

Why Pork is Forbidden in Islam

(part 1 of 2): Obeying the laws of God



Islam is a holistic way of life, taking into account physical, spiritual, and emotional well-being, each a separate but overlapping part of the structure of a human being. God created us with a purpose; to worship Him, (**Quran 51:56**) but He did not abandon us to a world of instability and insecurity. He gave us a book of guidance, the Quran, and the example of Prophets and Messengers to explain that trusting in God was the way for us to achieve success in this life and in the hereafter.

. A Muslim spends his or her life endeavouring to please God by worshipping Him and obeying His laws, or rules. One of those rules is that the eating pork, or pork products is forbidden.

At first, one might wonder what harm could come from pork, a product eaten in many parts of the world, and the fact that pork contains parasites and diseases harmful to man may spring to mind as a justifiable reason for abstaining. However, when analysing why Muslims are forbidden to eat pork, this becomes a secondary reason. Muslims simply do not eat pork or pork products because God has prohibited it.

“He has forbidden you only dead animals, and blood, and the swine, and that which is slaughtered as a sacrifice for other than God.” (Quran 2:173)

Sometimes we may never know or understand why God has ordained some things and prohibited others. In the case of pork, no specific reason for the prohibition is given except in **Quran 6: 145** when God says, in reference to the flesh of swine (pig), **“for that surely is impure”**. A Muslim submits to God’s commands willingly, without needing to know the reason behind the divine rule. Moreover, God has expressly stated that a believer hears the words of his Lord and obeys them.

“‘We hear and we obey.’ And such are the successful (who will live forever in Paradise).” (Quran 24:51)

“When God and His Messenger have decreed a matter, they (the believers) should not have any option in their decision. And whoever disobeys God and His Messenger; he has indeed strayed into a plain error.” (Quran 33:36)

A believer understands that God is the Most Wise and the Most Just; therefore, His rules are designed to benefit us in our daily needs, be they physical, emotional, or spiritual. The Creator knows the best way for His creation to live in this world and prepare for the next. It is not permissible for a Muslim to consume pork under any circumstances except in cases of dire necessity, such as, if a person’s life depends on eating it. In cases of dire necessity, prohibited things are permitted.

God allows us to enjoy all the good lawful things and forbids us to partake of those things that may be harmful to our beliefs, health, well being, or morals.^[1] Consequently, Muslims are acutely aware of the dangers of eating things that are forbidden and therefore make concerted efforts to seek out permissible food, even if it involves extra effort or expense.

If a believer consumes pork unknowingly or by mistake, there is no sin of him or her. God does not punish anyone for lack of knowledge, nor for unintentional mistakes or forgetfulness. However if a believer is certain, or thinks that any pork, or pork products may be in his food, drinks or medicines then it is not permissible for him or her to consume it. If he has doubts then he must make an effort to inquire about the ingredients or ask for details.^[2] Nowadays knowledge about ingredients and the manufacturing process is readily available and the prohibition applies whether there is a small amount of pork or pork products, or a large amount.

The scholars of Islam differ over the issue of whether or not changing the form of the impurity (in this case pork products) lifts the prohibition. The Islamic Organisation for Medical Sciences is of the opinion that changing the form (for example, food, and medicine additives) so that it becomes something different,*does* lift the prohibition. However, there is no doubt and no difference of opinion that it is forbidden to consume meat derived from the pig, including ham and bacon.

The recent outbreak of swine flu in Mexico and North America led some countries to slaughter pigs en masse however there is ample scientific evidence to suggest that pigs harbour parasites that are harmful to humans and the pig has long been considered the ideal breeding ground for influenza.

Footnotes:

^[1] At Tabarani (classified as authentic by Sheikh al Albanee).

(part 2 of 2): Is pork unclean?

In Part 1 we discussed the primary reason for Muslims abstaining from eating pork and pork products, and that is, that God has forbidden it. As the Creator of humankind and all that exists, God knows what is good for us, and He has sent guidance enabling us to make wise decisions. Just as a computer would not work properly if it were incorrectly programmed, a human being is not able to function if he is not nourished correctly. Islam is a holistic religion that recognises the interconnectedness of spiritual, emotional, and physical health. What a person eats and drinks has a direct bearing on their overall health and well-being.

Virologists have long been aware that the pig is an ideal breeding ground for influenza, so it is no surprise that the latest threat, swine flu, originated in pigs. Microbiologist and immunology expert, Dr Graham Burgess^[1] says, "Viruses that would normally grow in the chicken can potentially grow in the pig and ones that grow in humans will potentially grow in pigs. So we consider the pig a great mixing pot for viruses and this is where it can play a real role in generating new viruses".

The pig is known to harbour parasites as well as bacteria and viruses. Cysticercosis is an infection caused by the **pork tapeworm**, *Taenia solium*. Infection occurs when the tapeworm larvae enter the body and form cysticerci (cysts). When cysticerci are found in the brain, the condition is called neurocysticercosis. This tapeworm in pigs is found worldwide but is most problematic in poor and developing countries where pigs are allowed to roam freely and often eat human faeces. This infection can occur even in modern developed countries but the CDC reports that it is very rare in Muslim countries where eating pork is forbidden.^[2]

Trichinellosis, also called trichinosis, is caused by eating raw or undercooked meat of animals infected with the larvae of a species of worm called *Trichinella*. Infection occurs most commonly in certain wild carnivorous (meat-eating) animals but it may also occur in **domestic pigs**. The CDC warns that if a human eats meat containing infective *Trichinella* cysts, the acid in the stomach dissolves the hard covering of the cyst and releases the worms.

The worms pass into the small intestine and, in 1-2 days, become mature. After mating, adult females lay eggs. These eggs develop into immature worms, travel through the arteries, and are transported to muscles. Within the muscles, the worms curl into a ball and encyst (become enclosed in a capsule). This infection occurs when these encysted worms are consumed in meat. The number of cases of trichinellosis throughout the world has steadily decreased due to an awareness of the dangers of eating raw and undercooked pork products and legislation prohibiting feeding raw meat garbage to pigs.^[3]

Pigs are omnivores, which means they consume both plants and animals. Pigs will scavenge and eat any type of food, including dead insects, worms, tree bark, rotting carcasses, garbage, and even other pigs. Pigs have very few sweat glands so therefore they are unable to completely rid their bodies of toxins. New evidence indicates that farming practices are leading directly to the spread of human bacterial infections.

Pigs often live in the small spaces and fetid conditions that exist in many modern factory farms and studies are revealing that pigs frequently harbour antibiotic resistant staph bacteria. This drug resistant bacterium is now entering our food supply and recent investigations in the United States of America indicate that 49% of pigs and 45% of pig workers now harbour these bacteria responsible for killing more than 18,000 people in the US every year.^[4]

“He has forbidden you only dead animals, and blood, and the flesh of swine...” (Quran 2:173)

“For that surely is impure” (Quran 6:145)

Muslims refrain from eating pork and pork products because God has forbidden it. However a little investigation into the anatomy and lifestyle of the pig reveals that it is certainly an unclean animal. Those interested in consuming healthy, natural, and pure foods would do well to abstain from pork and pork products.

Footnotes:

^[1] James Cook University, Queensland Australia.
(<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/04/27/2554021.htm>)

^[2] (http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dpd/parasites/cysticercosis/factsht_cysticercosis.htm)

^[3] (http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dpd/parasites/trichinosis/factsht_trichinosis.htm)

^[4] (<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=sick-farms-infected-food>) &
(<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=new-drug-resistant-mrsa-in-pigs>)