

**Muslim Judicial Council, South Africa  
HALAAL TRUST**

**Dietary Laws in Islam  
ALCOHOL**

**Islam's contact with alcohol**

**The dietary laws in Islam are based on eating and drinking what is permissible, wholesome and beneficial to humankind.**

**"Oh humankind! Eat of what is permissible or good on earth." (2:168)**

**Islam came into confrontation with alcohol via the grossly sensual life-style of the pre-Islamic Arabs. It was a status symbol; a symbol of courage and pleasure, linked with music and women was the epitome of civilisation in pre-Islamic Arabia.**

**Islam, the revelation of Allah upon which Muhammad (pbuh) rested his authority came into fierce conflict with this life-style. It challenged this life-style not only in its basic beliefs but also in its social behaviour. The prohibition of wine was one of those precepts of Islam which the Arab, on the whole, always resisted, evaded and infringed.**

**A status symbol and a scourge**

**Its indulgence has become a sign of high culture that makes people oblivious of the enormous detriment of alcohol to society as a whole. On a more sombre note closer to home, wine was used in South Africa for the perpetuation of exploitation, degradation and subjugation of farm workers since the early twentieth century by the despicable "tot" system', in part payment of farm labourers. And the labourers were not given the option of a choice between the reward of their labour and wine.**

**The "tot" system whereby a labourer consumed more than a litre of wine per day had a dual economic advantage for the farmer. The farmer could dispose of surplus stock, of which the quality is unsuitable for sales purposes and also the continuity of employment and exploitation through alcohol addiction. This is besides the effects upon the dignity of the worker and the family. Wine should thus be particularly traumatic news for the history of the labour movement in South Africa.**

**Because of the centrality of wine in the life-style of the Arabs, they could not accept Islam's prohibition of wine, which according to them was the fountain of honour, virtue, bravery and generosity.**

**The method of the prohibition**

To eradicate this pervasive evil from society Islam adopted a wise course of education and training prohibiting it in measured stages.

**Stage One: Educating people that the harm of drinking wine is greater than its benefits. "They ask thee concerning wine and gambling. Say: in them is great sin and some profit for people: But the sin is greater than the profit..." (2: 219)**

**Stage Two: Encouraging them not to go to prayer intoxicated. "Oh you who believe! Approach not prayers in a state of intoxication until you can understand all that you say..." (4: 43)**

**Stage Three: After understanding and practising the above, the total and decisive prohibition of wine was declared: "Oh you who believe! Truly intoxicants and gambling and divination by arrows are an abomination, of Satan's doing: avoid it in order that you may be successful." (5: 90)**

**The total prohibition is supported by Ahadith of the Prophet (pbuh): "Every intoxicant is khamr wine) and every khamr is haraam (forbidden)." (Reported by Muslim)**

**In order to rid humankind totally from this scourge Islam takes an uncompromising stand in its prohibition, regardless of the amount consumed.**

**This is why the Prophet (pbuh) said: "Of that which intoxicates in a large amount, a small amount is haraam (forbidden)." (Reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim).**

**The prohibition goes further to aspects like the manufacture, trading, working with wine, etc.**

**The Prophet (pbuh) said: Truly, Allah has cursed khamr (wine) and has cursed the one who produces it, the one for whom it is produced, the one who drinks it, the one who serves it, the one who carries it, the one for whom it is carried, the one who sells it, the one who earns from the sale of it, the one who buys it and the one for whom it is bought." (Reported by Al-Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah on reliable authority)**