177030 - Is Vanilla Extract Halal?

the question

Is vanilla or vanilla extract halal?

I looked on the website guidedways.com under the “online halal food guide” section, and what they say there is that vanilla is halaal, but I want to be sure, because I heard that it contains alcohol?

Summary of answer

Eating vanilla is permissible even though it was mixed with alcohol during preparation for two reasons: 1- alcohol is not najis (impure), 2- alcohol does not have any effect on vanilla.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

What is vanilla?

Vanilla – which is known botanically as planifolia – is the most expensive plant after saffron, because of its rarity and the difficulty in obtaining it. The word vanilla originally comes from the Spanish word “vainilla”, meaning “little pod”. Its pods resemble those of carob. Some people use it in bread and some use it in perfumes; the most common use of vanilla in the Arab world is in the manufacture of ice cream and sweets.

It says in al-Mawsu‘ah al-‘Arabiyyah al-‘Alamiyyah:

“The vanilla plant produces pods that are collected when they are a greenish yellow, then they are treated.

Vanilla is the name for a number of climbing orchids. Vanilla extract, which is used to give flavour

in chocolate, ice cream, pancakes and sweets, is produced from this plant.

The plant produces its fruit in the form of a cylindrical pod, the length of which is between 13 and 15 cm. This fruit is oily and black inside, and contains a number of small black seeds. The pods are collected when they are a yellowish-green colour. After that they are treated or dried; this process shrinks the seeds and makes them rich and brown, producing the vanilla flavour and smell that is well-known.

Vanilla extract is produced by means of a complex and costly process. The seeds are cut into small pieces, then they are steeped in alcohol and water. Food scientists have developed an artificial vanilla flavor because of the high cost of natural vanilla."

Is Vanilla Extract Halal?

With regard to the ruling on eating vanilla, it is permissible even though it was mixed with alcohol during preparation, for two reasons:

1. Alcohol is not najis (impure) in a physical sense; rather it is tahir (pure)
2. The alcohol does not have any effect on vanilla; the one who consumes it does not become intoxicated and no effect of alcohol is seen when eating it. Rather whatever may become attached to the seeds during preparation disappears and leaves no trace in the seed. Something that is like this is not haram to consume.

We have mentioned the ruling on alcohol and that it is pure, and we have mentioned the ruling on foods and drinks to which some alcohol has been added, in the answers to question 146710 .

In the answer to question no. 33763 we quoted the following from Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymin (may Allah have mercy on him):

"Do not think that any ratio of alcohol that there may be in a thing makes it haram; rather if the ratio is such that it will have an effect, in the sense that if a person drinks this liquid that is mixed with alcohol he will become intoxicated, then it is haram. But if the ratio is very small and has

diminished and left no trace, and it does not have any effect, then it is halal.”

Ruling on haram substances in food and drink

The Islamic Organization for Medical Sciences has researched the topic of haram substances in food and drink ; among the conclusions they reached were the following:

1. Alcohol is not impure (najis) according to shari‘ah. Based on what has been established above, the basic principle concerning things is that they are pure, whether it is 100% alcohol or alcohol that has been diluted with water. That is because we think that the view that alcohol and other intoxicants are not physically impure, rather they are metaphorically impure because they are an abomination of the Shaytan, is more correct.
2. With regard to food substances that use a small amount of alcohol in their manufacture in order to dilute some substances that are not soluble in water, such as colourings, preservatives and so on, it is permissible to eat them because it is so hard to avoid that, and because most of the added alcohol evaporates during the manufacture of the food. (Tawsiyat an-Nadwah ath-Thaminah li’l-Munazzamah al-Islamiyyah li’l-‘Ulum at-Tibbiyyah. Please see the text of the statement in full in the book al-Fiqh al-Islamiyy wa Adillatuhu (7/209-211) by Shaykh Wahbah az-Zuhayli)

And Allah knows best.