

## Food Restrictions in Islām

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### **Abstract:**

Food restrictions in Islām are very simple. The Qur'ān states that the consumption of pork and alcohol is forbidden, and all other meat must come from animals slaughtered by cutting the carotid while reciting the name of Allāh. These seem like troublesome rules in Japan only because today there are types of food and eating habits (such as foodstuff containing pork additives, soy sauce made by adding alcohol, etc.) that could not have been imagined at the time and place when the Qur'ān was revealed, and this will also be considered in relation to the *ḥalāl* rules. This article will discuss the difficulties of Muslims living in Japan to obtain *ḥalāl* food, including the case of school lunches, with reference to the *ḥalāl* certification system. Finally, ways for coexistence between Japanese and Muslims will be discussed. The Japanese should respect people who live piously, even if their way of life is different from theirs. In order to acquire this sense of tolerance, the Japanese should learn and understand the various aspects of religion in general as well as the meaning and importance of religious precepts.

### **Keywords:**

Islām, Food Restriction, Ḥalāl, Sharī'a, Manners for Coexistence

## Introduction

The theme which was required of this article was food restrictions in Islām. These are very simple compared to Judaism, and are not a serious concern of Muslims in the Islamic world where Muslims are in the majority. Muslims have to be conscious of Islamic food restrictions only in places where Muslims live as a minority as in the West and Japan. This article will look at the kind of problems Muslims in today's Japan face in their daily lives. What is even more remarkable regarding the eating habits of Muslims living in Islamic societies than food restrictions, is fasting in the month of Ramaḍān, and the feast of Ifṭār at the end of fasting. Strictly speaking, this is not included in food restrictions, but I would like to touch on this point as well. Lastly, I will discuss the problem of multicultural coexistence in Japan, and consider how the Japanese who dislike religious precepts, can coexist with Muslims.

Before describing the features of Islamic food restrictions, I would like to explain how religious precepts from a point of view of the History of Religions can be understood. This will help people who are not familiar with religious precepts and laws to better understand the discussions in this article.

The modern world is said to have become secular. Simply speaking, secularism is the movement away from religion, and is the disbelief in or rejection of supernatural matters particular to religion such as god, the next world, and eschatology. This may be related to the spread of science and rational education, and since the modern age, people in developed countries (Western Christian societies and Japan) have gradually moved away from religion. However, religion is not completely gone. From the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century to the 1980s, secularism was one of the most popular topics in religious studies and sociology of religion. But around the time of the Islamic Revolution in Iran (1979), Islām was also revived in other Islamic countries, and after the fall of the Soviet Union, the Russian Orthodox Church too was rapidly revived. During the Cold War, most regional armed conflicts were understood as part of the war between the US and USSR, but after the end of the war, many of the regional and ethnical conflicts came to be seen as inter-religious conflicts. From around that time, the secularist theory became silent, and was mostly abandoned.

However, today many people tend to think rationally, and religious precepts whose rational reason is not clear are often evaluated negatively. Regarding food restrictions as well, people seek rational explanations. But for believers, who do not require rational explanations, the only correct reason for following precepts is “because they are revealed” or “because they are ordered by God”. As long as they observe food restrictions as part of

their customs, they acknowledge their belief in the existence of God and the revelation as self-evident truth. Self-understanding and attitudes of believers are basic data to understanding believers in the History of Religions. It is important to understand this when manners for coexistence are discussed at the end of this document.

Another important point is that while some religions emphasize precepts and laws, others reject them, in other words, precepts are not necessary for all religions. As the History of Religions seeks the meaning of precepts and laws from a different perspective of theology, it acknowledges the difference between religions with precepts and those without them as different types of religion, and thus never discriminates between them. Surveying the world history of religions, criticism and rejection of precepts and laws began from within religious traditions long before modern secularism and rationalism. For example, Paul and Shinran rejected precepts and emphasized inner faith. According to the latter, the observance of precepts does not prove an individual's belief or piety, and since they could be kept only by the talented and the well experienced but not by ordinary believers, precepts were negatively evaluated as formalistic. From the point of view of religions which respect precepts and laws, precepts have positive meanings, and are observed by ordinary believers. From the point of view of the History of Religions, the observance of precepts helps one to cultivate one's faith. Also, precepts and laws determine the lifestyle of the believers, and hence their observance helps to make their religious identity clear. This is especially the case with minority believers. Having this positive meaning of precepts in mind, I would like to examine Islamic food restrictions.

## 1 The Characteristics of Sharī'a

The Islamic food restrictions are part of the sharī'a. The word *sharī'a* is used only once in the Qur'ān (45:18), where it means the path to follow given by Allah to Muslims. The original meaning of the word is "a way leading to water," namely the way to the origin of life, as well as the way to gaining eternal happiness in the next world. In the Qur'ān, there are several legal and ritual precepts which later became part of the Islamic laws, but the Qur'ān is neither a book of law nor a legal code, and these are only minor parts of it.

Let me briefly relate the historical development of the Islamic legal system; what Muḥammad said and how he behaved in various situations was memorized as sunna, and later recorded as Ḥadīth. Some sunnas contain detailed instructions of rituals such as prayers and fasting, and others record Muḥammad's political judicial orders, his solutions of conflicts and problems among early believers. The activities of Muḥammad as prophet

and leader of the Ummah were a starting point of the systematization of the sharī‘a, and his activities were inherited by his fellow Muslims and gradually organized. Eventually, the sharī‘a, although never codified, came to stand for the Islamic legal system. In the Sunni Islām, the Islamic jurisprudence and legal system were probably completed between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries CE. The Shī‘ī Islām developed its own jurisprudence and legal system separately, and which I will not explain here in detail. The two sects share the Qur’ān, but their Ḥadīths were edited separately, and their legal systems also differ slightly.

The sharī‘a is divided into ritual rules and social rules, and covers almost all aspects of Muslim life. The ritual rules include detailed instructions of the obligatory rituals (the Five Pillars of Islām) [confession of faith, prayer, charity, fasting, and pilgrimage to Mecca]. Incidentally, fasting is obligatory only for healthy adults, but pregnant and breastfeeding mothers, the sick, travelers and children are exempt. It also dictates how those who are exempt from fasting, atone. On the other hand, the social rules consist of various types of rule covering most aspects of social life: legal laws, morals, manners, and also food restrictions. Though the sharī‘a is usually translated as Islamic law, only a small part of the social rules are legal laws for lawsuits, related to marriage, divorce, inheritance, and business.

Compared with the clear distinction of modern Western law and morality, the sharī‘a, with its collection of miscellaneous rules, seems outdated or even primitive. However, when we realize that all Muslims pray, do business, and get married, the system then includes all the rules necessary to live life as a Muslim. The Muslim’s way of life is unified by the sharī‘a, namely, the Islamic rule. The miscellaneous nature of the sharī‘a is suited to the fact that people live while doing miscellaneous things, and as such the sharī‘a is indeed consistent and in this sense can be understood as a rather rational rule system. Let us take an example from Japanese religions. In Japan, after an eldest son has converted to Christianity, he cannot easily abdicate from carrying out family rituals in a Buddhist way. Christianity and Buddhism emphasize spiritual aspects of religious life, and did not develop their own social rules, but rather let believers follow the laws and customs of their respective society and culture. Thus, they bring forth at times a gulf between the believers’ spiritual beliefs and secular social life. This example may help one to understand the benefit of the consistency of the sharī‘a.

As for another characteristic of the sharī‘a, the sharī‘a does not only consist of obligation and prohibition, but also of ritual and social rules which are classified into five categories: 1. Obligatory actions (the omission of which is punished); 2. Recommended actions (desirable and meritorious actions, the neglect of which is not punished ); 3.

Indifferent actions (the performance or neglect of which the law leaves quite open) ; 4. Reprehensive and disapproved actions (the performance of which are not punished) ; 5. Forbidden actions (which are punished). In general, the sharī‘a is translated as Islamic law, but the vast range of actions it covers, and the five categories of actions, in particular the third one which is not a rule in the usual sense, show that it is completely different from legal codes. Moreover, as the ultimate punishment is to be given by God on the day of Judgment, punishments are not always given for obligatory or forbidden actions. The sharī‘a is the guide to Islamic life, the road to salvation in the Hereafter, and its five categories can be understood as representing the broadness of this road. The obligations and prohibitions are the two edges of the road, which no Muslim should cross over, but Muslims can easily live along the broad road, especially, in the third category of actions which may be located in the middle part of the road, they live quite freely. Japanese people readily imagine that Muslims live uncomfortably bound by the sharī‘a, although the Japanese are also bound by state laws, and as long as they do not commit a crime, they live without being conscious of them. Similarly, most Muslims live without feeling tightly bound by the sharī‘a. Furthermore, since Muslims are accustomed to behavior such as praying from childhood, they do not find the observation of the sharī‘a as difficult as Japanese people imagine.

## **2 Muslims’ Eating Habits**

### **2.1 The Islamic Food Restrictions**

The Islamic food restrictions are based on the Qur’ān, but as the following texts show, they are simple. These precepts were revealed mainly in the Medina period, when the Islamic Umma (Muslim community) began to be established there.

2:168 O people! Eat of what is lawful and good on earth, and do not follow the footsteps of Satan. He is to you an open enemy.<sup>1</sup>

2:172 O you who believe! Eat of the good things We have provided for you, and give thanks to God, if it is Him that you serve.

5:3 Prohibited for you are carrion, blood, the flesh of swine, and animals dedicated to other than God; also the flesh of animals strangled, killed violently, killed by a fall, gored to death, mangled by wild animals—except what you rescue, and animals

sacrificed on altars; and the practice of drawing lots. For it is immoral.

Today, those who disbelieve have despaired of your religion, so do not fear them, but fear Me. Today I have perfected your religion for you, and have completed My favor upon you, and have approved Islām as a religion for you. But whoever is compelled by hunger, with no intent of wrongdoing—God is Forgiving and Merciful.

5:4 They ask you what is permitted for them. Say, “Permitted for you are all good things, including what trained dogs and falcons catch for you.” You train them according to what God has taught you. So eat from what they catch for you, and pronounce God’s name over it. [...]

5:5 Today all good things are made lawful for you. And the food of those given the Scripture is lawful for you, and your food is lawful for them. [...]

16:115 He has forbidden you carrion, and blood, and the flesh of swine, and anything consecrated to other than God. But if anyone is compelled by necessity, without being deliberate or malicious, then God is Forgiving and Merciful.

#### Prohibition of Alcohol

2:219 They ask you about intoxicants and gambling. Say, “There is gross sin in them, and some benefits for people, but their sinfulness outweighs their benefit.” [...]

4:43 O you who believe! Do not approach the prayer while you are drunk, so that you know what you say; [...]

5:90-91 O you who believe! Intoxicants, gambling, idolatry, and divination are abominations of Satan’s doing. Avoid them, so that you may prosper.

Satan wants to provoke strife and hatred among you through intoxicants and gambling, and to prevent you from the remembrance of God, and from prayer. [...]

All meat except pork is *ḥalāl* if the animal is slaughtered by cutting its carotid while chanting the name of Allāh. In the Qur’ān, the phrase “slaughter while chanting the name of Allāh” is repeated and thus emphasized. This is related to the historical situation when the revelations were revealed and many people in the Arab tribal society of Jāhiliya,

refused to convert to Islām, and continued to worship their tribal gods (idols). For this reason, the Qur’ān states that it is strictly forbidden to eat meat which has been offered to gods other than Allāh. However, once the Muslim community was established and Muslims were in the majority, the act of chanting Allāh’s name became routine, thus this cautionary ritual became essentially unnecessary.<sup>2</sup> This issue only regained attention when Muslims began to live in the West. The following is a story I heard from Fazlur Rahman. Around the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a Pakistani man began slaughtering sheep on the street in London, since the meat sold in London was not *ḥalāl*, i.e. meat from animals slaughtered without chanting the name of Allāh. London officials were worried about hygienic problems and consulted a Pakistani Islamic law expert. The expert issued a *fatwā* that since the meat in London had not been offered to other gods, it was *ḥalāl* and slaughtering animals on the street was forbidden by the London authorities. Thus, the problem was solved.

The Qur’ān also forbids the drinking of alcohol. What is assumed in the Qur’ān is only wine, but since the reason for its prohibition is that drinking alcohol makes one intoxicated and lose one’s cognitive powers; other kinds of alcohol such as beer, making one similarly intoxicated, are also forbidden. There is no other forbidden food. Therefore, compared with Judaism, Islamic food restrictions are very simple. Today, most food available in supermarkets in Islamic societies is basically *ḥalāl* even if it is not certified as such, one can buy and eat everything without worrying about the prohibitions. Conversely, if a Japanese person wishes to eat pork which is not *ḥalāl*, it is impossible to find it.

There are many individual differences as to how and how much people observe *ḥalāl* food. However, regarding alcohol there are also regional differences besides personal differences. In Iran and Saudi Arabia, even foreigners and non-Muslims cannot drink alcohol in public places, but in Turkey, most restaurants in big cities serve beer and alcoholic drinks, and not only tourists but also some Muslims enjoy drinking beer. Turkey is relatively lenient concerning the drinking of alcohol, partly because it conquered the Byzantine Empire located in Anatolia. After the Ottoman Empire was established, a large number of Christians remained and coexisted with the Muslims. They used wine for communion and drank alcohol in their everyday lives. In Cappadocia, wine is still produced today. The Ottoman Empire was an Islamic state ruled by the *sharī’a*, but broke up soon after the end of WWI, and the Turkish Republic was established under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk). Kemal as the first President promoted westernization and modernization like Japan, and decided to rule by secular law not by

the *sharī'a*. This policy was named the separation of state from religion (*laiklik*),<sup>3</sup> i.e. the secularism which became the national policy of the Turkish Republic. Turkey's modernization is sometimes referred to as the Turkish Revolution.

## 2.2 The Problem of *Ḥalāl* Food in Japan

In a society such as Japan where Muslims are a minority, they often have difficulty in keeping *ḥalāl*. Similar problems have been experienced everywhere by minorities of Jews in the diaspora. In a secular society, it is not easy to keep certain religious precepts. This is partly because secularism is not generally favorable to religion, and also partly because even a secularized society is not entirely a transparent society with no religious color, but colored to some extent by the values and customs of its traditional religion.

Though the food restrictions in the Qur'ān are simple, keeping *ḥalāl* in Japan seems quite complicated. This gap is, of course mainly caused by the different dietary culture of Japan from that of the Middle East, but also by the great changes in food production and distribution which were never envisaged at the time of the Qur'ānic revelations. In the Qur'ān, there is no mention of lard and other pork products. Naturally, there is no mention of seasoning and other ingredients which are added in the mass production of food, nor of sweets flavored with alcohol. Something I have realized through this research is how greatly food and eating habits have changed today from the time of the Qur'ānic revelation. Ham and other processed foods were produced even before the modern age but in far simpler ways than today.

Basically, when food was cooked at home (until about 50 years ago in Japan, still today in the Middle East), the ingredients and seasonings were all visible, and, for example, no Muslim uses lard in cooking or for baking bread. However, nowadays, as most people often eat out and buy ready-made food, it is impossible to know if lard was used in the process of food production. A large variety of ingredients, seasoning, food coloring, and preservatives are currently used. Related to this, when it was found in Indonesia that some pork products produced by a Japanese company contained artificial seasoning, Muslim consumers complained and the seasoning was banned. Even alcohol is sometimes added as an ingredient of soy sauce and miso. Nowadays, even in the Islamic world, most food is mass produced in factories, but Muslims do not have as many difficulties as in Japan, where *ḥalāl* ingredients are not usually used. Thus, the modern industrialization of the food industry seems to me the main reason for today's *ḥalāl* problems, namely, that both inspection and certification of *ḥalāl* food is required.

A serial column article in ten installments, "Searching for *ḥalāl*" in the Asahi

Newspaper dated from June 5<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup>, 2018,<sup>4</sup> focused on the problems which Muslims living in today's Japan face in general, and particularly in relation to the *ḥalāl* rules. I would like to briefly explain these problems, and discuss mature ways for coexistence with Muslims.

Starting with a story of a family who hosted a Muslim student from Malaysia for a few days (no. 1, June 4<sup>th</sup>), the articles depict how Muslims spend the fasting period (no.2, June 5<sup>th</sup> and no. 4, June 7<sup>th</sup>), the life of a Muslim family in 1960s in Tokyo (no. 3, June 6<sup>th</sup>), the difficulties of obtaining *ḥalāl* food today, and also their worries and solutions about children's school lunch (no. 5, June 8<sup>th</sup>). In Japan, some kinds of bread contain lard which is used for shortening, and alcohol is added to make some kinds of soy sauce and miso, which are such basic seasonings in Japan that they are used in most dishes as well as in school lunches. Muslims have long debated regarding whether or not these are *ḥalāl*, and their opinions also vary. But if alcohol-free soy sauce and miso were chosen, Muslim children could eat most meals on lunch menus, which would also be safer and better for Japanese children too. But since this would increase lunch prices, it has not been used yet. Some Muslim mothers, after checking the lunch menu, cook the same food, such as curry and hamburger using *ḥalāl* materials at home, and bring them to school. One school has begun to serve *ḥalāl* lunch, but there are both voices of agreement and disagreement to this (no. 5, June 8<sup>th</sup>).

Furthermore, the articles explain the *ḥalāl* certification system. *Ḥalāl* does appear in the Qur'ān, but the *ḥalāl* certificate system has only recently started. According to the article, strict and systemic rules were determined in Malaysia in the 2000s in order to increase investment. Because acquiring the certificate helps foreign, even non-Muslim companies to start up their business in the vast Islamic market, the certificate system is a growing business (6<sup>th</sup>, June 11<sup>th</sup>). The *ḥalāl* certificate system operates by certifying that the products of food companies, and the entire premises in the case of restaurants and food shops, are *ḥalāl*, after an investigation by a private organization. This investigation is very strict and exhaustive. Not only does it simply check the ingredients and the processing of the food, it investigates whether any non-*ḥalāl* ingredients and materials are used in all sections of the factory or not, and moreover whether the food produced is transported together with non-*ḥalāl* products or not. If all items are cleared, a certification sticker is given. To acquire a *ḥalāl* certification costs too much in most cases, since major investment is necessary to make a production line and transportation system specifically for the *ḥalāl* item. The article cites an example where a bakery baked *ḥalāl* bread with special imported *ḥalāl* ingredients, but the price became too high for Muslims to buy and

Japanese customers did not dare to buy it; finally it could not help but close down (7<sup>th</sup>, June 12<sup>th</sup>).

The last three installments of the newspaper column discussed Muslims' diversity, demerits of sticking to *ḥalāl*, and their criticisms of the *ḥalāl* certification, especially its derived business. Around the time of the Tokyo Olympics in 1964, a Tatar Muslim Imām who used to distribute *ḥalāl* mutton slaughtered by himself to Muslims in a Tokyo mosque, had a request to provide *ḥalāl* meat for Muslim athletes. At that time, the *ḥalāl* certificate system did not exist; most Japanese people had no knowledge of *ḥalāl*, and Muslims even ate ramen, simply avoiding the roasted pork fillet. Since what is *ḥalāl* is decided by Allah and not by men, it can also be interpreted as a matter of personal preference (no. 3). Nowadays some Muslims observe *ḥalāl* strictly, but others although very pious Muslims eat most Japanese food products flavored with soy source without caring much about ingredients and other strict rules. A large part of food products that do not have a *ḥalāl* certificate can in fact be eaten by Muslims. Sticking too much to the certificate may make Muslims isolated in Japan. The last installment introduced a ramen restaurant in Hida, a local city, which serves fully *ḥalāl* ramen without having the certificate (no. 10, June 18<sup>th</sup>).

In Japan, Muslims do not expect to find the same food as is available in their homeland, and many Muslims in fact, eat most Japanese food except pork and alcohol, and do not want to be treated specially. Most meat which is sold in Japan has no certificate, and what is worse, is sold next to pork. The mechanical slaughtering conducted by meat companies does not follow the *ḥalāl* slaughtering guidelines. However, as seen in the above mentioned *fatwā* regarding slaughtering on the streets of London, Muslims can eat the meat sold in Japan even if it is not certified. Naoki Maeno, a Japanese Muslim, serving as an imām at a mosque, insists as follows: firstly because “in Islām, only Allah can decide what is *ḥalāl* and what is not, and secondly because most of the natural food such as water, fruits and vegetables are *ḥalāl* by nature; by contrast, the recent *ḥalāl* certification system, in which certain human beings decide what is *ḥalāl*, would be rather contrary to Islām” (no. 9). Similarly, as the alcohol added to soy sauce and miso never intoxicates people, Muslims can eat various foods flavored with soy sauce. As mentioned above, as there are many individual differences in the observance of *ḥalāl*, therefore the Japanese would do well to remember that some Muslim travelers stubbornly try to maintain the same standard of *ḥalāl* food as in their homeland.

### **2.3 Ṣawm and ‘Īd al-Aḍḥā**

For Muslims living as minorities, the difficulty in observing food restrictions may make

them more conscious of their faith and thus cultivate it more. But Muslims living in Islamic societies do not have such difficulties, for they share the same eating habits with others, and such easy observance rarely makes them conscious of their faith. For them, fasting and the sacrificial festivals seem to be important occasions which make them conscious of their faith. Strictly speaking, these two topics are not part of food restrictions, but I would like to refer to them briefly.

During the whole of month of Ramaḍān in the Islamic calendar, fasting from sunrise to sunset is one of the Five Pillars of Islām, and is compulsory for all healthy adults. Since the Islamic calendar is a lunar calendar, the timing of fasting changes from year to year, with the seasons moving from winter to fall, and fall to summer. During winter, the sun rises late and sets early, and hence fasting is easier than fasting during midsummer, in which one must fast longer in the harsh heat. The time of sunrise and sunset differs according to regions within the same country. While everyday life is regulated by the standard time of each country, fasting starts and ends exactly at the sunrise and sunset of each city and town, which means that the time schedule of fasting changes each day during the month of Ramaḍān. Before Ramaḍān, special calendars are distributed by many food stores and bakeries, printed with the time schedule of fasting and prayer during Ramaḍān for each local town.

The Japanese people who have almost no religious precepts find it hard to understand why so many Muslims observe fasting. However, children growing up in Islamic societies would imprint the scene that most adults fast at a certain time of the year, and naturally observe it without as much difficulty as the Japanese imagine. The obligation to fast is based on the reason that someone who has experienced the suffering of hunger willingly helps those who are starving. Fasting is by no means easy. In the newspaper articles, a Muslim says that he can carry on fasting when he feels Allah watching him, and also that he can persevere because he wants to show Allah his best (no. 2, 9). Each family decides when to have children begin fasting, and sometimes they only do a half day fasting.

In Turkey, at the exact time of sunset when fasting is over, the minarets are lighted up. With that as a signal, Muslims begin to drink water and eat a meal which is called *ifṭār*. They invite relatives, acquaintances, friends, and neighbors for this meal, and enjoy a more copious meal than usual. At many places, *ifṭār* for travelers and the poor is also prepared and hosted. In the square in front of the Sultan Ahmed Mosque (the Blue Mosque), a meal for over 1,000 persons is prepared every evening. The funding for food, cooking, and cleaning afterwards is provided by individuals and companies, as well as by organizations collecting donations from Muslims, and many volunteers participate and

help cooking and serving.

As mentioned previously “carrying on because god is watching” suggests that Muslims feel Allāh closer in Ramaḍān than on other occasions, and thus it is a particularly religious time. This is also the most basic meaning of ritual. The daily life of Muslims who pray five times a day and observe the various rules of the sharī‘a is already sufficiently religious, but fasting in Ramaḍān is special for them, and can be called a sacred time in accordance with the strict sense of ritual. In terms of eating, the pain of fasting and the enjoyment of *iftār* make Muslims more thankful for being able to eat, and also for the Mercy of Allah. In this sense, for Muslims living in Islamic societies, fasting may heighten their religious awareness more than the observation of *ḥalāl* food.

The festival of sacrifice (*‘Īd al-Aḍḥā* or *Kurban Bairam* in Turkish) is also a special day of ritual which happens once a year; it is a special occasion on which Muslims realize the origin of their food. *‘Īd al-Aḍḥā* takes place on the last day of the month *Dhū al-Hijjah* when pilgrims make sacrificial offerings in Mecca; all other Muslims sacrifice sheep, camels, and sometimes cows in their own home towns, distributing and sharing the meat with the poor. In Turkey, animals are slaughtered by imāms, wardens of mosques, with help from volunteers. They divide up the meat and give it back to those who brought in the sacrificial animal. I was also given a small piece of meat by a student whose family sacrificed the animal at home, but unlike the meat sold in supermarkets, it was sinewy and tough. However, although it was not the meat of the sheep which I had seen scarified, after having witnessed the slaughtering, I could not waste it. I was made to face the fact that we regularly take the life of animals and fish at every meal time, which has taught me that we must not waste any of it. At the festival of sacrifice which takes place once a year, Muslims witness the origin of their food and realize the origin of human life and the meaning of food. Especially in the modern world where food products have been industrialized, the *‘Īd al-Aḍḥā* is an important opportunity for teaching urban consumers about food and life.

### **3 The Japanese and Religious Precepts: For a better understanding of Ways for Coexistence**

Today, coexistence does not only mean coexistence with foreigners and people of other religions, but also with LGBT people and the disabled. In order to coexist with others in every sense, it is necessary to interact with respect for the other, but also important not to feel too heavily burdened nor try to overreach oneself. It is, unfortunately, natural that

everyone fears the unknown, and others who belong to different cultures, religions etc. One must accept and realize the difference, and learn to respect such others. In order to respect them by overcoming one's negative feelings, one must know something about their culture and religion. One can simply ask about what one cannot understand, but Japanese people are not good at asking questions about religion, for they think asking about it is rude. A Jewish woman, who married a Japanese husband and raised her children in Japan, lamented that when her children were in school, none of the Japanese mothers ever asked about Judaism. If they had asked, she would have gladly explained it to them. As Japanese people do not like to be asked about their religion, they assume that others would similarly dislike being asked. The Japanese are often taught not to ask about personal beliefs and convictions. And they sometimes insist that they can coexist with the others because they do not know their beliefs, and hence do not discriminate against them. This insistence is not right. True coexistence must be based on the intellectual understanding of the different other, which will help the Japanese to be aware of their misunderstanding and prejudice so as to stop discrimination.

Here, I would like to focus on the manner in which coexistence can be achieved with people who observe strict religious precepts such as Muslims. Many Japanese people think in the following way: "I myself have no religion, but I may have my wedding ceremony in a church, which does not have any religious meaning for me. Thus, I am tolerant to other religions." However, these Japanese often have a strong aversion to precepts and religious laws and are not tolerant of religions with strict precepts. Prayer on New Year's Day, regional Shinto festivals, prayers for success in entrance exams, funerals, memorial services, and visiting graves, these are all religious activities which most Japanese people participate in, however they do not acknowledge them as religious, but merely as social customs. They think that "religion" is something unrelated to themselves such as suspicious cults, or something that is unfamiliar such as Islamic beliefs and rituals. Moreover, the Japanese seldom talk about religious topics, and most Japanese do not like asking or being asked about religion as they themselves are unable to answer. This tendency could be called religion allergy, and might be deeply rooted in the ancient Japanese culture which avoided speaking out or discussions because of the pious awe of the spiritual power of speech.

Contrary to the high level of Japanese education, the low level of knowledge about religion in general is outstanding. This results from poor religious education in public schools after World War II because of the repentance over State Shinto which was manipulated by the Meiji government and led to the War. Moreover, the poor religious

education in schools concentrates on religious thoughts, and rarely refers to rituals and lifestyles.<sup>5</sup> Islām and Judaism are simply explained as religions with strict precepts, but their food restrictions are not concretely taught. In early Buddhism and Therawada Buddhism, monks kept various precepts through their strict training, but Japanese Buddhism has not obliged regular believers to keep precepts, most monks even get married. As Shinto also has not imposed strict precepts on Japanese people, they are not familiar with precepts and tend to deny them. Their denial of precepts could be corrected by acquiring knowledge about Islām, but there are no such opportunities in Japanese religious education at the moment.

In addition, the home is another place for religious education. All over the world, religious practices are taught at home, and passed on from generation to generation. In Japan, activities such as visiting shrines on New Year's Day and visiting the ancestral graves are passed on, but knowledge of scriptures and doctrine is non-existent because Shinto, a typical ancient religion, does not possess a holy scripture nor a clear and systemized doctrine. In the case of Japanese Buddhism, Buddhism has scriptures and doctrine, which essentially preach individual enlightenment and salvation, but do not teach the ancestral worship. Today however, the Buddhism most Japanese are familiar with is called "funeral Buddhism; it is a family religion for conducting funerals, and other rituals for the dead. This originated from the institutionalization of most Japanese Buddhist sects which was politically accomplished by the Edo government. Since then until today, Japanese Buddhism has played the role of a family religion where each family belongs to a fixed temple, while also having another doctrinal aspect teaching individual salvation. The dead are called a buddha, but the Buddhist rituals of the dead are almost the same as ancestor worship which was influenced by Shinto and Confucianism and mixed with Buddhist doctrines, for it cannot be explained by the official doctrine of Buddhism. Even today, most Japanese identify as Buddhists, not based on their personal faith, but only because of being a member of a family. As a result, although participating in Buddhist rituals, they have little knowledge of the doctrine of their own Buddhist sect.

Japanese people have such little knowledge of the various religions of the world that they are not aware that religions are living traditions even in today's world, and that living religiously is not strange but rather ordinary and natural for modern people. Furthermore, it is not properly explained through religious education that the actual religious activities which Japanese people participate in are not simply social customs but in fact part of a religion. Since they lack the basic understanding of religion, Japanese people cannot properly explain their own Japanese religions, which means that they cannot

express their own religious identity, and instead simply say that they “have no religion”.

The problem of Japanese religious identity is due to that fact that Shinto and Buddhism are not fully integrated, existing simultaneously, with most Japanese people belonging to both. According to Joseph M. Kitagawa, Japan is in a state of “religious division of labor”, and most religious studies in Japan have not properly explained it. <sup>6</sup> I have not been able to fully prove this yet, but I deduce that the strength of compelling social pressure in Japanese is somehow related to Japanese religious identity. My deduction is based on the fact that Japanese people, who do not fear god unlike Christians and Muslims, do fear the compelling gaze of others. This gaze of others is the compelling pressure, which compels Japanese people to behave and think in the same way, and makes them hate or sometimes exclude the different others. The newspaper article (No.5), quoted above, tells of a Muslim mother who cooks the same menu as on the school lunch menu but uses *ḥalāl* ingredients. The article makes no comment on this, but I wonder why she cooks the same meal. If personal lunch is allowed, the choice of lunch menu is free. Especially if a mother works full-time, it is almost impossible for her to prepare the same menu as the school. Whether Muslim children demand the same food, or their school or classmates complain if they bring different food, in either case compelling pressure seems to be at work. Another Muslim mother worries that strictly observing *ḥalāl* may make Muslim children so isolated that their Japanese friends will not invite them to birthday parties being afraid of food problems. Here I would like to make some comments on this from the point of view of mature coexistence. Concerning birthday parties, if Muslim children do not participate in them, or if a Japanese family does not invite them, the absence of a party should not mean the end of friendship. Secondly, if invited, Muslim children can bring their own food to the party, and eat it instead of the food served by the host family, but they can still eat deserts with the other friends. For mature coexistence with Muslims, Japanese people should be tolerant and let Muslims behave as they feel comfortable, and understand that coexistence does not mean that people must always behave in the same way.

In an increasingly globalizing world, Japanese people must get used to religions which observe precepts and religious laws such as Islām, Judaism, and Hinduism, and thus coexist with people whose way of life is different. Tolerance of other religions does not simply mean tolerating their inner faith, but also their behavior and way of life i.e. rituals and eating habits. In order to respect people of other religions, the Japanese should understand that religion is, as a basic item of human rights, too important to despise. Even if one cannot agree with doctrines and precepts of other religions, one can be tolerant

of them by intellectually understanding those religions. Keeping this advice in mind, Japanese people need to learn a tolerant attitude towards other religions, and also to understand their own religion better than they do now, so that they are able to explain it to foreigners. Although they have not been good at this in the past, Japanese people have to begin talking about religion in general today.

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### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> *The Holy Qur-án: Containing the Arabic Text with English Translation and Commentary*. 2nd Edition. Translated by Maulana Muhamad Ali. Lahore: Ahmadiyya Anjuman-I-Isháat-I-Islam, 1920. Accessed: <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=wu.89079755401;view=1up;seq=13>.
- <sup>2</sup> A historical interpretation of the holy scripture is a contextual interpretation that considers the meaning of the text by considering historical situations at the time of revelation, and is a liberal interpretation which is adaptable well to historical changes. By contrast, another interpretation which ignores all contexts and sticks to its literal meaning, results in the fundamental interpretation which insists that the name of Allāh be chanted at any slaughtering situation.
- <sup>3</sup> *Laiklik* is a Turkish word stemming from the French word *laïcité*. However, as Islām has never established a church, it was impossible for the Turkish Republic to separate the church from the state. The word means that the government introduced a modern legal system based on the French model, and ruled the state by it instead of the sharī'a. However, as most Turkish people have kept on believing in Islām, the sharī'a still influences their daily and social life concerning rituals and eating habits. Moreover, regarding family laws, the sharī'a is quite valid and effective parallel to civil family laws. In addition, in Turkey recently, President Erdogan is pro-Islamic, and has promoted Islamist policies such as the prohibition of alcohol.
- <sup>4</sup> Research on Muslims living in Japan has been increasing. For example, chapter 8 "Meeting Muslims in Japanese Society" (Tadano Numajiri and Hide Miki) in Hide Mitsuki and Yoshihide Sakurai ed., *The Religious Life of Immigrants in Japan: The Religious Diversity Brought on by Newcomers* (Kyoto: Minerva, 2012) surveys the life of Muslims and their relationship with neighbors focusing on construction and management of mosques. Also, in Masamune Horie ed., *The State of Religion in Japan, The Situation in Japan, vol. I* (Tokyo: Iwanami, 2018), there is a chapter titled "Muslims in Japan and Japanese Regional Society" (chapter 10). However, regarding *halāl*, the newspaper column is full of examples, and therefore I will use it.
- <sup>5</sup> See: Satoko Fujiwara, *Religion in Textbooks: This Strange Situation*. Tokyo: Iwanami Shinsho, 2011. Fujiwara surveys how Japanese and world religions are explained in Japanese high school textbooks of ethics and history, quoting many examples.
- <sup>6</sup> See: Joseph Mitsuo Kitagawa, *The Religions of the East*, The University of Chicago Press, 1959. The religious division of labour refers to the fact that many Japanese belong to plural religions such as Shinto and Buddhism (Kitagawa also includes Confucianism) without feeling it to be contradictory, and they can also choose either Buddhism or Shinto case by case.