

1. Using Utensils of People of Other Faiths

Some Muslims have claimed that it is prohibited to the use of eating utensils, kitchenware and cutlery that have been used by non-Muslims. So while eating their food may be regarded as permissible, the prohibition of using their utensils has sometimes created serious awkwardness, uneasy embarrassment, humiliation or inconvenience for both the hosts and guests. This could happen when Muslims accept invitations for meals from friends and family members of other faiths, or when they go to eat in public restaurants.

Is it really prohibited for Muslims to use the cutlery of others?

All Muslim scholars agree based on the Qur'an and Sunnah on the permissibility of eating the food of *Ahl al-Kitab* provided the food in itself is not impure or unlawful in Islam, such as carrion, blood, pork, wine, etc.¹

However, in a hadith, Abu Tha'labah al-Khushani narrated that he said to Allah's Messenger (p), "We come from a locality populated by the People of the Scripture (who were Christians); can we eat from their dishes? The Prophet (p) replied, 'do not eat from them, unless you do not find anything else to eat with. In that case, wash these (utensils) and eat from them'.² In another version of the above hadith, the reason is given why the Prophet (p) forbade some of the Companions from using the (unwashed or inadequately washed) utensils of the *Ahl al-Kitab* of that

¹ Muhammad At-Tahir Ibn 'Ashur, *At-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir*, vol.4, p.220; Muhammad bin Isa Al-Tirmidhi, *Al Jami' As-Sahih* (Sunan At-Tirmidhi), Jami' At-Turath Al-'Araby, Beirut, vol.4. p.133; Ibn 'Atiyyah, *Sharh Bulughul Al-Maram*, The Standing committee of Academic Research and Issuing Fatwah (Saudi) compiled by: Ahmad bn Abdur-Razzaq Ad-Dawaish. Verdict no. (3262)

² *Bukhari*, hadith no.5488; *Muslim*, hadith no. 1930

particular locality. The version reads: "...and they (the Christians of that area) used to cook pork and drink wine".³

This means that the *Ahl al-Kitab* referred to in the hadith concerned were Christians who used to cook pork and drink wine using their utensils.⁴ This is the reason for the prohibition of using such utensils. If Muslims did not find other cleaner utensils to use, then they would wash and use these as taught by the Prophet (p).

The fact that the Prophet (p) and his Companions ate on numerous occasions from plates and utensils used by various non-Muslims which were clean, implies that the concern with the utensils is primarily that of cleanliness. In fact, when the Prophet (p) and his Companions ate from such plates, there is no record of him asking for a different plate or requiring that the plate be washed again by Muslims before use.

While this hadith has been understood by some to either discourage or prohibit the use of the utensils of non-Muslims, Ahmad bin Hanbal holds that such dishes are lawful to use even if it is known that they were formerly tainted by impurity.⁵

This conclusion is also arrived at from an authentic hadith where Allah's Messenger (p) had a neighbour who was Persian (a Zoroastrian/Magian), and he was an expert in the preparation of soup (*maraq*). He prepared the soup for Allah's Messenger (p) and then came to him to invite him (to that feast). The Prophet (p) said, "Here is Aisha (and you should also invite her to the meal)." The Persian said, "No!"

³ Ibn Atiyyah, *Shar Bulugul Maram*, Al-Maktabah Ash-Shamilah 3.13.

⁴ Ibn Atiyyah, *Shar Bulugul Maram*, Al-Maktabah Ash-Shamilah 3.13.

⁵ See Ibn Qudama, *Al-Mughni fi Fiqh al-Imam Ahmad*, Dar al-Fikr, Beirut, 1405, vol.1, p.97; Mansur bin Yunus bin Idris al-Bahuti, *Al-Rawdh al-Murbi' Sharh Zaad al-Mustaqni'*, Riyadh, 1390, vol.1, p.31; <http://en.islamtoday.net/artshow-381-3281.htm> (accessed 09/06/1017)

(implying that she was not invited), then Allah's Messenger also said, "No! (then I cannot join the feast)." He (the Persian) returned another time to invite him, and Allah's Messenger said, "She (Aisha) is also here." He said, "No!" whereupon Allah's Messenger also said, "No" (and declined his offer). He (the Persian) returned once more to invite him, and Allah's Messenger (p) again said, "She is also here." He (the Persian) said, "Yes" on the third occasion. Then he accepted his invitation, and both of them set out and went to his house. ⁶

It is also narrated from Jabir who said, "We used to go on military expeditions with Allah's Messenger (p), and acquire the dishes and drinking vessels of the polytheists. We would use these and did not consider doing so to be objectionable."⁷

In addition, a verdict (fatwa) by the Standing Committee of Academic Research and Issuing of *Fatwah* (of Saudi Arabia) says: "...You are allowed to eat from what your Christian friend gives you, either in his house or anywhere else if you know that the food itself is not prohibited (*haram*) or if you are ignorant of its lawfulness. This is because the norm is that it is permissible until proven otherwise. The fact that the giver (of the food) is a Christian does not make it *haram* because Allah permits food of *Ahl al-Kitab* for us".⁸

The hadith about the Persian host of the Prophet (p) and Aisha, the numerous other instances of the Prophet (p) and his companions eating from the plates and utensils

⁶ *Sahih Muslim*, hadith no.958 in Alim 6.0

⁷ *Musnad Ahmad*, hadith no.15053; *Sunan Abu Dawud*, hadith no. 3838; *Al-Baihaqi*, hadith no.129

⁸Standing committee of Academic Research and Issuing Fatwah, by Ahmad bn Abdur-Razzaq Ad-Darwaish. Verdict no.3262.

of non-Muslims, and this fatwa, assume that eating the food of people of other faiths in their own houses would naturally imply the permissibility and use of their own utensils too.

Muslims in the past did not, and those today are not expected to be moving around carrying their own utensils when visiting people of other faiths!