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CAN I BE A MUSLIM

VEGAN?

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Veganism is a philosophy or belief system that avoids the consumption or use of anything sourced from animals, whether in food, clothing, cosmetics or any other purpose. The main reasons for most people “going vegan” is due to animal wellbeing issues, health issues or environmental issues. As with many philosophies and beliefs, some of the issues therein may overlap with Muslim belief. However, there are other issues that do not conform with our religion.

It is important to make a distinction between what does and does not conform to Muslim belief regarding food and animals. It is also important to look at and distinguish between personal health choices and belief systems.

Some people may dislike chocolate as a personal preference, but they would not go so far as to assert that God has made it unlawful for all to consume.

Belief in God's Wisdom and Judgement

At the core of our faith in God is that we accept His rulings and judgements. We believe that God is All-Wise and All-Just. Therefore, what God allows and legislates is due to His infinite knowledge and wisdom in the benefits of such things, just as what God forbids is due to His infinite knowledge and wisdom in the harms of such things.

God alone legislates what we can and can't do. To disagree with God's commands or question them, is to imply that God does not know what is best for us. God's commands are further clarified by the Messenger Muhammad by way of example and etiquettes that allow us to see the beauty of our religion. For example, God legislated that certain types of meat are lawful to consume. The Messenger Muhammad then instructed us on the issue of animal welfare and general health.

God tells us in the Quran that certain meat is lawful to consume. To disagree with that is to reject this command of God. You may choose to eat less or forgo meat at certain times for health reasons, but the belief that it is lawful must always remain. Likewise, certain ritual acts of worship in Islam relate to the slaughter of animals, such as with the birth of a child, on the Feast of Sacrifice (Eid al-Adhha) celebrations, and for many pilgrims performing the major pilgrimage in Mecca. At these times, you either must or should engage in the ritual slaughter and animal sacrifice as an act of worship.



Animal Welfare

One of the main arguments of veganism is the call for animal welfare. Veganism argues that consuming animals is exploitative. In Islam we view animals as God's creations. God has created many resources for us, including animals, and he made us stewards over them.

We are responsible for these resources and have guidelines in Islam in how to deal with them properly. Animals have rights upon us, especially the animals we keep for farming, agriculture or as pets. To harm animals or be negligent of their welfare is not allowed in Islam, and it is a major sin. The Messenger Muhammad stressed this in a number of his traditions.

However, just because someone may consume meat, does not mean they will be prone to harm animals. The Messenger Muhammad told us that God punished a woman who imprisoned a cat; starving it. He also informed us that God forgave another woman who gave water to a thirsty dog. The Messenger Muhammad told us that labor animals should not be overworked, overloaded or harmed.



Animals should be kept in clean dwellings, fed pure, non-harmful feed, and looked after. The Messenger Muhammad said that God is All-Pure and therefore only accepts what is pure. When it comes to slaughter, animals should not be distressed by seeing other animals being slaughtered or even the sight of a blade. They should be slaughtered quickly, cutting the carotid arteries and jugular veins which ensures a quick death.

Therefore, being concerned about animal welfare, the source of our food and that it is ethical, that animals are not being exploited or oppressed and harmed; all of this is in accordance to Islamic teachings. Similar concerns of a lack of welfare and ethical standards can be made in plant agriculture and farming. These practices do not make those foods unlawful in and of themselves, but urge us to hold ourselves and others to higher standards.



The Human Health Impact

Another argument of veganism is the health benefits it contains. The overconsumption of meat leads to diseases and illnesses such as high cholesterol, heart illnesses, increased risk of diabetes etc. Islam recommends that Muslims eat a balanced diet and manage their food intake. The Messenger Muhammad told us that we should never overeat. His practice of eating was minimalist. He instructed those who can not satisfy themselves with a few morsels of food that they should reserve a third of their stomachs for food, a third for drink and the last third for breathing.



Belief in God's Knowledge and Wisdom Over Evolving Scientific Arguments

This issue also goes back to trusting in God above evolving scientific arguments. For example, currently scientists cannot definitively say whether or not plants feel pain. We know plants respond to sensations, but they don't seem to have a nervous system or brain.

However, it may well be that in decades to come, science discovers that plants feel pain. Would we then avoid a plant component in our diets?

Thus, believing in God's knowledge and wisdom is essential for a Muslim. By all means, be sensible and ethical in your meat consumption, but do not fall into the trap of making unlawful what God has made lawful. Therefore, eating in moderation and being aware of the natural world around us is part of Islam. However, this does not mean we cannot enjoy certain parts of that world in ways God has allowed.



The Environmental Impact

Veganism states that meat and dairy consumption are bad for the environment. Islam commands us to care for our environment. The Messenger Muhammad stated that to remove rubbish from the road is a blessed deed considered part of true faith. However, the assertion that due to its environmental impact, meat should not be consumed is not correct.

The growing of crops also has a major environmental impact. The amount of water needed, the chemicals such as pesticides used and the landfill waste of crops and produce is not a small percentage. We could also look at the issue of the exploitation of migrant labour when it comes to crop farms.

However, just as with meat, these issues with crop production are ethical issues that need to be addressed and rectified. Just as they are not justifications to make a plant diet unlawful, they should not be used to make the consumption of meat unlawful.

In conclusion, we have in Islam a complete and comprehensive system when it comes to food production and consumption. We have the laws of God as well as the parameters and etiquettes set out clearly in the Quran and teachings of the Messenger Muhammad. Muslims are free to choose their own food consumption preferences, but this must not contradict the laws of God of what is lawful and unlawful.