271192 - Ruling on working in a pharmacy and making or selling medicines containing alcohol or haraam gelatine

the question

I am a pharmacist and am currently living in Germany, where I am in the process of having my university credentials assessed and verified so that I can work and complete my studies in Germany. I want to ask about the ruling on working in a pharmacy in this country, as I may have to make or sell medicines containing gelatin derived from pork, or that may contain alcohol. Please note that I am determined to try hard not to sell these medicines to Muslims if there is an alternative available.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

It is not permissible to work in the manufacture of medicines containing alcohol or gelatin derived from pork, because alcohol comes under the heading of khamr (intoxicants), and it is not permissible to consume it, use it as medicine, or mix it with food or drink. Rather what should be done is to destroy it and dispose of it. Anything derived from pork is impure and must be avoided and measures taken to purify oneself from it. So it is not permissible to add it to any kind of medicine, food or drink.

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said: Treating sickness with unlawful things is abhorrent both from a rational point of view and from an Islamic point of view. As for the Islamic point of view, that is seen in the hadith and other texts that we have quoted above. As for reason, that is seen in the fact that Allah, may He be glorified, only prohibited it because of its evil, for He has not prohibited to this ummah anything good or wholesome as a punishment, as He did in the

case of the Children of Israel, as He says (interpretation of the meaning): “For wrongdoing on the part of the Jews, We made unlawful for them [certain] good foods which had been lawful to them” [an-Nisa’ 4:160]. Rather He prohibited to this ummah what He prohibited because of its evil nature.

His prohibition of it is a protection for them, to keep them away from consuming it. So it is not appropriate to seek healing from sickness and disease by means of it, because even if it could be effective in removing the sickness, that will be followed by sickness that is even worse than it, namely spiritual sickness, because of the strength of its evil nature. Thus the one who uses it as medicine to remove physical sickness, is doing so in a way that causes spiritual sickness.

Moreover, the prohibition thereon dictates that one should avoid it and stay away from it by all possible means. Using it as a medicine is making it acceptable to people and making them deal with it, and this is the opposite of what the Lawgiver intended.

Moreover, it is a disease, as was stated by the Lawgiver, so it is not permissible to take it as a remedy.

Moreover, it will have an impact on man’s physical and spiritual being and will cause them to become contaminated with evil, because his body will clearly be affected by the evil nature of the remedy. Therefore if the remedy has evil qualities, it will have an evil impact on his physical being, so how about if the remedy is evil in and of itself?

Hence Allah, may He be glorified, forbade to His slaves all evil foods, drinks and clothing, so that one will not acquire evil qualities under their impact.

End quote from Zaad al-Ma‘aad (4/141)

In Fataawa al-Lajnah ad-Daa’imah (22/106) it says: What is the ruling on benefitting from alcohol and khamr in general, that is, using it in paint for furniture, medicines, fuel, cleaning materials and perfumes, or for cleansing purposes, or to make vinegar?

Answer: Whatever causes intoxication when drunk in large amounts is khamr (intoxicant). Whether

the amount is small or large, it is all the same, and it is all the same whether it is called alcohol or is called by some other name. What must be done is to pour it away, and it is prohibited to keep it in order to use it and benefit from it for purposes such as cleaning and cleansing, using it as fuel or perfume, or turning it into vinegar, or any other benefit.

As for that which does not cause intoxication in large amounts, it does not come under the heading of khamr, and it is permissible to use it in perfumes and medicines, and to use it for cleansing wounds and the like.

‘Abdullah ibn Qa‘ood, ‘Abdullah ibn Ghadyaan, ‘Abd ar-Razzaaq ‘Afeefi, ‘Abd al-‘Azeez ibn ‘Abdillah ibn Baaz. End quote.

Secondly:

If there are some manufacturers who mix the medicine with alcohol or haraam gelatine, then they are sinning thereby, as we have mentioned above. Then we should look at the medicine. If the amount added is small, in the sense that one who drinks a large amount of the medicine will not become intoxicated, or if it is fully absorbed and has no impact on the taste, colour or smell, then it is permissible to take this medicine and treat sickness with it.

It says in Fataawa al-Lajnah ad-Daa’imah (22/297): Some medicines and sweets are sold in the marketplace that contain a tiny amount of alcohol. Is it permissible for us to consume them? Please note that if a person were to eat the sweets and have his fill of them, he would never reach the point of intoxication.

Answer: If the alcohol in the sweet or medicine is of a very tiny amount, such that eating or drinking a lot of that thing would not lead to intoxication, then it is permissible to consume it and to sell it, because it does not have any effect on the taste, colour or smell, because it has been absorbed into the pure and permissible components. But it is not permissible for the Muslim to make anything like that or to add it to the food of Muslims, or to help someone else in doing that. End quote.

Thirdly:

It is permissible to sell medicine containing alcohol or haraam gelatine, if the amount that has been added is small or has been fully absorbed. Statements and fatwas on the permissibility of using medicines containing a tiny amount of intoxicant alcohol have been issued by Islamic fiqh councils, and fatwa-issuing councils and bodies in the Muslim world, whilst noting that it is preferable to avoid adding alcohol to any medicines, so as to avoid dubious matters.

It says in a statement of the Islamic Fiqh Council belonging to the Organization of the Islamic Conference, no. 23(11/3) in response to enquiries from the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) in Washington:

There are many medicines that contain varying amounts of alcohol, between 0.01% and 25%. Most of these medicines are remedies for colds, sore throats, coughs and other common ailments. These alcohol-containing medicines constitute nearly 95% of the medicines for such ailments, which makes it very difficult or even impossible to obtain medicines that are free of alcohol. What is the ruling on taking these medicines?

Answer: The Muslim patient may take medicine containing a small amount of alcohol if alcohol-free medicine is not available, and that medicine has been prescribed by a trustworthy doctor.

End quote from Majallat al-Majma‘, issue no. 3, vol. 3, p. 1087

In a statement issued by the Islamic Fiqh Council belonging to the Muslim World League, it says: It is permissible to use medicines containing alcohol in small amounts that are fully absorbed, that is dictated by the way in which the medicine is made, when there is no alternative to it, on condition that it be prescribed by a doctor of good character

End quote from Qaraaraat al-Majma‘ al-Fiqhi al-Islami bi Makkah al-Mukarramah, p. 341

For more information on medicines and products containing haraam gelatin or glycerin, please see the answer to question no. 97541.

Fourthly:

If there is a medicine or product that would cause intoxication if drunk in large amounts, or it contains lard (pig fat), for example, that has not been transformed (istihaalah), then it is not permissible to consume it or sell it.

The one who works in the pharmacy must avoid that.

Conclusion:

The basic principle is that it is permissible to work in pharmacies, and that most types of medicine are permissible.

If it becomes clear that there is a medicine that it is haraam to consume, then it is not permissible to sell it, but there is nothing wrong with continuing to work there whilst avoiding selling that which is haraam.

And Allah knows best.