

## IS CHEESE HALAAL OR HARAAM?

Cheese is defined as “Curd of milk coagulated separated from whey and pressed (Collins Compact Dictionary 1991).

### **Rennin (Rennet)**

Rennet as an enzyme, is used in the food industry for the preparation of cheese by curdling milk. The only way to know whether the source of rennet is animal, plant or microbe is to ask the food industry about it or else have it written on the label.

### **Whey**

During cheese making, a coagulum is formed by clotting milk with rennet. When the coagulum is cut, a watery liquid known as whey is released and drained off leaving the curd to be salted and further processed into cheese. Whey contains water, fat, protein, lactose, minerals and lactic acid. Cream, butter, cheese, drinks, syrups and powder are some of the products made from whey.

### **ISLAMIC LAW REGARDING RENNET**

The rennet which is extracted from the stomach of a calf or a goat or any similar animal whose meat is Halaal (lawful) and the rennet extracted after slaughtering in accordance to Islamic methods is unanimously Halaal (permissible) for consumption. But if the afore mentioned animals were not slaughtered in accordance with Islamic law then the Honourable Sahibayn hold the view that although the rennet itself is Halaal it would be Haraam (unlawful) to use it because of it being mixed with impure moisture etc. contained in the stomach. Because rennet is fluid or viscous then because of the penetration and saturation of impure moisture it would be impossible to purify it, therefore such rennet would remain Haraam.

The Noble Imaam Abu Hanifah does not regard the moisture found in the stomach of the afore mentioned animals as impure. Therefore the rennet obtained from them is Halaal. In actual fact the lawfulness of rennet does not depend upon the slaughterer being Muslim or non-Muslim but depends upon whether there is life in rennet or not.

The final result of the difference of opinion between Imaam Abu Hanifah and his two students, the Sahibayn, will be that according to Fatwa (legal opinion) it would be permissible to use rennet (in the form of cheese etc.) for consumption. Whilst according to Taqwa (piety) abstinence would be desirable. They will come under the same rule as rennet because it is a by-product which appears during the process of cheese making.

**Below we reproduce an actual Fatwa (legal verdict) regarding rennet used in cheese, by Mufti Nizamuddin Sahab.**

**Question:** Most of the food and drink which is available in South Africa is produced by Jews and Christians. Muslims buy their food and drink from them. Similarly cheese is a product which is produced by these very same non-Muslims and the Muslim community buys it from them for consumption.

Recently it has been noticed that rennet is used in cheese production which is extracted from the stomachs of calves. Rennet is milk which has set in the stomach of a calf. The milk sets, much like yoghurt, in the stomach of the animal. The process is as follows: The calf is given milk to drink; after that it is slaughtered and the rennet is extracted. The question is:

Is the rennet extracted from a calf slaughtered by a non-Muslim Halaal (lawful) for Muslims?

**Answer:** The rennet which is extracted from the stomach of a calf or a goat or any other animal whose meat is Halaal (permissible to eat) after slaughtering and the rennet is extracted in accordance with Islamic methods then this rennet is unanimously Halaal for consumption and pure. But if the afore mentioned animals were not slaughtered in accordance with Islamic law then the Honourable Sahibayn say that although the rennet itself is Halaal it would be Haraam (unlawful) to use it because it is mixed with impure moisture etc. contained in the stomach.

But if the rennet is solid it is Halaal to use after washing it thoroughly. If the rennet is viscous or fluid then due to the penetration and saturation of impure substances or impure moisture it would be impossible to purify the rennet. Therefore such rennet would remain Haraam (unfit for use).

According to the great Imaam Abu Hanifah rennet obtained from the afore said animal is Halaal regardless of whether or not the animals have been slaughtered in accordance with Islamic law because he does not regard the moisture found in the stomach as impure.

The result of this difference of opinion is that according to Fatwa (legal opinion) it would be permissible to use it for consumption etc. and according to Taqwa (piety) abstinence would be desirable thus the rennet obtained from the stomach of cows which have been Islamically slaughtered is unanimously Halaal (permissible) and therefore any products made with such rennet are also permissible for consumption and use.

- 1) According to the Honourable Imaam Abu Hanifah the rennet of Halaal (permissible) animals which have not been slaughtered according to Islamic law is Ja'iz (fit for consumption). Thus the animal which has been slaughtered by a non-Muslim is also one which has not been slaughtered according to Islamic law and therefore the rennet extracted from such an animal is Ja'iz.
- 2) It is Ja'iz and Halaal. The reason being that the lawfulness of rennet does not depend upon the slaughterer being a Muslim or non-Muslim, in fact it depends upon whether there is life in it or not. If there is no life in rennet then death cannot occur because life and death are opposites. The circulation of blood in an organ is the cause of life. No blood flows through rennet therefore rennet is not a living thing thus it cannot die. So to consume and use rennet is permissible. The Honourable Sahibayn's difference in opinion in this is connected to the fact that rennet is situated in close proximity to impure substance contained in the stomach irrespective of whether the rennet from the animal was extracted and slaughtered by a Muslim or a non-Muslim.
- 3) Most responsible people say that rennet is extracted from animals other than pigs or is obtained from plants. Only one person claims that rennet is obtained from a runny substance contained in the stomach of pigs and from this cheese is made. This persons testimony will not be enough to make cheese questionable and so render it Haraam especially when testimonies to the contrary exist. Therefore the consumption of foods which contain rennet is Ja'iz.
- 4) If it is known beyond doubt that certain rennet is obtained from liquidity substance extracted from pigs then such rennet is absolutely Haraam.
- 5) The rennet obtained from an animal slaughtered by a non-Muslim or Muslim in accordance with Islamic law or contrary to it, in all cases is Ja'iz as long as the animal in question is not a pig. This is the opinion of Imaam Abu Hanifah. According to the Sahibayn it is Impure.
- 6) Rennet extracted from plants is Halaal.
- 7) Most well informed people are adamant that rennet which is used to make cheese is not derived from pigs. If one person says that it is extracted from a runny substance contained in pigs stomach his claim will not be accepted.

Therefore rennet is Halaal although it is better to avoid it.

**QUESTION : PLEASE CAN YOU INFORM US IF WALKERS CRISP CONTAINING ANIMAL RENNET IS HALAAL OR HARAAM?**

Rennet is an enzyme used in the food industry for the preparation of cheese by curdling milk.

Rennet extracted from the stomach of a calf or animal whose meat is Halaal (lawful) after slaughtering in accordance with Islamic Thabh is unanimously Halaal (permissible) for consumption. If the above mentioned animals were not slaughtered in accordance with Islamic law then the Honourable Saahibayn hold the view that the rennet itself is Halaal but its consumption would be Haraam (unlawful) because of the contamination with impure moisture etc. contained in the stomach of the animal. According to them, rennet is fluid or viscous [running] and because of the penetration and saturation of impure moisture it would be impossible to purify it, therefore such rennet would remain Haraam.

However, Imaam Abu Hanifah does not regard the moisture found in the stomach of the above mentioned animals to be impure. Therefore the rennet obtained from them is Halaal, according to him.

The permissibility of rennet, therefore, is not really dependent on the slaughterer being Muslim or non-Muslim but upon whether there is life in rennet or not, and whether it absorbs the impurities found in the stomach of a newly born slaughtered calf. This is the outcome of the difference between Imaam Abu Hanifah and his two students, the Saahibayn,

Because of this difference in the opinion of the school, the Fatwa (legal opinion) allows a person to consume rennet (in the form of cheese etc.). Whilst Taqwa (piety) desires abstinence.

In a commentary of the hadith text, Mishqatul Masaabeeh, by the famous Hanafi, scholar, Ali Qaari, Mirqaat, volume 8, page 193, is mentioned in the Kitaabul A'timah, Fasl Thaani.

**Ibn Umar, radhiallahu anhu, narrates that our Rasul, sallallahu alayhi wasallam, was given a piece of Jubnah [Cheese] in Tabuk; he called for a knife, praying the tasmiyya he cut it [and ate it] narrated by Abu Dawud.**

**In the commentary, is mentioned; in this is proof of the purity of anfaah [rennet], because if it was impure then the cheese itself would be impure for it cannot be made without it [rennet].**

Again In this commentary in volume 2, page 79/80 is mentioned, in Bab Mash alal Khufayn, Fasl Awwal.

**Tabraani narrates with a good sanad, although Ghareeb, that in one of the ghazawah, cheese was brought to Nabi sallallahu alayhi wasallam; He asked where is this made? Someone replied in Persia or in the lands of the Majus. Place the knife on it [cut it] and eat it. Someone said; O Rasulullah, we fear it may be carrion [Maitah]. He replied pray the tasmiyyah and eat it. Tirmidhi has mentioned a hadith wherein the Prophet was given a pair of leather socks and he wore them, without knowing whether they were pure or not. In the hadith of Salmaan, our Rasul was questioned regarding Jubn [cheese], Simn [clarified butter] and Faraa'e [leather] together with the fact that it was taken from the lands of the Majus. It was mentioned to Umar regarding Jubn [cheese] and said to him that the rennet of dead animals are put in it [cheese]. He replied pray the tasmiyyah and eat it. Imam Ahmad mentions that this is the most sound hadith regarding cheese manufactured by Majus.**

From the above commentaries it is evident that if rennet is derived from an animal that is permissible to eat, despite how it is slaughtered, it is Halaal to eat such cheese, despite the method used in the making of cheese.

The rennet formed by the milk drunk by a newly born calf, which is then slaughtered and taken from its stomach is somewhat solid and has the effect of solidifying liquid milk and transforming it into cheese. Its permissibility though seemingly irrational because what is within the womb and stomach is under the law of impurity but the permissibility of cheese is established by Nass [Sharii proof] and agreed, therefore rennet is pure and permissible **Fatwa Mazahir Ulum Volume 1 page 110.**

Mufti Taqi' Uthmaani, the ruling of the Hadhraat Saahibayn is more cautious whilst that of Imaam Abu Hanifah is extensive or accommodating. If a pious person refrains it is better, whilst a person consuming cheese then do not stop him. However, the rennet derived from the stomach of a pig is Haraam and Impure, provided that its original property and chemical makeup does not undergo any drastic change.

Vegetarian or synthetic rennet, if nothing impure has been added to it will be Halaal. The cheese sold in supermarkets and shops, if it is vegetarian or derived from animals slaughtered Islamically is permissible to consume. On the other hand if it is pig rennet used in the cheese, without transformation then this is not permissible. Lastly, the rennet in cheese from animals other than pig is permissible, but abstention is desirable/.

Bahr al-Raa'iq Volume 1 page 112/3

We quoted the actual Fatwa (legal verdict) regarding rennet used in cheese, by Mufti Nizamuddin Sahab in the MFG, but the following points therefrom are noteworthy.

- 1) According to Imaam Abu Hanifah the rennet of Halaal (permissible) animals which have not been slaughtered according to Islamic law is **Ja'iz (permissible for consumption)**. Thus the animal which has been slaughtered by a non-Muslim is also one which has not been slaughtered according to Islamic law and therefore the rennet extracted from such an animal is Ja'iz.

The reason being that the lawfulness of rennet does not depend upon the slaughterer being a Muslim or non-Muslim, in fact it depends upon whether there is life in it or not. If there is no life in rennet then death cannot occur because life and death are opposites. The circulation of blood in an organ is the cause of life. No blood flows through rennet therefore rennet is not a living organism. To consume and use rennet is permissible. The Honourable Saahibayn's difference in opinion in this is connected to the fact that rennet is situated in close proximity to impure substances contained in the stomach of the animal irrespective of whether the rennet from the animal was extracted and slaughtered by a Muslim or a non-Muslim.

- 2) If it is known with certainty that rennet is obtained from liquid substance extracted from pigs then such rennet is absolutely **Haraam**.
- 3) The rennet obtained from an animal slaughtered by a non-Muslim or Muslim in accordance with Islamic law or contrary to it, is in all cases Ja'iz as long as the animal in question is not a pig. This is the opinion of Imaam Abu Hanifah. According to the Saahibayn it is Impure.
- 4) Rennet extracted from plants is **Halaal**.

### **Whey**

During cheese making, a coagulum is formed by clotting milk with rennet. When the coagulum is cut, a watery liquid known as whey is released and drained off leaving the curd to be salted and further processed into cheese. Whey contains water, fat, protein, lactose, minerals and lactic acid. Cream, butter, cheese, drinks, syrups and powder are some of the products made from whey. Whey will come under the same rule as rennet because it is a by-product which appears during the process of cheese making.

Therefore, in conclusion, the same rule applies to the by product of cheese in the form of crisp etc.