

Al-Baqara (The Cow) [2:168]

يَتَأْتِيهَا النَّاسُ كُلُّوْا مِمَّا فِى الْأَرْضِ حَلَالًا طَيِّبًا وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا خُطُوَاتِ

الشَّيْطَانِ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُّبِينٌ ﴿١٦٨﴾

O you people! Eat of what is on earth, Lawful and good;
and do not follow the footsteps of the evil one, for he is to
you an avowed enemy.

MUHAMMAD HUSAIN TABA TABAI (AR)

QUR'AN: *o men! eat the lawful (and) good things out of what is in the earth ... what you do not know:*

al-Halal (lawful) is opposite of al-haraam (forbidden); al-hill is used as opposite of al-hurmah (prohibition), al-haram (sanctuary); while al-hall (to untie) is opposite of al-'aqd (to tie). All these usages of al-hill allude to freedom of a thing in its action and effect.

at-Tayyib (good) is opposite of al-khabith (bad, evil), and basically means "agreeable"; a good speech is that which is agreeable to the hearing; a good perfume is agreeable to the sense of smelling; a good place or house is agreeable to the people residing therein.

al-Khutuwaat is plural of al-khutwah (step, pace, stride). Some reciters have read it as al-khatawaat which is plural of al-khatwah (one step). The phrase, "the footsteps of the Satan" refers to things leading to the Satanic aim, as footsteps lead to the walker's aim and destination. The Satan's aim is to mislead with polytheism; therefore, his footsteps are the things which lead to polytheism, and take the walker away from Allah.

al-Amr (to enjoin); the enjoiner imposes his own will on the enjoined, so that the latter does what the former wants. The Satan enjoins and orders by devilish insinuations and temptations encouraging man to do what the Satan wants. as-Su' (= evil) refers to the thing or action which is repugnant and repulsive to society. When it exceeds that limit, it becomes al-fahsha' (indecent); it is a masdar like as-sarra' (prosperity, happiness) and ad-darra' (adversity; distress).

Allah has addressed these verses to all the men in general, because the order promulgated therein concerns all. As for the polytheists, they followed some self-imposed taboo, and falsely ascribed its promulgation to Allah. It is reported, for example, that the tribes of Thaqif, Khuza'ah, Banu 'Amir ibn Sa'sa'ah and Banu Madlaj had forbidden themselves certain things of tilth and cattle, as well as some categories of camels, forging a lie against Allah. Similar baseless taboos are found in other countries and societies too.

Coming to the believers, there was a possibility that even after accepting Islam, some myths and superstitions might continue in their society, because of hereditary influence and national tradition. As a matter of fact, every new spiritual or temporal system concentrates in the beginning on eradicating and destroying the roots of the old system. After it is done, and if by that time it is left with some vitality and vigor - by good training and learning - then it starts mopping up operation by obliterating and erasing the remnants of that old system. Otherwise, the residue of that system is mixed with the new one, and the resulting mixture becomes a hybrid - neither this nor that.

Allah ordered the people to eat from what is in the earth. To eat is to swallow after chewing. Sometimes the word "eating" is allegorically used for general usufruct of a property, for unrestricted right of its disposal, because eating is the basic activity of man, the main pillar of his life.

For example, Allah says: ... do not swallow up your property among yourselves by wrongful means, except that it be trading by your mutual consent... (4:29). The verse under discussion may easily be interpreted in this wider sense, because it is general, not restricted. It would therefore mean: Eat, make use of, and enjoy the usufruct of the bounties of Allah that are in the earth, and which the earth has prepared and kept in store for you by permission of Allah; and it should be in a lawful and proper way. But you should see that there is no snag or hindrance in eating or using it, either from your own nature or from the nature of the earth.

For example, there are some things which by their nature cannot be eaten; there are others which man by his nature does not want to eat; and lastly there are things which are eatable and useable, but your own nature rejects them and does not want to touch them at all, for example, a food that was obtained by unlawful means.

Thus, the words of Allah, "eat the lawful (and) good things out of what is in the earth", promulgate general permission of eating all the lawful and good things of the earth, without any condition, without any restriction. But the next sentence, "and do not follow the footsteps of the Satan", shows that there are some things (related to this lawful and good eating) which are called "the footsteps of the Satan".

They are of two categories: either refraining from some food as a result of following the Satan, or eating it for the same reason. Thereafter, Allah mentions a general principle applicable to all that is done for following the Satan, that it is evil and indecency, as well as speaking against Allah what one does not know.

Desisting from a food is not allowed except when Allah is pleased with such abstaining; likewise one should not audaciously use any thing without the permission of Allah. Eating out of what is in the earth is not lawful and good unless Allah permits and allows it. And He has allowed it in this and similar verses. Also, one should ascertain that a particular thing is not forbidden or prohibited by Allah, as He says after a few verses: He has only forbidden you what dies of itself, and blood, and flesh of swine ... (2:173).

The meaning of the verse then would be as follows, and Allah knows better: Eat out of what is in the earth, from the bounties of Allah which He has created for you, as He has made them lawful and good for you; and do not leave some of them abstaining from them, because that would be evil and indecency, and you would be guilty of speaking against Allah what you do not know; it would be tantamount to making your own law against the law of Allah; and you would thus be following the footsteps of the Satan.

The verse thus shows that:

First: Man has been given a general permission for unrestricted use of all that is in the earth - except the things excluded from this general rule by other proofs. Allah may forbid a thing as easily as He permits it.

Second: One who abstains, without any reasonable proof, from that which Allah has made lawful, in fact promulgates his own law - which he is forbidden to do.

Third: Following the footsteps of the Satan means worshipping Allah in a way Allah has not allowed, by a method He has not approved. Allah has not forbidden any walking except that in which man puts his foot in the footsteps of the Satan, making his walk conform with that of the Satan; thus he would be following the Satan's footsteps.

It may be inferred from above that, although the reason given of this prohibition (He only enjoins you evil and indecency ...) demands that man should neither proceed to do any thing without knowledge, nor refrain from any thing without knowledge; but this is not what this verse is meant for; because it is not following the footsteps of the Satan, though it is following the Satan.

QUR'AN: He only enjoins you evil and indecency, and that you may speak against Allah what you do not know:

Evil and indecency are attributes of action, vis-à-vis, speech. It shows that what the Satan enjoins is confined to the action that is evil and indecency, and the word that is spoken without knowledge.

'Abdu 'r-Rahman says: I asked Abu Abdillah about a man who vowed to slaughter his child. He said: *That is from the footsteps of the Satan.* (at-Tahdhib)

Mansfir ibn Hazim said: Abu Abdillah (a.s.) said to me: 'Have not you heard about Tariq? Verily, Tariq was a cattle- dealer in Madina. He came to Abu Ja'far and said: "O Abu Ja'far! I have taken an oath by divorce (of my wives), emancipation (of my slaves) and vow." Thereupon, (Abu Ja'far, a.s.) said to Him: *O Tariq! verily this is from the footsteps of the Satan.*

Abu Ja'far (a.s.) said: 'Every oath taken in the name of other than Allah, is from the footsteps of the Satan.' (al-Ayyashi)

As-Sadiq (a.s.) said: "When a man takes oath for not doing a thing - while what he has sworn against, its doing is better than its leaving - then he should do that which is better; and there is no penalty on him; surely it (i.e., such oath) is only from the footsteps of the Satan." (al-Kafi)

The author says: The traditions, as you see, interpret the footsteps of the Satan as the deeds supposed to bring one nearer to Allah, while in fact they are not so, because the shari'ah does not recognize them - as we have explained above. Of course, as for the divorce, etc. (mentioned in the second tradition), there is an additional reason for the invalidity of such oaths; and that is making it conditional on some contingency in future; and it is against the principle of immediate and unconditional effecting of such transactions. (It is a topic of jurisprudence.) Oath in the name of other than Allah refers to an oath which has no validity in the shari'ah, and to swearing by what Allah has not sworn by and to which He has given no excellence.

Al-Baqir (a.s.) said about the words of Allah, And the parable of those who disbelieve is as the parable of one who calls out...: *That is, their likeness when you call them to the faith is like the caller who calls out to the cattle which understands nothing other than hearing a voice.*

MIR AHMED ALI (AR)

To determine what food is lawful or unlawful is a very intricate procedure. The injunction is to eat all that is suitable and good, and avoid causes of harm based on the satanic pattern. Unlawful are not only those things which Allah prohibits but even unforbidden things acquired unlawfully - by usurpation, by theft and cheating etcetera. Those who lay stress only on the apparent aspects of religion make a show of dislike to unlawful things but devour things unlawfully acquired (Ma-idah: 63).

"Follow not the footsteps of Shaytan" means follow the way of Allah which has been shown by the Holy Prophet and his Ahl ul Bayt.

AYATULLAH KAMAL FAQIH IMANI AND SEVERAL SCHOLARS

One of the signs of a complete religion is that it considers the usage of the unlawful food-stuffs a Satanic deed (as the Qur'an says: "...intoxicants and games of chance... are an abomination of Satan's work..."), and the inappropriate avoidance of eating the lawful ones originated from the temptations of Satan, (as the Qur'an says: "...eat of what Allah has given you and do not follow the footsteps of Satan...").

Therefore, in the current verse, too, it says:

" O' mankind! eat of what is in the earth lawful and good; and do not follow the footsteps of Satan. ..."

In some of the historical narrations it is cited that a few of the Arab tribes had unreasonably forbidden a part of their crops and their animals for themselves, where they used to sometimes attribute those prohibitions to Allah. Then, the above verse was revealed to dismiss that ambiguity.

Islam pays also specific attention to the material life of people. At the top of these things is the food necessities about which there are found tens of Qur'anic verses and hundreds of traditions in Islamic literature.

One of the duties of prophets has been to define the lawful and unlawful edible materials and drinks beside the introduction of the advantages and disadvantages of each of them. This verse emphasizes that we have to consume from what is religiously lawful and pure /halal/ on the earth:

" O' mankind! eat of what is in the earth lawful and good..."

And that we must not prohibit ourselves from some things under the effect of the Satan's temptation, because it is certain that Satan is our open enemy:

"...and do not follow the footsteps of Satan. Surely he is a manifest foe for you."

Imam Baqir (a.s.) has narrated a tradition from the Prophet (S) who said:

Worship of Allah is divided into seventy divisions, the best of which is earning a living lawfully.

Again, in another tradition, the very holy Imam, the fifth Imam, (a.s) has said:

He who seeks for sustenance in this world in order to be independent of people for his needs, to provide for his family members, and to stretch affection unto his neighbours, will meet Allah, Almighty and Glorious, on the Day of Judgement while his face will be as bright as the full moon.

It is cited in Tafsir-i-Ruh-ul-Bayan that Satan has some different stages in his invitations unto temptations.

- At first, he invites to infidelity.
- If he fails in this phase, he invites to innovation.
- If he does not succeed, he invites to lesser sins.
- Failing in these stages, Satan invites to doing good and lawful deeds instead of worshipping Allah.
- When he fails in this phase, too, he invites to performing worships with lower qualities than the noble ones in order to stop a person from promoting to higher degrees.

Thus, the statement of the verse is a warning against what Satan does and how he leads men astray by his different forms of evil whispers when the Qur'an says:

" Verily, he (Satan) enjoins you evil acts and indecency and that you should speak against Allah what you know not."