

يَتَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا أَوْفُوا بِالْعُقُودِ أُحِلَّتْ لَكُمْ بَهِيمَةٌ
 الْأَنْعَامِ إِلَّا مَا يُتْلَى عَلَيْكُمْ غَيْرَ مُجَلِّى الصَّيْدِ وَأَنْتُمْ حُرْمٌ إِنَّ
 اللَّهَ يَحْكُمُ مَا يُرِيدُ ﴿١﴾

Al-Ma'idah (The Table Spread) 5:1

O You Who Believe!

- Fulfil (all) obligations.
- Lawful unto you (for food) are all four-footed animals, with the exceptions named.
- But animals of the chase are forbidden while you are in the sacred precincts or in pilgrim garb
- For Allah does command according to His will and plan.

Commentary

Allamah Taba Tabai (AR)

If we meditate on the beginning and end of this chapter and ponder on the general verses which have been revealed in it and look at the admonitions and the stories which it contains, we will find that the general theme of the chapter is to call the people to fulfill the covenants and to uphold the valid agreements whatever they might be. It warns against breach of agreement and cautions those who take the covenants lightly. It shows that Allah has made it His habit to deal with mercy and lighten the burden of those who guard themselves against evil and believe, and then again guard themselves against evil and do good work. On the contrary, He deals harshly with those who commit outrage, exceed the limit and overstep the bounds by throwing away the collar of obedience and going out of the boundary of covenants which have been made in the religion.

- That is why you will see that the chapter contains many laws concerning legal punishment and retribution;
- there are stories of the dinner table,
- of questioning of the Messiah and
- the incident of the two sons of Adam;
- it also points to a lot of injustices of the Israelites and how they broke the covenants which were taken from them;

- also there are many verses in which Allah described His Grace on the people in various matters like perfecting the religion, completing His favor, making the good things lawful to man and legislating the ways of purification without putting the people into any difficulty and hardship.

This was in conformity with the time when the chapter was revealed. All reporters agree that it was the last detailed chapter which was revealed to the Messenger of Allah (S) nearing the end of his life. It has come in both sects' traditions that it is the abrogating chapter, not the abrogated; and it was proper in this background to emphasize the admonition to fulfill and safeguard the agreements which Allah has taken from His servants, and to remain firm on it.

al-'Aqd, that is covenant, is used for all the religious covenants which Allah has taken from His servants, like monotheism and all the fundamentals cognition and perception, the acts of worship and the laws which were laid down anew or were allowed to continue from previous times, including the proposal and acceptance in trade, etc. The verse contains the word *al-'uqud* which is plural of *al-'aqd* having *al* which signifies comprehensiveness; therefore, this word in this verse encompasses all which could be called '*aqd* (tie, covenant).

The above explanation shows the weakness of what various exegetes have written in its interpretation. Some have said that the covenants refer to those agreements or contracts which people make one with another, like trade deal, marriage and promise or which man binds himself with like oath.

Likewise, some others have said that it refers to those agreements which the people of the Days of Ignorance had contracted with one another that they will help and support each other against those who would proceed against them with evil intention or transgress against them. It means the pact or treaty which was common in those days.

Similarly, some others have said that it refers to the covenants taken from the People of the Book that they would follow what was written in the Torah and the Gospel. All these interpretations are without any support from the wording of the verse. Moreover, as we have said that a plural joined with 'al' and the common usage of the word *al-'aqd* for every type of covenant, renders all such explanations inappropriate. Therefore, the word should be taken in its comprehensive and general meaning.

It shows that so far as eating of meats is concerned, mankind is divided in numerous categories. The spectrum shows on one side total prohibition and on the other unrestricted indulgence. When he uses some meats he follows the dictates of nature, and when he refrains from some items, it emanates from some ideology, or is a result of his second nature.

The Buddhist system prohibited use of all animals altogether. This is one extreme, and its opposite is the excess which was prevalent among uncivilized people, in Africa and elsewhere, who had no hesitation in eating any meat, even the flesh of man.

The Arabs used to eat the meat of quadrupeds and other animals, even rats and lizards; they ate all types of dead cattle which they killed by slaughtering or which died by itself, was strangled or beaten to death; they ate what died as a result of fall, or by being gored by another animal, or which was killed by beasts of prey. They ridiculed the Muslims saying: *Why is it that you eat what you kill yourselves and do not eat what has been killed by Allah?* Many people offer similar objections even today. Some people say: *What is the difference between one flesh and the other, when the human body does not get any harm from, especially if it is hygienically prepared, because the digestive system does not differentiate between this and that?*

The Arabs also used to eat blood; they filled the intestine with blood, roasted it and offered it to the guests. During famine days, they used to wound their camels with arrows and drank the blood which came gushing out. Even today, eating of blood is common among many non-Muslims communities.

The Chinese Buddhists are more liberal than the ancient Arabs; reportedly, they eat all types of animals including dogs and cats, even the worms, sea-shells and all types of insects.

Islam has chartered a middle course, and has allowed the meats which are agreeable to the normal human nature. It has selected in quadrupeds the cattle like sheep, goats, cows and camels (also horse and donkey, although with dislike); among the birds, it disallowed the birds of prey and allowed those other birds which have crawl and those which flap their wings more often and do not have talon; in marine animals, it has allowed some categories of fish, details of which may be found in books of shari'ah.

Even while allowing the above-mentioned animals, it has prohibited its blood and that which has died of itself and on which the name of Allah has not been invoked. The purpose behind these rules is to revitalize the natural canon, inasmuch as the man naturally likes to eat meat. Together with it, Islam respects the correct thinking and normal nature as these too are repulsed from eating those things which may prove harmful to human being or which the human nature thinks odious and unclean.

How Allah Allowed Killing of Animals When the Mercy Rejects it?

It may be asked: The animals has a spirit which is endowed with feelings similar to that which a man has: man hates the torture of slaughtering, the bitter taste of death and is endowed with the natural love of self. These are the feelings which incite a man to flee from every disliked and dangerous situations. This realization of our own feelings demands from us that we should look with respect and mercy on other human being, because they too feel the same pain as we do, and all souls are equal.

The same argument can be advanced for animal species. How can be inflict on animals the sufferings which we ourselves do not accept How can be exchange their sweet life with bitter death? What right do we have to deprive them of the bounty of life which is the best of the bounties? Allah is the most Merciful of all. How can His Mercy allow us to kill an animal for enjoying its meat when both of us are equally His creatures?

Reply: This question gives precedence to the feelings over realities. Legislation follows the real good of humanity and not the emotional feelings. We may expound it as follows: Look minutely all the things which you find around yourselves, you will see that all of them in their creation and continuity follow the law of continuous change. All things without exception do change to other things; and those other things in their turn do change into these things – directly or indirectly. Nothing comes into being unless another thing loses its existence in the process. Nothing continues living on this earth without something else going out of existence. This material world is the world of change and exchange; or you may say, the world of the eater and the eaten. The earthly compounds eat the earth itself by absorbing its chemicals to themselves changing them to their own images; then after sometime, the earth again eats and destroys them. Again, the vegetable world gets its nourishment from the earth and absorbs the air, then later the earth eats it and break it down to its original ingredients, the first elements; and this cycle continues.

How comes the animal world which gets its nourishment from vegetables, water and air. Some animals feed themselves on other animals, like the wild beasts which eat the meat of their preys; and likewise predatory birds eat the pigeons and sparrows. The digestive systems of these carnivorous animals and birds do not accept any other food. The small birds in their turn feed on grain, flies, fleas, insects and mosquitoes, while the mosquitoes feed on blood of man and other animals. Then, finally, the earth devours them all.

Clearly, the system of creation which has overall control on all the creatures, has ordained that man should get nourishment from meats, etc.; then it has guided the previous parts of existence towards it. It is the system which has created in human beings the ability to get sustenance from both animals and vegetables. He has in the front of his alimentary system the teeth some of which are made to cut, the others to break, some to tear and others to grind; they are called canines, molars, premolars and incisors; man is not like goat or cow which cannot cut or tear apart, nor is he like the beasts of prey which cannot grind or incise.

The faculty of taste with which his mouth is equipped finds the taste of meats pleasant; then other organs of his digestive system likewise find the meats delicious, and long for it. All this is a part of creative guidance which proves that the Creator has given him permission to use and eat various meats. How can we separate this creative guidance from lawfulness of the work which this guidance leads to.

Islam is a natural religion. Its only aim is to revive the tracks of nature which the human ignorance has obliterated. It is bound to declare lawful what the creation guides to and the nature decrees. Islamic legislation revives this natural commandment; and in the same way it restores other arrangements which the Creator has ingrained in our nature. We have already mentioned that it confirms the decree of reason that one should abstain from such meats which are harmful physically or spiritually; and it strengthens the inner feelings by prohibiting what the normal human nature dislikes or feels aversion from. These two principles ultimately are based on the Divine management of the creation; and Islam has given credence to them. It has prohibited that which harms the growth of the body and has forbidden that which is injurious to the well-being of human society; for example, that which has been slaughtered in the name of other than Allah or that which has been obtained through gambling and dividing with arrows and so on; and it has prohibited those repulsive things which the nature abhors.

As for the idea of mercy which prevents one from torturing or killing other living beings, there is no doubt that mercy is a fine gift of Allah which has been ingrained in the human nature, and in many animals as well, as we have sometimes observed. But the Creator has not given it the status that it should enjoy absolute power over all affairs, or should command unqualified obedience. The creation itself has not given the mercy free rein; otherwise, there would not have been in this world any trace of grief, disease, suffering and various types of tortures and oppressions.

Moreover, human mercy in itself is not like justice, inasmuch as it is not an absolute noble characteristic which admits no restriction. Had it been so, then it would not have been proper to punish an oppressor for his oppression or to penalize a criminal for his crime; not would we have been allowed to confront a transgression with similar action. If mercy means this, then the earth and all that is on it would perish.

However, Islam has not neglected the demands of mercy altogether, because it is among the creation's gifts. It has ordered us to deal with the animals with mercy. It has forbidden us to torture the animal at the time of slaughter; it doesn't allow to dissect the limbs of the slaughtered animal before it has died, nor is it allowed to skin it while it is alive. The prohibition of strangling an animal or beating it to death comes under this category of rules. Also, it has forbidden to slaughter an animal with another one looking at it. At the time of slaughtering, many rules based on mercy have been laid down, as for examples, the animal should be given water before slaughtering, and so on, details of which can be seen in books of jurisprudence.

When all is said and written, the fact remains that Islam is a religion of reason, not of sentiments; it does not give precedence to the dictates of sentiments over the rules which are meant to bring reform in the human society. It accepts only that sentiment which is accepted by the reason; so in the end, that too becomes the dictate of reason.

As for the talk of divine Mercy and His being the most Merciful of all, do they think that Allah is tender-hearted being? Or that his senses are influenced and He feels pity on some things? Obviously, these are material and physical characteristics and Allah is far above such things. The Divine Mercy means that Allah bestows good on someone who deserves it as much as he deserves it. That is why sometimes what we think is punishment turns out to be the Mercy from Him, and vice versa. Consequently, according to the reason, it is not good to neglect or discard a beneficial action by listening to what is suggested by our false mercy. Nor is it allowed to be negligent in legislating the shari'ah, keeping in view the realities of the creation.

It appears from the above, that Islam follows the dictates of nature when it allows eating of meat, and enforces the conditions for that, or explains the rules which it has laid down: the nature made by Allah in which He has made men; there is no altering of Allah's creation; that is the right religion, but most people do not know (30:30)

As-Saduq narrates through his chain from Abas ibn Taghlib from Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Ali al-Baqir (AS) that he said:

Dead body, blood and flesh of swine is known: that on which any other name than that of Allah has been invoked, that is, what has been slaughtered on idols.

As for the strangled (animal), the fire-worshippers did not eat slaughtered animals rather they ate dead ones; they used to strangle cow and sheep, and when it dies, they ate it; and that beaten to death: they used to tie its legs and beat it until it died and then they ate it; and that killed by a fall: they used to blindfold it and throw it from a roof, when it died, they ate it; and that killed by being smitten with the horn: they made the rams fight each other and when one of them died, they ate it; and that which wild beasts have eaten, except what you slaughter: they used to eat what was killed by wolf, lion and bear.

So Allah, the Mighty, the Great, prohibited it; and what is sacrificed on stones set up (for idols): they (the Zoroastrians) used to sacrifice animals in their fire-temple; and the Qurayshites used to worship trees and stones and slaughtered animals on them; and that you divide by arrows; that is a transgression.” He said:

They used to take an animal and divide it into ten parts, then they gathered and took out the arrows (and they gave it to a man) and there were ten arrows, seven of which had got shares and three were without any share. Those with shares were: al-fadhah, at-taw'am, al-musbil, an-nafis, al-hils, ar-raqib and al-mu'alla, al-fadhah had one share, at-taw'am two, al-musbil three, an-nafis four, al-hils five, ar-raqib six and al-mu'alla had seven shares. Those without shares were as-safih, al-munih and al-waghad; and the animal's price was paid by those who did not get any share; and it was gambling, therefore, Allah prohibited it.

(Man la yahdurushu l-fqih)

Muhammad ibn Abdillah narrates from one of his companions that he said, I said to Abu Abdillah (AS); May I be made your ransom! Why did Allah forbid the dead animal, blood and flesh of swine? He said,

Verily when Allah, the Blessed, the High, prohibited these to His servants and made the other things lawful to them, it was not because Allah liked these prohibited things for Himself, Blessed and High is He, nor did He dislike other things so allowed His servants to use it. The fact is that He created the creatures and knew what would sustain their bodies and keep them in good health.

Therefore, he made it lawful for them as a favor from Himself for their own well-being; and He knew what would be harmful to them, so He forbade it to them and made it unlawful; yet He allowed it for those facing emergencies, and made it lawful to him when his body could not be sustained otherwise, so He ordered him partake from it to that amount which would avert the emergency, but not any more.

Then the Imam (AS) said,

As for the dead body, nobody goes near it or eats it but his body becomes weak and thin, and his strength is lost and his generation is discontinued; and one who (habitually) eats dead body will not die but unexpectedly.

For blood, it creates burning thirst and hard-heartedness, mercilessness and unkindness; one cannot be sure that he would not kill his child or parents; he cannot be trusted about his friends or companions.

As for the flesh of swine, verily Allah had transformed some groups in various forms, resembling swine, monkey, bear and other such animals; then He prohibited (His servants) to eat the animals of similar shapes in order that they should not be polluted by it and should not take the Divine punishment lightly.

As for intoxicants, Allah has made it unlawful because of its effect and disorder.

Then he (AS) said,

Verily the one addicted to liquor is like the idol-worshipper; it creates in him tremor and takes away his radiance; it destroys his sense of honor, and incites him to indulge in unlawful activities like bloodshed and fornication; when he is intoxicated, there is no guarantee that he would not assault sexually the women who are within the prohibited degree [like mother, daughter or sister] without being aware of it. The liquor does not lead the drinker except to every type of evil.

(ibid)

Mir Ahmed Ali (AR) and Aqa Mahdi Puya (AR)

Aqd literally means tying together. *Uqud* (plural) here may mean covenants, contracts agreements, promises, treaties-between man and God or (any of) His prophets, or between human beings.

For peace and harmony in this world fulfilment of uqud has been enjoined by Islam. Islam means complete surrender and submission to the divine will manifested through the sayings and doings of the Holy Prophet, because "He does not speak of his own will; it is naught but revelation revealed" (Najm: 2, 3); and verse 7 of al Hashr enjoins upon the believers: "whatever the Holy Prophet gives you accept it; and whatever he forbids, abstain from it."

There are covenants which constitute the basis of the religion of Allah-belief in Allah, His prophets, His books, His guidance, His justice; and the covenant taken by the Holy Prophet on the day of Ghadir Khum (see commentary of al Ma'idah: 67). The divine guidance made available to mankind (from His mercy and grace), without which the din of Allah would have not been found in its true and original colour, has been clearly made known by the Holy Prophet in his last pronouncement known as hadith al thaqalayn.

According to the Ahlul-Bayt the covenants referred to in this verse are those taken by the Holy Prophet from his followers on various occasions to follow and obey the holy Imams of the Ahl ul Bayt after the conclusion of his risalat.

The criticism of the slaughter of animals by the opponents of Islam is unreasonable. Animals have been created by the creator to provide food for the human beings. There is "life" in everything man or animal eats or drinks. Therefore saving or sparing "life" is not possible. This is the law of nature. The very existence of life depends upon the proper consuming of life. Life in the lower stages of creation has been purposely created to be sacrificed to serve the survival of the species in the higher realm.

Similarly, man has been created to sacrifice his self which is dearest to him, to reach the higher realms of divinity or spiritual bliss. It is true that purposeless slaughter of animals is a waste of Allah's bounty when it is carried out in contravention to the laws of the author of nature. Even for those who hold animals sacred, the surest way to show their concern is to slaughter them at the proper time, because one day they will be eliminated by death. So, if an animal is to die anyway, it is better to use it for sustenance of human life, rather than letting it go waste. The merciful creator, therefore, has allowed slaughter of animals for the sustenance of human life.

In the days of ignorance, man sacrificed man to please his man-made gods. Islam stopped this practice. Instead, to keep alive the spirit of the intended sacrifice of Ismail by Ibrahim, to show his obedience to his Lord, sacrifice of animals has been prescribed. On the other hand, Islam prohibits purposeless killing of animals. As long as a haji is in ihram he cannot kill even a mosquito. Hunting is not only forbidden during the hajj but also as a sport in ordinary life. Imam Ali, on his death bed, asked his children to take care of the birds he had domesticated, or else to set them free. Once a disciple of Imam Jafar al Sadiq killed some pigeons in exasperation. The Imam asked him to give one dinar in charity for every pigeon he had killed as an expiation.

The companions of Imam Hasan tried to make a dog run when the unclean animal came near them while they were having meals with the Imam. The Imam prevented them and began to eat one morsel himself and gave another to the dog. He said: "I should feel ashamed if a creature of Allah looks at my food and I turn it away."

Ayatullah Sayyid Kamal Faqih Imani and a Group of Muslim Scholars

Muslims should earnestly fulfil any covenant and every kind of contract that they have made, irrespective of the recorded contracts and the oral contracts, whether they are political, economical, social, and both with authoritative and weak people.

The Qur'an enjoins that the contracts with pagans should be fulfilled, too. Sura At-Taubah, No. 9, verse 4 says: "...so fulfil their contract ...". According to a tradition from Imam Sadiq (AS) , recorded in Al-Kafi, vol. 1, p. 162 even the fulfilment of agreements with the sinners is necessary.

These covenants may be with Allah (SWT) (like rows and promises), or with people who can be an individual or a group, young or old. The contracts may be with the countries in neighbourhood, or those of international formation. However, as in the same manner that breach of promise and iniquity is the secret of deprivations,(Sura An-Nisa, No. 4, verse 160, and Sura Al-An'am, No. 6, verse 146) fulfilling the promises is the cause of gains and enjoyments.

And it ought to be noted that the heavenly Books are also Allah's covenants to which should we be loyal to them, and fulfil them. The Old testament (the Torah), the New testament (the Evangel) and the present testament (the Qur'an) all are referred to in the Islamic literature. In a tradition, Imam Sadiq (AS) said: "Al-Qur'an is the covenant of Allah unto His people..."(Bihar-ul-Anwar, vol. 16, p. 144; & vol. 69, p. 198

However, faith is the basis of fulfilling the promises and vows. The holy Prophet (S) said:

There is no religion for the person who does not fulfil his promise.

If the agreements and promises be not kept, the basis of the society and common confidence will fail, and disorder comes forth.

" O' you who have Faith! fulfil the contracts (made by you or people)"

Then, following to the ordinance of fulfilling the promises, which involves the entire ordinances and divine covenants, the Qur'an states a number of Islamic ordinances. At first, it refers to the meat of some animals that can be lawful. It says:

"...The four-footed animals are lawful to you (for food) ..."

But, in this ordinance, it has excepted the meat of two animals to be lawful. It says:

"...except those which will be recited unto you, and while you are in pilgrim garb, deem not game permitted to be hunted. ..."

And Allah is willful to decree whatever ordinance He pleases, since He is Omniscient and Omnicompetent. This means that He decrees whatever ordinance which is good for the servants, and His Wisdom requires it.