

### EXCEPTIONS:

In matters of food as in all other matters the mission of Islam is to avoid the extremes of lawlessness on one hand and extreme formalism on the other. Muslims are permitted to eat or drink unlawful foods and drinks only under exceptional conditions as follows:

- By mistake
- If one is compelled to do so without wilful disobedience. In this regard, Allah says in the Qur'an:

مَنْ أَضْطُرَّ غَيْرَ بَاغٍ وَلَا عَادٍ فَلَا إِثْمَ عَلَيْهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ  
غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ

"but if one is forced by necessity, without wilful disobedience, nor transgressing due limits then is he guiltless for God is oft forgiving, MOST MERCIFUL"

(Qur'an, II: 173)

- For fear of dying of hunger or disease, Allah says in the Qur'an:

مَنْ أَضْطُرَّ فِي مَحْمَصَةٍ غَيْرٍ مُّتَجَانِفٍ لِإِثْمٍ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ  
غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ

"but if any is forced by hunger with no inclination to transgression, God is indeed oft forgiving, MOST MERCIFUL."

(Qur'an, V:4)

- Seafood is exceptional to the category of forbidden food of dead meat.

وَهُوَ الَّذِي سَخَّرَ الْبَحْرَ لَنَا كُلَّوَأَمِنَهُ لَحْمًا طَرِيًّا

"And He it is who has constrained the sea to be of service that you eat fresh meat from thence..."

(Qur'an, XVI: 14)

Sea food is lawful whether it is caught alive or found dead, unless it is spoiled or poisoned. According to a Sunnah reported by Ahmad and Ashab Sunan, "The water is pure and clean, and the dead sea food is Halal."

## ISLAMIC DIETARY HABITS:

Eating, like any other act of a Muslim, is a matter of worship and begins in the name of Allah<sup>1</sup>. Islam reminds Muslims that the foods and drinks are the provision of Allah provided to them for survival and for maintaining good health.

Cleanliness and hygiene are emphasized to the extent that it has been considered a part of Iman (faith).

Eating together and sharing of food and resources with relatives, friends and neighbors is recommended.

Peoples starve in several areas of the world today, not because there are more people on earth than can be fed, but because the food that is produced is not equitably distributed.

It is recommended that we not drain a glass of drink in one attempt but drink small amounts of it at intervals to avoid choking. Islam expects people to eat to maintain health. Overeating is not encouraged and wastage of food is condemned. Allah says in the Qur'an:

يٰۤاَيُّهَا اٰدَمُ خُذْ وَاٰزِىۡنَتَكَ عِنۡدَ كُلِّ مَسْجِدٍ وَّكُلُوۡا وَشَرِبُوۡا  
وَلَا تُسْرِفُوۡا ۗ اِنَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُسْرِفِيۡنَ

*"O children of Adam! look to your adornment at every place of worship, and eat and drink, but be not prodigals. Lo! He loveth not the prodigals."*

(Qur'an, VII: 31)

Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) is reported to have said, "Eat less; you will be healthier." Muslims are advised to eat and drink not more than two-thirds of their normal capacity.

A very interesting study with rats has been conducted dealing with the onset of diseases, longevity and mortality as influenced by the levels of food intakes. On liberal feeding, the rats attained large size and developed obesity. When food intake was reduced by 33% to 46%, fat accumulation was prevented with little retarded effect on skeletal growth. Longevity was extended and the onset of diseases was delayed. In man there is a considerable evidence that overweight and obesity predisposes to shortened life expectancy and to the development of cardio-vascular and renal disorders and hypertension. According to the National Health Survey approximately half of the adult population of America is classified as hypertensive and about 20% to the population is considered to be obese.

<sup>1</sup>The Arabic term is "BISMILLAH" which is repeated at the beginning of every act by a Muslim.

## FASTING IN ISLAM

Deprivation of food stuff either accidental or deliberate is a common event in human existence. Voluntary abstinence from food or from certain kinds of food for a duration of time has found widespread acceptance in all religious systems as fasting, although the motives vary.

Fasting in Islam involves abstinence from three primal physical needs of human beings — food, drink and sexual gratification, from dawn to sunset with the intention of fasting in the month of Ramadhan each year. It is obligatory on every Muslim who is not minor or insane.

يٰۤاَيُّهَا الَّذِيۡنَ ءَامَنُوۡا كُتِبَ عَلَیۡكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَی  
الَّذِيۡنَ مِنۡ قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُوۡنَ

*"O you who believe! Fasting is ordained for you ... so that you may remain conscious of God."*

(Qur'an, II:183)

Control or abstinence from the satisfaction of thirst which is basic to our very existence, hunger which has always played a major role in determining the action and attitude of man and sexual gratification which is universally held to be one of the pleasures of life are intelligently used as the means to arrive at the state of purity and holiness.

## SCIENTIFIC STUDY ON FASTING

No ethno-scientific study has been found on Muslim religious fasting in the literature. However following is a brief review of fasting experiments on animals which in some way resemble the Muslim fasting pattern.

Following a fast of about 15 hours in an experiment on rats, it has been reported that there is an increase in their absorptive capacity of small intestine and an enhancement of tissue uptake of amino-acids. While studying the effect of restriction of both food and water, organ water contents in thirsty and starving rats has been found to be basically more normal than in those starving rats with access to water. Scientific studies concluded that presumably in voluntary dehydration the free circulating water of the gut is being withdrawn and tissue dehydration does not start until the gut water has been largely utilized. This provides an initial buffer against dehydration.

In the year 1974 during the month of Ramadhan (September 18th through October 16th) the author conducted a dietary analysis of Muslim students of North Dakota State University, Fargo, North Dakota. It was found that the dietary intake of Muslim students was adequate during fasting although the energy intake was at or near the two-third

level of NRC-RDA.<sup>1</sup>

In other words fasting involves just a change in feeding schedule rather in the amount of food consumed. By no means does this practice lead to the inadequate food intake. Instead food may be more varied and nutritious during Ramadhan fasting than that consumed at other times of the year.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

As Muslims are a part of many cultures, they have an opportunity to make significant contributions to the nutritional practices of the world. The Islamic injunctions have made the consequences of these practices moral and spiritual. There is a tremendous scope of research in the sphere of Muslim cultural nutrition. A large number of Muslims migrating to the non-Muslim environments are confronted with a challenge to preserve their Islamic identity.

Muslim scientists in general are recommended to explore the scientific reasoning behind the Islamic practices and to establish the fact that Islam is a complete and practical code of life.

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<sup>1</sup>NRC-RDA: National Research Council-Recommended Daily Allowances.

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