

40882 - A Christian is asking why alcohol is emphatically prohibited in Islam?

the question

When we ask the reason why alcohol is forbidden in Islam we are told that it robs us of our senses. But drinking a small cup of it every few months is not going to have any harmful effect, rather some scientists say that a little of it is good for the heart. So why is there this prohibition on drinking even a drop of it? Man has the sense to control his actions and to stop drinking before he becomes intoxicated, so why does Islam require Muslims to keep away from alcohol and pork in order for the religious commitment to be sound? Why not stop at pointing out their harmful effects and give people the choice?.

Detailed answer

Firstly: we welcome you to our site as a seeker of truth, and we ask Allaah to make our answer clear and to show you, after you read it and think about it, the fairness, wisdom and perfection of Islamic sharee'ah, which will make you think for yourself and seek the truth and follow it.

Secondly: it is affirmed by our Islamic sharee'ah that it came to bring and increase good things, and to ward off and reduce harmful things. Whatever is beneficial or mostly beneficial is permissible (halaal) and whatever is harmful or mostly harmful is forbidden (haraam). Alcohol undoubtedly falls into the second category. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“They ask you (O Muhammad) concerning alcoholic drink and gambling. Say: In them is a great sin, and (some) benefits for men, but the sin of them is greater than their benefit”

[al-Baqarah 2:219]

The harmful and evil effects of alcohol are well known to all people, to knowledgeable and ignorant alike. Among the harmful effects of alcohol is that which was mentioned by Allaah (interpretation of the meaning):

“O you who believe! Intoxicants (all kinds of alcoholic drinks), and gambling, and Al-Ansaab (stone altars for sacrifices to idols, jinn, etc), and Al-Azlaam (arrows for seeking luck or decision) are an abomination of Shaytaan’s (Satan’s) handiwork. So avoid (strictly all) that (abomination) in order that you may be successful.

91. Shaytaan (Satan) wants only to excite enmity and hatred between you with intoxicants (alcoholic drinks) and gambling, and hinder you from the remembrance of Allaah and from As-Salaah (the prayer). So, will you not then abstain?”

[al-Maa'idah 5:90-91]

In these two verses Allaah emphatically forbids alcohol, when He mentions it in conjunction with Al-Ansaab (stone altars for sacrifices to idols, jinn, etc), and Al-Azlaam (arrows for seeking luck or decision), which were symbols of shirk that were widespread in the Arabian peninsula before Islam, and He describes it as being the Shaytaan’s handiwork, which is immorality and evil. And Allaah commands us to avoid it and describes that as being the means that leads to success. And He describes its spiritual harm as hindering man from carrying out the obligations and duties enjoined by sharee’ah, namely remembrance of Allaah (dhikr) and prayer.

Alcohol leads to many harmful things, and deserves to be called “the mother of all evils” – as it was described by our Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), who said: “Alcohol is the mother of all evils.” A hasan hadeeth quoted by al-Albaani in al-Silsilah al-Saheehah, 1854. And the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “Alcohol is the mother of all evils, the greatest of major sins. Whoever drinks it may end up committing incest with his mother, his maternal aunt and his paternal aunt.” This hadeeth is hasan on the basis of corroborating evidence, as stated by al-Albaani in al-Silsilah al-Saheehah, 1853.

This is some of the evidence of the truthfulness of our Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him). And what he spoke of has indeed come to pass. Have you not heard the news about that young man who came home drunk and committed incest with his mother after imbibing intoxicants? He threatened to kill himself if she did not do it, so she took pity on him

and did what he wanted. Then when he came to his senses and realized what had happened, he killed himself.

Look at how things ended after he drank alcohol. He committed incest with his mother, then he killed himself. We ask Allaah to keep us safe and sound.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica states that most cases of sexual assault against relatives such as sisters, mothers and daughters happen under the influence of alcohol.

With regard to those who say that drinking a little alcohol is good for the heart, the response to that is:

1 – Modern research has proven that what is said about the benefits of alcohol for the heart and that it dilates the arteries, is a serious mistake. Alcohol does not dilate the arteries that bring nutrition to the heart, as was thought in the past, rather it dilates the veins that lie beneath the skin, whilst at the same time constricting the arteries, because of the accumulation of fats and cholesterol in them. This contributes to blood clots in the heart and angina, especially when it is accompanied by smoking, which contributes to congestion and narrowing of the arteries.

Alcohol also affects the muscle of the heart itself, when it becomes poisoned and dysfunctional, especially after drinking beer that contains cobalt, as when the heart becomes inflamed as a result of exhaustion when burning alcohol.

2 – These supposed benefits to the heart may be attained by means of things other than alcohol, the sinfulness and harmful effects of which outweigh any good it may do or benefits it may bring.

3 – It has also been said that the benefits that alcohol is said to bring to the heart come from the fruits and other substances from which alcohol is made, such as grapes, apples, etc. Based on this, these benefits may be obtained from these foods in the forms in which Allaah has permitted them, without making alcohol from them.

4 – We should weigh up those benefits to the heart – if they are true – against the destructive effects that alcohol has on health, which you can find out about by consulting any medical

reference work that speaks of addiction to alcohol and its destructive effects on man.

See for example: al-Idmaan al-Kuhooli by Dr Nabeel Subhi al-Taweel, published by Mu'sasat al-Risaalah, Beirut.

Abhaath wa A'maal al-Mu'tamar al-'Aalami al-Thaalith wa'l-Raabi' 'an al-Tibb al-Islami, published in Kuwait, 1405 AH, 1407 AH.

Because some people in the past – like some of their counterparts nowadays – thought that wine had some benefits, Taariq ibn Suwayd al-Ja'fi – one of the companions of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) – came and asked him about alcohol, and he forbade it. He said: “We make it as a remedy”. He said: “It is not a remedy, rather it is a disease.” Narrated by Muslim. This is a sign that his Prophethood was true.

With regard to your saying that “Man has the sense to control his actions and to stop drinking before he becomes intoxicated”, this pays no attention to the ways of the accursed Shaytaan, who seeks to distance people from the Lord of the Worlds. It is also the words of one who does not know – or perhaps chooses to ignore – how a drinker's relationship with alcohol begins until he becomes drunk or addicted.

The Shaytaan gradually leads a person from a little to a lot, from minor to major, from sin to kufr, as much as he can, step by step. This is what the Lord of the Worlds refers to in Soorat al-Noor, where He says (interpretation of the meaning):

“O you who believe! Follow not the footsteps of Shaytaan (Satan). And whosoever follows the footsteps of Shaytaan (Satan), then, verily, he commands AL.Fahsha' [i.e. to commit indecency (illegal sexual intercourse)], and AL.Munkar [disbelief and polytheism (i.e. to do evil and wicked deeds; and to speak or to do what is forbidden in Islam)]. And had it not been for the Grace of Allaah and His Mercy on you, not one of you would ever have been pure from sins. But Allaah purifies (guides to Islam) whom He wills, and Allaah is All.Hearer, All.Knower”

[al-Noor 24:21]

The poet also referred to this when he said:

“A glance, then a smile, then a greeting, then words, then an appointment, then a meeting.”

Although this is clear to everyone who understands how people are and how the Shaytaan gets to them, it is more obvious in the case of alcohol and those who drink it.

According to the eastern proverb, “In the beginning a man takes a cup of wine... then the first cup takes a second, then the cup of wine takes the man.”

The story begins with advice from a doctor or friend to have a cup of wine to increase the appetite, or to help one relax, or it starts by joining friends in a social gathering where cups of alcohol are being passed around, or as part of a meal offered, or whatever.

Then gradually physical and psychological bonds are formed to alcohol until it becomes part of a person's life, and the drunkard becomes a slave to intoxication and to alcohol, and he seeks it as a sick person seeks medicine, as the poet said:

A cup that is drunk for pleasure, and a cup that is drunk as a remedy for the first.

In the first cup he may have found some benefit, without getting drunk, and some relaxation and pleasure without losing his mind, and the second likewise, but now he is longing for the cup of yesterday. When the body gets used to this alcoholic poison, it needs to increase the dose of alcohol time after time, in order to enjoy the relaxation and pleasure that it found in the first cup. Then the drunkard starts to drink more regularly, and his desire for alcohol grows stronger. The only guarantee against addiction is not to drink alcohol at all.

Hence we can see the wisdom of Islam in forbidding a little or a lot of alcohol, because a little is the first step towards a lot, and a little added to a little becomes a lot.

As the poet said: Do not think of a little as insignificant, because even the mountains are formed of small pebbles.

With regard to your asking: why does Islam require the Muslims to keep away from alcohol and pork in order for their religious commitment to be sound? Why does it not just explain how harmful they are and let people choose for themselves?

This is the flawed questioning of one who is trying to cheat himself. It is well known that people are not all the same in their levels of understanding of what is beneficial and what is harmful, and their levels of will power are not the same either, when it comes to choosing what is beneficial and avoiding what is harmful. The behaviour of individuals and societies cannot be controlled if things are left to each person's choice.

If things are left to people's choice then the harm that results from drinking alcohol is not limited only to the one who drinks, so that he could be left to his own devices and choose whatever he wants for himself. Rather the harmful results affect everyone. The diseases that result from alcohol weaken society as a whole. The productivity of the drunkard is decreased because of his drunkenness, which affects others. The economy is affected as a result of the money spent on treating him, which also affects others. Moreover there are crimes which result from this addiction. In a World Health Organization report on violent crimes in 30 countries, including the US and the UK, it says that 86% of murders and 50% of rapes are carried out under the influence of alcohol. There are many similar, well-known statistics on such topics in various countries around the world.

With regard to road accidents, the statistics are even more well-known. In 1965 – for example – there were 49,000 deaths on roads in the US, and 1,800,000 cases of permanent disability. Public health officials at the time estimated that half of these deaths were caused by alcohol. The losses resulting from these deaths in that year alone were valued at 8900 million dollars.

In Chile, in South America, 70% of traffic accidents in 1966 were caused by drunkenness. In Paris between 10 and 15 % of all accidents were found to have been caused by alcohol.

Moreover, we may respond to this question by asking:

Why don't we explain how evil it is to steal and then leave people to make their own choice, with no force or punishment? The same could be said of killing and bribery... But then society would become a dangerous and barbaric place, governed by the law of the jungle.

This question itself may be directed against all the laws and systems which people follow in their lives.

The main reason why people deviate from the religion of Allaah, which was revealed from heaven, and go against the laws that He has prescribed for His slaves, is this idea – the idea that people can be left with no commands to follow or prohibitions to heed, even though adhering to commands and prohibitions is what is meant by submission to Allaah (‘uboodiyyah) in its simplest form. This is the pure right of the Creator because He is the Creator, and it is the primary duty of the created being, because he is created. The Lord of the Worlds says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Does man think that he will be left neglected (without being punished or rewarded for the obligatory duties enjoined by his Lord Allaah on him)?”

[al-Qiyaamah 75:36].

i.e., does man think that his Lord will leave him alone, with no obligations or commands or prohibitions, then He will ignore him in his grave with no resurrection, no gathering, no reckoning? What then would be the point of servitude to the Lord of the Worlds, if there were no commands or prohibitions, no reward or punishment? How then would anyone enter Paradise?.