59899 - Is Alcohol in Food and Cosmetics Haram?

the question

I am a university student in Vienna. During my studies in the faculty of pharmacy, I discovered that most food products have a very small amount of alcohol added to them. It is added when mixing two ingredients, or as a preservative or thickener. The substances in question are: maltitol, xylitol, sorbitol, glycerol, pectin, agar agar, triacetin and vanillin. Another question: what is the ruling on creams, perfumes or cosmetic products in general?

Summary of answer

If the effect of alcohol in medicine and food is clear, it is haram to add it and it is haram to use these foods and medicines, whether they are eaten or drunk. If it has no effect when added to these foods and medicines, it is permissible to use them and eat or drink them.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Is alcohol haram?

Alcohol is an intoxicating substance; every intoxicant is khamr and khamr is haram . There are two issues having to do with alcohol:

The first issue is: is it impure (najis) or not? The second issue is: does it have an effect when it is added to other ingredients in medicines and foods?

Is alcohol impure?

With regard to the first issue, the majority of scholars are of the view that alcohol is impure (najis) in a real, physical sense, but the correct view is that that is not the case, and that its impurity is

metaphorical.

Is alcohol in food and cosmetics haram?

With regard to the second issue, if alcohol is added to other ingredients in medicine and food, either it will have a clear effect, or it will not. If its effect is clear, it is haram to add it and it is haram to use these foods and medicines, whether they are eaten or drunk.

If it has no effect when added to these foods and medicines , it is permissible to use them and eat or drink them. There is a difference between consuming undiluted alcohol and consuming it after it has been added to something else. If a person consumes it on its own, even in a small amount, it is not permissible, and if it is added to something else, the rulings discussed above are to be applied.

There follows a fatwa of Shaykh Muhammad ibn Salih al-'Uthaymin discussing this matter in detail.

He (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

"Alcohol is an intoxicating substance, as is well known, so it is khamr, because the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "Every intoxicant is haram." According to another report: "Every intoxicant is khamr." Based on that, if this alcohol is mixed with something else and it is not absorbed into it, then that thing becomes haram, because the trace of the alcohol is still apparent. But if this alcohol is absorbed into what it is mixed with, and no trace of it can be seen, then that thing does not become haram, because the scholars (may Allah have mercy on them) are unanimously agreed that if some impurity is mixed with water, but it does not change it, then the water remains pure. The ratio between the alcohol and what it is mixed with may be great or small, in the sense that the alcohol may be strong, in which case a small amount will have an impact on what it is mixed with. Or it may be weak, in which case a large amount of it will have no impact. Everything depends on whether it has an impact or not.

Then there are two further issues to discuss:

- Is khamr impure in a real, physical sense, meaning that one should not touch it and it must be washed off if it gets onto the clothes or body or vessels, or not?

The majority of scholars are of the view that khamr is impure in a real sense, and it must be washed off if it gets onto the body, clothes, vessels, furnishings or anything else, just as urine and feces must be washed off. They quoted as evidence for that the verse in which Allah, may he be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

{O you who have believed, indeed, intoxicants, gambling, [sacrificing on] stone altars [to other than Allah], and divining arrows are but an abomination] from the work of Satan} [Al-Maidah 5:90]

Abomination is impurity, based on the verse in which Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

{Say, “I do not find within that which was revealed to me [anything] forbidden to one who would eat it unless it be a dead animal or blood spilled out or the flesh of swine - for indeed, it is an abomination} [Al-An‘am 6:145]

In other words, it is impure.

They also quoted as evidence the hadith of Abu Tha‘labah al-Khushani, when he asked the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) about eating from the vessels of the disbelievers. The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Do not eat from them, unless you cannot find anything else, in which case wash them and eat from them.” Regarding the reason for the prohibition on eating from such vessels, it was narrated that they used to put alcohol, pork and the like in them.

The second view regarding this matter is that alcohol is not impure in a real, physical sense. They quoted as evidence for this view the fact that the basic principle is that things are pure, and if something is prohibited, that does not necessarily mean that it is impure. Poison is undoubtedly haram, yet despite that it is not impure. They said: The Islamic principle is that everything that is impure is haram, but not everything that is haram is impure.

Based on that, alcohol remains haram but it is not impure unless there is evidence to indicate that it is impure. They also quoted as evidence the fact that when alcohol was prohibited, the Muslims poured it out in the marketplaces, and they did not wash the vessels afterwards. The fact that they poured it out in the marketplaces indicates that it is not impure, because it is not permissible for anyone to pour out something impure in the marketplaces of the Muslims, because the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Avoid the two things that provoke curses.” They said: O Messenger of Allah, what are the two things that provoke curses? He said: “The one who relieves himself in the street where people walk or in the place where they seek shade.” Furthermore, they did not wash the vessels to cleanse them [after pouring away the alcohol]; if it was impure, it would be obligatory to wash the vessels after pouring it away. In support of this view, they also quoted the proven report in *Sahih Muslim* which says that a man gave a gift to the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) of a skin full of wine. The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) told him that it had been forbidden, and one of the Companions whispered to the one who had brought the wine – meaning that he said something to him privately. The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “What did you whisper to him?” He said: I said: Sell it. But the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) told him not to sell it, and said: “When Allah forbids a thing, He also forbids its price.” Then the man opened the mouth of the wineskin and poured away the wine in the presence of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), and the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did not instruct him to wash the skin [container]. If alcohol was impure, the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) would have told him that the skin [container] was impure and he would have instructed him to wash it.

As for what was quoted as evidence by those who say that alcohol is impure in a real sense, namely the verse (interpretation of the meaning):

{O you who have believed, indeed, intoxicants, gambling, [sacrificing on] stone altars [to other than Allah], and divining arrows are but an abomination] from the work of Satan} [Al-Maidah 5:90],

Allah has qualified this abomination by pointing out that it is the action that is objectionable: {an

abomination from the work of Satan}; it is not an abomination or impure in a physical sense, based on the fact that gambling, sacrificing on stone altars and using divining arrows are not impure in a physical sense, and the words that describe them as impure and mention the impurity of alcohol all appear in one verse, and describe them as such for one reason: {indeed, intoxicants, gambling, [sacrificing on] stone altars [to other than Allah], and divining arrows are but an abomination from the work of Satan} [Al-Maidah 5:90]. As that is the case, they cannot be interpreted or understood in two different ways except on the basis of specific evidence to that effect.

As for the hadith of Abu Tha'labah al-Khushani, the instruction to wash the vessels [of the disbelievers] was not because of impurity, because there is a possibility that the instruction to wash them was for the purpose of encouraging them to keep away completely from using the vessels of the disbelievers, which would lead to becoming closely associated with them, and it was not because of impurity. It is well known that impurity cannot be confirmed on the basis of possibility.

Whatever the case, this is the first matter that we have to discuss in order to answer this question about alcohol. Once it is established that khamr is not impure in a real sense, then we may ascertain that alcohol is not impure in a real, physical sense, so it remains pure as it was originally.

- With regard to the second matter, if it becomes certain that these perfumes contain alcohol that has an impact because there is a large amount of it, then is it permissible to use them without drinking them?

The answer to that is that the words of Allah, {so avoid it} [al-Maidah 5:90] are general in meaning and apply to all ways of using it. In other words, we should avoid eating it, drinking it, applying it as perfume, and other uses. This is undoubtedly more prudent. But avoiding it is not strictly enjoined except in the case of drinking, because Allah, may He be exalted, gave the reason for the command to avoid it when He said (interpretation of the meaning):

{Satan only wants to cause between you animosity and hatred through intoxicants and gambling

and to avert you from the remembrance of Allah and from prayer. So will you not desist?} [Al-Maidah 5:91]

These bad consequences do not appear except in the case of drinking. Based on that, prudence dictates avoiding these perfumes, but we cannot state definitively that they are haram to use."(*Fatawa Nur ‘ala ad-Darb)*

Ruling on cosmetic products

With regard to the ruling on cosmetic products, you can find out more by referring to the answers to the following questions: 10337 , 1365 , 20226 , 26799 and 26861 .

And Allah knows best.