

Treating patients with Snake Oil and selling it

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allaah, the Most Merciful, the Bestower of Mercy

Question: A kind of oil called Zayt Al-Hayyah (snake oil) is currently being traded in the market. It is used to cure baldness or hair loss. So, what is the ruling regarding such a substance? May Allaah reward you.

Answer: All praise is due to Allaah, the Lord of the Worlds. Peace and blessing be upon whom Allaah sent as a mercy to the Worlds, upon his Family, his Companions and his Brothers until the Day of Resurrection.

If the oil is actually extracted from the snake, then the latter is like the mouse and insects; they are counted among impure and reprehensible animals which are unanimously forbidden to be eaten and to treat patients therewith, pursuant to the verse in which Allaah عز وجلّ says:

وَيُجِلُّ لَهُمُ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَيُحَرِّمُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْخَبَائِثَ

[He allows them as lawful At-Tayyibaat (i.e. all good and lawful as regards things, deeds, beliefs, persons and foods), and prohibits them as unlawful Al-Khabaa'ith (i.e. all evil and unlawful as regards things, deeds, beliefs, persons and foods)]¹

And according to the jurisprudential rule that says: "The prohibition follows that which is evil, reprehensible and harmful". Ibn Taymeeyah رحمه الله said: "Eating Al-Khabaa'ith (evil and reprehensible food) as well as eating snakes and scorpions is forbidden according to the unanimous agreement of the Muslims. So, whoever eats them and makes them permissible, should turn to Allaah in repentance; otherwise he should be killed; and whoever believes in their prohibition but even so he eats them, then he is deemed a wicked person [religiously] and a disobedient to Allaah and His Messenger".²

This being said, all that which is forbidden to be touched or approached such as the impurities, it is equally forbidden to be eaten or getting a benefit thereof by using it as an ointment or a remedy; indeed: "When Allaah عز وجلّ prohibits benefitting from something, He prohibits being compensated for that benefit"³, pursuant to the hadeeth of the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم: "May Allaah curse the Jews, for they sold fat and ate its price after Allaah had made it

¹ Soorah al-A'raaf [7:157]

² See: "Majmoo' Al-Fataawaa" of Ibn Taymeeyah (11/609).

³ See: "Al-Fataawaa Al-Kubraa" of Ibn Taymeeyah (3/125) and "I'laam Al-Muwaqqi'een" of Ibn Al-Qayyim (3/146).

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unlawful for them. Indeed, when Allaah prohibits a people from eating something, He prohibits its price"⁴.

Yet if the term Zayt (oil) is added to Al-Hayyah (the snake) from the perspective of naming not reality, i.e., the oil is extracted from At-Tayyibaat (lawful substances) such as the oils extracted from plants or pure animals which do not cause any harm, then it is permissible to benefit from such oil by eating, using it as an ointment and a remedy, and by selling it, according to His Saying عزّ وجلّ:

يَسْأَلُونَكَ مَاذَا أُحِلَّ لَهُمْ قُلْ أُحِلَّ لَكُمْ الطَّيِّبَاتُ

[They ask you what is lawful for them (as food). Say: "Lawful unto you are At-Tayyibaat [all kinds of Halaal (lawful – good) foods which Allaah has made lawful]"⁵

It is also permissible to use it in performing acts of obedience not those of disobedience, according to the verse in which Allaah عزّ وجلّ says:

لَيْسَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ جُنَاحٌ فِيمَا طَعَمُوا

[Those who believe and do righteous good deeds, there is no sin on them for what they ate]⁶

Obviously, the believers have to thank Allaah for it, according to His Saying عزّ وجلّ:

ثُمَّ لَتُسْأَلُنَّ يَوْمَئِذٍ عَنِ النَّعِيمِ

[Then on that Day you shall be asked about the delights (you indulged in, in this world)]⁷

That is to say you shall be asked whether or not you thanked Allaah for the bounties He bestowed upon you.

The perfect knowledge belongs to Allaah عزّ وجلّ; and our last prayer is all the praises and thanks are to Allaah, the Lord of the Worlds, and prayers of Allaah are to Muhammad and his Family, Companions and Brothers until the Day of Resurrection.

Algiers on: Ramadhaan the 2nd, 1429 H Corresponding to September the 2nd, 2008 G.

⁴ Reported by Ahmad (4/95) and by Aboo Dawood (3488), from the hadeeth of Ibn 'Abbaas رضي الله عنهما. The Hadeeth is judged authentic by Ahmad Shaakir in his recension of "Musnad Ahmad" (4/347), and by Al-Albaanee in "Ghaayat al-Maraam" (318).

⁵ Soorah al-Maa'idah [5:4]

⁶ Soorah al-Maa'idah [5:93]

⁷ Soorah at-Takaathur [102:8]