

Islam and the Prohibition of Alcohol

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Abstract

It is believed that Islam is a religion that very strongly opposes alcohol. The Islamic prohibition is believed to include not only consuming alcohol, but also selling, buying, touching, and even selling ingredients that will be used to make alcohol. Many Muslim scholars and scientists work hard to reason the wisdom behind the prohibition of alcohol. On the other hand, there are other Muslim scholars who adopted a different point of view. These scholars believed that the prohibition of alcohol depends on specifics other than just alcohol as a substance. It is a great debate that started centuries ago, but now, "What is this debate all about?" and "Whose side does science stand by?" are the questions that need answers.

Introduction

It is a common knowledge for many Muslims that Islam forbids alcohol. The Holy Quran gradually prohibits alcohol, starting from describing it as a great sin, yet still allowing Muslims to drink it, (They ask thee concerning wine and gambling. Say: "In them is great sin, and some profit, for men; but the sin is greater than the profit.") (Quran, 002.219). It is prohibited at times of prayers, (O ye who believe! Approach not prayers with a mind befogged, until ye can understand all that ye say.) (Quran, 004.043). But finally it is prohibited at all times, (O ye who believe! Intoxicants and gambling, (dedication of) stones, and (divination by) arrows, are an abomination,- of Satan's handwork: eschew such (abomination), that ye may prosper.) (Quran, 005.090). Many sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) also emphasize the Quranic judgment. There are Muslim scholars, however, who interpreted these verses differently and created a diversion in the Islamic view of alcohol. Scholars like Abu Hanifa believed that as long as alcohol does not reach the degree of intoxication in which it alters the human mind, then it is not prohibited. And Abu Hanifa was the head of one of the four major doctrines in Islam.

Nowadays, statistics indicate that the alcohol comes right after tobacco in the number of victims of its use. Most crimes are related to alcohol consumption. In fact, combining the number of victims from alcohol consumption with those from alcohol related accidents and crimes puts alcohol in a position of the number one killer in the world. Science, however, still proves that drinking alcohol responsibly, and to the degree that does not alter the human mind, is good for health. One may wonder whose side to take, the scholars who are totally against alcohol, or those who are in favor of it. My study has been to find and present documented information on each side of this debate.

Method

For this study, I used websites that were either credible or at least provide a list of references. I also checked the evidence from the Holy Quran and the Sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him). I did two interviews which were very helpful in directing my study and giving me a place to start.

Results

The Islamic prohibition of alcohol is widely known. However, what many people do not know is that there were many Muslim scholars who interpreted the Quranic verses differently, and for whom alcohol was not prohibited for itself as a substance, but for its bad effects. For them alcohol is only prohibited if the person reaches the state of drunkenness. That was the Islamic outcry of "Drink responsibly" in the eighth century.

It is not a coincidence that what those scholars said coincides with what recent scientific research reveals. In Table 1, the arguments of both Muslim scholars who believe in the prohibition of alcohol and those who do not are presented. The views, religious beliefs, and scientific support of each party are provided.

Table 1: Two sides of alcohol use by Muslims

	Muslim scholars who argued that alcohol is only prohibited when reaches the state of drunkenness.	Muslim scholars who argued that alcohol is prohibited without regard of any specifics.
Who?	Abu Hanifa, Sufian Al-thuri, other scholars and their followers.	Malik, Al-shshafai, Ahmed, and the majority of Muslim scholars.
Alcohol as a substance:	This group believes that alcohol is not forbidden for itself but only for its effects.	This group believes that alcohol is forbidden for itself and for its effects.
Prohibition and quantity: Scientific definition of moderate alcohol consumption is from 1-3 cups a day	Drinking alcohol if does not lead to the alteration of the human mind is not prohibited.	Drinking alcohol is prohibited regardless of the quantity.
Prohibition and effect:	Drinking alcohol if it leads to the alteration of the human mind is prohibited.	Drinking alcohol is prohibited regardless of the quantity.
{O ye who believe! Intoxicants and gambling, (dedication of) stones, and (divination by) arrows, are an abomination,- of Satan's handwork: eschew such (abomination), that ye may prosper.) (Quran,005.090).	They do not take this verse as the absolute evidence of alcohol prohibition since the word "Eschew" (فاجتنبوه) is not a word that the Quran usually uses for prohibition. They believe that the word is used not as a command but as a warning that still gives the people the freedom to decide.	They take this verse as the last one in the series of the gradual prohibition of alcohol. They take the use of the word "Eschew" as a stronger emphasis on the prohibition. They believe that the word indicates not only the prohibition of drinking alcohol but of having any kind of relationship with it, whatsoever.
Prophet (Peace be upon him) says, "Whatever alters the human mind is forbidden."	They take the saying literary. As long as alcohol consumption is not to the degree that leads to the alteration of the human mind, then it is not forbidden.	They interpret the saying as, "any substance that potentially leads to the alteration of the human mind is prohibited."
Scientific support	1.Have better health 2.Fewer hearth attack and strokes 3."Less likely to suffer hypertension, high blood pressure, peripheral artery disease, Alzheimer's disease, and common cold." 4:"Prevents diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, bone fractures and osteoporosis, kidney stones, digestive ailments, stress and depression, poor cognition and memory, Parkinson's disease, hepatitis A, pancreatic cancer, macular degeneration (a major cause of blindness), angina pectoris, duodenal ulcer, erectile dysfunction, hearing loss, gallstones, liver disease and poor physical condition in elderly"	1.Have poorer health 2.More hearth attack and strokes 3.More likely to suffer hypertension, high blood pressure, peripheral artery disease, Alzheimer's disease, and common cold. 4.Alcohol poisoning 5.Hangovers

Discussion

Islam generally prohibits anything that is bad for health, a fact that is fundamental to the prohibition of alcohol. Abu Hanifa, Sufian, and those who share their views realized this fact and used it in order to reverse the argument about prohibiting alcohol by proving that the quantity of alcohol consumed is the factor in deciding the impact it has on the human body. Although the majority of Muslim scholar disagreed with Abu Hanifa, who was the head of one the major four doctrines in Islam, and took the prohibition of alcohol as a prohibition of the substance rather than the effect, scientific research comes now to support what Abu Hanifa said many centuries ago. Considering factors other than health, the economic, social, and religious status of the person is only affected by the consumption of excessive amounts of alcohol, since moderate alcohol consumption—if does not lead to addiction—does not usually affect any of these areas.

References:

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