

Food and Food Waste in the Qur’ān: A Thematic Approach

ALI ASGHAR LAMUWALA*
UMAIR MAHMOOD SIDDIQUI**

Abstract

Food waste is a pressing global issue with profound environmental, economic, and social consequences. The Qur’ān, which reveres food as a divine blessing, provides ethical and practical insights into addressing this challenge. This paper thematically examines the Qur’ānic view of food as a necessity of human beings and its provision by Allah. It also explores Qur’ānic guidance on food waste mitigation by identifying its drivers and proposing solutions rooted in the scripture. For instance, the abundance of food and overproduction have been identified as drivers of food waste by the Qur’ān. Other contributors include spoilage due to natural and anthropogenic factors, such as negligence in resource management. Moreover, the study examines Qur’ānic solutions for mitigation, emphasizing the role of moderate and mindful consumption, source reduction, charity, repurposing, and composting. Mindful consumption has also been promoted through many of the Qur’ānic injunctions and relevant strategies, such as preparing food by one’s own hands to foster a deeper appreciation for sustenance, thereby mitigating waste. The analysis of tafsīr literature reveals specific instances where sufficiency of food has been prioritized over excess, promoting sustainable food choices. Previous research has dealt with the Islamic perspectives of food waste, but a thorough study, especially based on scriptural insights, remains underexplored. This study addresses this gap by thematically examining the Qur’ānic verses that highlight a profound concern for food waste mitigation. The findings hold particular relevance for Muslim societies grappling with excessive food waste, emphasizing the growing importance of religious approaches in addressing this critical issue, especially in Muslim societies.

Keywords

Qur’ān, food, thematic study, waste, mitigation, *tafsīr*.

Introduction

Food is one of the most fundamental components for sustaining human life. Thus, access to an adequate supply of food is the most basic of

* PhD Scholar, Department of Islamic Learning, University of Karachi, Pakistan.

** Assistant Professor, Department of Islamic Learning, University of Karachi, Pakistan.

human needs and rights.¹ Wasting food hinders the food security of 8.9 per cent of the world population and results in multiple economic, social, and environmental problems. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, the global volume of food waste is estimated to be 1.6 billion tonnes of primary product equivalents, of which the wastage for the edible part amounts to 1.3 billion tonnes.²

Qur'ānic teachings are abundant on the reverence of food and its conservation. Despite this, it is ironic to state that some of the Muslim countries face acute problems of food waste. Not only does this contradict Islamic principles, but it also negatively affects those nations' natural and economic resources. Taking the example of Saudi Arabia alone, the Saudi Grains Organization (SAGO) has estimated that thirty-three per cent of food is wasted annually in Saudi Arabia, costing the kingdom over SR40 billion.³ This is despite the country's scarce arable lands and limited resources of water and labour. Moreover, the problem is exacerbated on the eve of Islamic celebrations. A study by the Economist Intelligence Unit in 2016 assessed that during Ramaḍān, 1.8 kg of additional food was wasted in the UAE; a staggering increase of sixty-seven per cent as compared to the wastage in other months.⁴ A study by Masdar, a renewable-energy firm in Abu Dhabi, revealed that only fifty-three per cent of the food served at *iftār* buffets during Ramaḍān is actually consumed, with the rest typically being wasted.⁵

Time and again, studies and surveys have indicated an uptick in the squander of food in these seasons. Investigating the Islamic perspective on food waste, especially as defined in the Qur'ān, is, therefore, necessary to raise awareness among Muslims and to propose practical solutions to the situation.

¹ Shelley McGuire, review of *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2015: Meeting the 2015 International Hunger Targets; Taking Stock of Uneven Progress*, by FAO, IFAD, and WFP, *Advances in Nutrition* 6, no. 5 (2015): 623–24, <https://doi.org/10.3945/an.115.009936>.

² FAO, *Global Food Losses and Food Waste: Extent, Causes and Prevention* (Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 2011).

³ Fahad al-Zahrani, "Saudis Waste 33% of Food Each Year: KSA Loses SR40 Billion Annually from Waste," *Arab News*, April 7, 2020, accessed October 12, 2022, <https://arab.news/nm5zn>.

⁴ "Arab States Waste Heaps of Food during Ramadan," *The Economist*, May 23, 2019, accessed October 10, 2024, <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2019/05/23/arab-states-waste-heaps-of-food-during-ramadan>.

⁵ *Ibid.*

A considerable body of research has explored Islamic environmental ethics and its broader implications for sustainability. Ahmad and others, for instance, present a comprehensive overview of Islamic environmental ethics, arguing that the theocentric worldview inherent in Islamic teachings fosters a heightened sense of human responsibility towards the protection of the environment.⁶ Similarly, Aadil and others synthesize data from the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* corpus to elucidate the Islamic perspective on the human-nature relationship, particularly in the context of sustainability.⁷

In parallel, several empirical studies have examined the role of religiosity in influencing food waste behaviours. Asyari and others conducted a survey involving 443 students at State Islamic Religious Colleges (SIRCs) to investigate the impact of religiosity on their intention to avoid food waste.⁸ Elhoushy and Jang also found that higher levels of religiosity were associated with a greater inclination to reduce food waste, advocating for the integration of religion-based interventions in policy and marketing strategies.⁹ Another study examined food waste through the dual lenses of Islamic values and Arab hospitality, suggesting that religious teachings could be strategically leveraged to address food waste.¹⁰ Similarly, a study conducted in Lebanon, which included Muslim, Druze, and Christian restaurant patrons, found that individuals with stronger religious affiliations were generally less likely to waste food.¹¹

Further, a limited number of studies have specifically addressed food waste from an Islamic perspective. For example, Azrina discusses

⁶ Ahmad Abedi-Sarvestani and Mansoor Shahvali, "Environmental Ethics: Toward an Islamic Perspective," *American-Eurasian J. Agric. & Environ. Sci.* 3, no. 4 (2008): 609-17.

⁷ Aadil Gulzar et al., "Environmental Ethics towards Sustainable Development in Islamic Perspective," *Ethnobotany Research and Applications* 22 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.32859/era.22.39.1-10>.

⁸ Asyari Asyari et al., "Food Waste Behavioral Intention in Islamic Universities: The Role of Religiosity and pro-Social Behavior," *International Journal of Ethics and Systems* (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOES-10-2023-0231>.

⁹ Sayed Elhoushy and SooCheong (Shawn) Jang, "Religiosity and Food Waste Reduction Intentions: A Conceptual Model," *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 45, no. 2 (2021): 287-302, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12624>.

¹⁰ Omar Moufakkir and Busra Auzun, "Leveraging Religion to Reduce Food Waste: Examining Food Waste through the Lens of Islam and Arab Hospitality," *Preprints* (2024), <https://doi.org/10.20944/preprints202409.1659.v1>.

¹¹ Hussein F. Hassan et al., "The Influence of Religion and Religiosity on Food Waste Generation among Restaurant Clienteles," *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems* 6 (2022): 1010262, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsufs.2022.1010262>.

household food waste reduction through a broader Islamic lens.¹² Yoreh and Scharper, in a comparative theology framework, explore the religious and spiritual dimensions of food waste, including an examination of Muslim attitudes alongside those of Jews and Christians.¹³

While these studies contribute valuable insights into Islamic perspectives on food and food waste, the direct engagement with Qur'ānic scriptural evidence remains relatively underexplored. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, no existing study has employed a thematic approach to examine food waste in light of the Qur'ānic discourse as a whole, taking into account relevant verses concerning food, sustenance, and wastage. This study seeks to address that gap by undertaking a thematic analysis of Qur'ānic verses related to food and food waste, and argues its necessity for comprehensively understanding the Qur'ānic guidance on food-related ethics and its broader implications within Islamic religiosity and sustainability discourse.

Thematic interpretation of the Qur'ān, known in Arabic as *al-tafsīr al-mawḍū'ī*, is a modern exegetical approach that seeks to study the Qur'ān by focusing on specific themes or subjects. Unlike traditional *tafsīr*, which typically follows the sequence of verses, thematic exegesis systematically gathers all Qur'ānic verses relevant to a particular theme, analyses them in their respective contexts, and synthesizes a coherent understanding of the Qur'ānic vision on the issue.¹⁴ Thematic interpretation does not seek to replace classical exegetical tradition but complements it by shifting the focus from textual sequence to conceptual unity. It thus enhances the Qur'ān's applicability in academic, interreligious, and interdisciplinary discourses. It is particularly relevant to understanding the Qur'ān's treatment of key existential and socio-ethical matters, particularly those that transcend historical and cultural contexts. Among such challenges is the issue of food waste. The thematic approach of this study identifies patterns of divine guidance as a solution to food waste.

This study systematically catalogues Qur'ānic verses related to food and food waste, while analysing the interconnections and interplay among these verses within their broader scriptural and ethical contexts.

¹² Azrina Sobian, "Household Food Waste Reduction: An Islamic Perspective," *TAFHIM: IKIM Journal of Islam and the Contemporary World* 15, no. 2 (2022): 1-21, <https://doi.org/10.56389/tafhim.vol15no2.4>.

¹³ Christian John Reynolds et al., eds., *Routledge Handbook of Food Waste* (London: Routledge, 2020), 55-64, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429462795>.

¹⁴ Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'ān*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2013).

To uncover the exegetical depth and historical nuances embedded in these verses, classical and modern *tafsīr* literature has been consulted, offering insights into the interpretive traditions that inform Qur'ānic discourse on sustenance. By first establishing the Qur'ān's overarching perspective on food—its purpose, provision, and ethical use—the study transitions to examine verses specifically addressing wastefulness and excess. This thematic method not only facilitates a coherent understanding of Qur'ānic guidance on food-related issues but also renders the discourse applicable to contemporary challenges. In doing so, it offers new interpretive avenues for addressing the global problem of food waste through the ethical and spiritual lens of the Qur'ān.

Qur'ānic Approach to Food and Sustenance

This section explores the Qur'ānic perspective on food and sustenance through a thematic lens, drawing together relevant verses to present a holistic understanding of the role of food in human life and divine provision. The Qur'ān considers food not merely as nourishment, but a symbol of Allah's care and a reflection of human dependence. The subtopics discuss food as Allah's provision, its essentiality for human survival, its inherent connection to human nature, its deeply personal significance, and the Qur'ānic emphasis on its timely and purposeful provision. Together, these themes illustrate the ethical and spiritual dimensions of food in the Qur'ānic worldview.

Food as Allah's Bounty and Provision

The Qur'ān provides profound insights into the role of food as a divine provision, framing it as an essential blessing bestowed by Allah for the sustenance of all creation. This understanding is fundamental to Islamic theology, where food is viewed not only as a means of survival but also as a symbol of divine mercy and beneficence. The Qur'ān repeatedly highlights food as one of the innumerable bounties that demand gratitude, mindfulness, and responsible consumption. For instance, the Qur'ān instructs believers: “O you who have believed, eat from the good things which We have provided for you and be grateful to Allah if it is [indeed] Him that you worship.”¹⁵ This verse not only emphasizes the lawful and wholesome nature of sustenance but also establishes gratitude as an intrinsic part of consuming food. Gratitude, in the Islamic tradition, is not merely a verbal expression but encompasses mindful practices that include avoiding extravagance and wastage. Another verse reinforces the concept of sustenance as a divine gift by recounting the blessings granted to the people of Sheba: “Eat from the provision of your Lord and be grateful to Him. A good land [you have], and a forgiving

¹⁵ Qur'ān 2:172.

Lord.”¹⁶ This verse underscores the intertwining of sustenance and gratitude, emphasizing the ideal relationship between enjoying Allah’s provisions and recognizing His mercy. It also implicitly warns against ingratitude, which can manifest in the neglectful treatment of food, such as wastefulness.

Food as a Basic Human Necessity

The gratitude becomes very important in the light of the Qur’ānic view of the indispensability of food for human sustenance. For instance, the Qur’ān informs that “on the Day the earth will be replaced by another earth.”¹⁷ Expounding on its meaning to Abrash al-Kalbī, Imam Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Bāqir (d. 114/732) said that the earth would transform into pure white bread, from which people would eat until the judgment was completed. Upon hearing this, al-Abrash questioned how people could be concerned with eating on such a critical day. Imam Bāqir replied that even those in hell, despite being consumed with the torment of divine punishment, would eat from the tree of Zaqqūm and drink boiling water.¹⁸ Thus, it is more likely that humans, even during the Day of Judgment, will still require sustenance. Imam Bāqir further explained that the need for food was intrinsic to human nature, as the son of Adam was created hollow—possessing a stomach that constantly demands to be filled. Thus, he affirmed that the necessity of food was a fundamental characteristic of human nature, one that endures even in the life hereafter.¹⁹

In the Qur’ānic narrative of Prophet Moses (peace be on him), it is mentioned that after he had watered the flocks of two Midianite women, he “withdrew to the shade and said, ‘My Lord, indeed I am in need of whatever good You would send down to me.’”²⁰ Many exegetes have interpreted the term *khayr* (good) in this verse as a reference to food, which Prophet Moses requested from Allah due to his dire need at that moment.²¹

Food as a Fundamental Human Trait

The indispensability of food, as highlighted above, establishes eating as one of the most fundamental human characteristics. The Qur’ān utilizes this trait as evidence to underscore the mortality and non-divinity of

¹⁶ Ibid., 34:15.

¹⁷ Ibid., 14:48.

¹⁸ Ibid., 56:52-55.

¹⁹ Al-Qāḍī al-Nu’mān b. Muḥammad, *Da’ā’im al-Islām* (Mumbai: Dā’irat al-Ṭab’ wa ’l-Nashr, Aljamea-tus-Saifiyah, 2015), 2:106; Ḥusayn b. Mas’ūd al-Baghawī, *Ma’ālim al-Tanzīl* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma’rifah, 1989), 6:201.

²⁰ Qur’ān 28:24.

²¹ Al-Baghawī, *Ma’ālim al-Tanzīl*, 6:201.

human beings. For instance, the Qur'ān refers to the eating habits of Prophet Jesus (peace be on him) and his mother Mary (peace be on her) to affirm their humanity. This act of consuming food is presented as a definitive marker of their non-divinity: "The Maseeh, son of Marium, was not but a messenger; messengers have passed on before him. And his mother was truthful. They both used to eat food. See how We make the signs clear to them; then see how they are deluded."²²

The Qur'ān further emphasizes this fundamental human trait in the context of all prophets, highlighting their shared human need for sustenance: "And We did not send before you, [O Muhammad], any of the messengers except that they ate food and walked in the markets."²³ In another verse, the Qur'ān states about the prophets, "And We did not make them bodies that did not eat food, nor were they immortal."²⁴

These verses unequivocally affirm that neither the prophets nor any other human beings are exempt from the basic human requirement of consuming food. It highlights that they were mortal and subject to the same needs as all humans, refuting any notion of divine, food-independent existence.

In contrast, the Qur'ān often highlights the non-humanity of divine or inanimate entities by noting their non-consumption of food. One such instance is the encounter of Prophet Abraham (peace be on him) with angels who had visited him to inform him about both the glad tidings of a son, Issac (peace be on him), and the impending destruction of the people of Prophet Lot (peace be on him). Unaware of their celestial nature, he mistook them for human guests and, following the natural human expectation of hospitality, offered them a roasted calf as described in the following verse: "And he did not delay in bringing them a roasted calf. But when he saw their hands not reaching for it, he felt uneasy with them and became apprehensive of them."²⁵ The angels' refusal to eat demonstrated their metaphysical nature, which transcends human needs such as hunger and thirst.

Conversely, narrating the encounter of Prophet Abraham with idols, the Qur'ān uses the inability of idols to consume food to expose their inherent impotence and futility as objects of worship and divinity. The Qur'ān records his words as follows: "Then he turned to their idols and said, 'Will you not eat?'"²⁶ The idols' inability to eat underscored their

²² Qur'ān 5:75.

²³ Ibid., 25:20.

²⁴ Ibid., 21:8.

²⁵ Ibid., 11:69.

²⁶ Ibid., 37:91.

man-made nature, illustrating their incapacity to sustain themselves, let alone their worshippers.

Collectively, these Qur'ānic examples highlight the centrality of food consumption in defining humanity and mortality. By distinguishing physical beings from spiritual or inanimate entities, the Qur'ān highlights the intrinsic connection between eating and human existence, ultimately emphasizing food as a fundamental human trait.

Food as a Profoundly Personal Aspect of Human Experience

In addition to being a fundamental human trait, the Qur'ān considers food as a deeply personal aspect of human experience. This is the reason that foretelling about food was chosen by Prophet Jesus and Prophet Joseph (peace be on them) to establish that they indeed received divine revelation.

Prophet Jesus demonstrated his prophethood by revealing knowledge of the food people consumed and stored in their homes.²⁷ Similarly, when Prophet Joseph was asked by his two prison companions about the interpretation of their respective dreams, he first proved his prophetic truthfulness so that, based on that, they could firmly believe in his interpretation of their dreams as well. For doing so, he chose to foretell about the food they were to receive,²⁸ detailing its type, its colour, its quantity, and whether it was poisoned or not.²⁹ Through this accurate prophecy, Prophet Joseph established his legitimacy as a recipient of divine revelation. Both examples from the Qur'ān highlight how knowledge of food and its foretelling is intertwined with profound spiritual truths, illustrating the intimate and personal nature of food in the human experience.

Assurance in Sustenance and its Prompt Provision

Recognizing food as a fundamental human necessity for sustaining life, the Qur'ān repeatedly affirms Allah's guarantee of sustenance for all of humankind. This divine assurance is often articulated with emphatic and unequivocal language, as exemplified in the following verse: "Indeed, it is Allah who is the [continual] Provider, the firm possessor of strength."³⁰ This verse not only affirms the reality of sustenance but also stresses that it is exclusively sourced from Allah, thereby reinforcing the imperative of reliance upon divine provision over excessive material

²⁷ Ibid., 3:49.

²⁸ Ibid., 12:37.

²⁹ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1420 AH), 18:455.

³⁰ Qur'ān 51:58.

pursuit. Another verse reinforces this certainty, likening the provision of sustenance to the undeniable nature of human speech: “And in the heaven is your provision and whatever you are promised. Then by the Lord of the heaven and earth, indeed, it is truth—just as [sure as] it is that you are speaking.”³¹ The analogy between sustenance and speech highlights that, just as humans are certain of their ability to speak, they should likewise be assured of their sustenance, regardless of their awareness of how and when it will arrive.

This theme is echoed in the advice of Luqmān to his son, wherein he asserts that even if a person’s sustenance is as small as a mustard seed, even if it is hidden within a rock, scattered across the heavens or the earth, Allah will bring it forth and deliver it to the one for whom it is destined.³² The Qur’ān quotes Luqmān, saying, “O my son, indeed, if one’s sustenance, even if it is the weight of a mustard seed and should be within a rock or anywhere in the heavens or in the earth, Allah will bring it forth.”³³

It may be noted that the mention of the earth alone would have sufficed, rendering the reference to the “*ṣakhrāh*” (rock) seemingly superfluous. However, Muslim exegetes have provided substantive interpretations to justify this unique inclusion. Al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273) interprets the phrase as a rhetorical intensification (*ta’kīd*), where repetition or specificity serves to heighten emphasis on the provision of sustenance rather than introduce new spatial or physical details.³⁴ This passage illustrates the omniscience and omnipotence of Allah in ensuring that everyone receives their allotted sustenance, no matter how hidden or distant it may seem. Such assurances foster a deep sense of trust in Allah (*tawakkul*), which in turn cultivates a sense of security and responsible consumption. It also helps to counter food waste due to over-acquisitions driven by human tendencies of hastiness and impulsiveness borne out of uncertainty. This inherent hastiness of humans has been identified by the Qur’ān as follows: “Man was created of haste”³⁵ and “Man is ever hasty.”³⁶ ‘Alī Zayn al-‘Ābidīn insightfully explains the root of this haste as the fear

³¹ Ibid., 51:22-23.

³² While Muslim exegetes like Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) and al-Baghawī (d. 516/1123) interpret the pronoun in “*innahā*” as referring to good or evil deeds, al-Qurṭubī offers a distinct interpretation, identifying the referent as sustenance. See Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘ li Aḥkām al-Qur’ān*, ed. Aḥmad al-Bardūnī and Ibrāhīm Aṭfīsh, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, 1964), 14:66.

³³ Qur’ān 31:16.

³⁴ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘ li Aḥkām al-Qur’ān*, 14:68.

³⁵ Qur’ān 21:37.

³⁶ Ibid., 17:11.

of missing out on provision.³⁷ This fear can trigger behaviours such as panic buying and stockpiling³⁸—particularly during times of crisis³⁹—where individuals acquire food in excessive quantities out of concern for potential scarcity. Much of this surplus food often goes unused, eventually spoiling and contributing to waste.

The significance and immediacy of food provision are exemplified through various historical incidents mentioned in the Qur’ān. This divine concern is evident from the very beginning of human existence. Upon their creation, Adam and Eve (peace be on them) were granted access to sustenance in Paradise. Allah instructed them: “O Adam! Settle—both you and your wife—in Paradise, and eat freely from wherever you wish.”⁴⁰

This Qur’ānic emphasis on food provision is also reflected in the narrative of Prophet Jonah (peace be on him). Upon his release from the belly of the fish, Allah immediately ensured his nourishment by causing a gourd vine to grow over him.⁴¹ Similarly, in the story of the People of the Cave (Aṣḥāb al-Kahf), the first thing they sought after their prolonged sleep was food.⁴² Their instinct led them to prioritize acquiring sustenance. These narratives collectively affirm that Allah’s provision of food is not only timely but also tailored to meet the immediate needs of His creation.

The Qur’ānic perspective discussed in this section thus frames food as both a divine bounty and a manifestation of Allah’s care. The Qur’ān also characterizes eating as an intrinsic human trait, signifying both human mortality and their inherent dependence on Allah. Moreover, food is presented as a deeply personal and essential aspect of human existence. For this reason, the Qur’ān highlights Allah’s assurance of sustenance and His prompt provision of food for humanity. These

³⁷ ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, *al-Ṣaḥīfah al-Sajjādiyyah* (Qom: Mu’assasat al-Anṣāriyān li ‘l-Ṭibā‘ah wa ‘l-Nashr, 1411 AH), 352.

³⁸ Cong Cao, Chengxiang Chu, and Jinjing Yang, “‘If You Don’t Buy It, It’s Gone!’: The Effect of Perceived Scarcity on Panic Buying,” *Electronic Research Archive* 31, no. 9 (2023): 5485–508, <https://doi.org/10.3934/era.2023279>.

³⁹ Rambabu Lavuri, Deepak Jaiswal, and Park Thaichon, “Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motives: Panic Buying and Impulsive Buying during a Pandemic,” *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management* 51, no. 2 (2023): 190–204, <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJRDM-01-2022-0010>.

⁴⁰ Qur’ān 2:35.

⁴¹ Ibid., 37:146.

⁴² Ibid., 18:19.

insights promote sustainable consumption and pave the way for food waste mitigation.

Analysing the Drivers and Qur'ānic Solutions for Food Waste

Identifying the underlying drivers of food waste is essential for addressing this pressing global challenge. Research indicates that food waste occurs across multiple stages of the supply chain—from production and distribution to final consumption—each with distinct contributing factors. Key drivers include overproduction, excessive consumerism, lack of awareness, and improper storage and handling.⁴³ In households, socio-economic factors, such as income, family size, and cultural norms, have been found to significantly influence food waste behaviour.⁴⁴ Furthermore, environmental factors like inadequate infrastructure, climate conditions, and policy gaps exacerbate the problem. Addressing these drivers requires a multi-faceted approach involving education campaigns, policy reform, and cultural shifts.⁴⁵ A deeper understanding of these causes enables the development of more targeted strategies for reducing food waste and promoting sustainable consumption.

The Qur'ān offers valuable insights into both the causes of food waste and the pathways to its mitigation. It addresses not only the behavioural and psychological dimensions that contribute to wastefulness but also prescribes ethical guidance and practical measures aimed at fostering awareness and responsible consumption. The following sections examine specific Qur'ānic verses that highlight the drivers of food waste and propose solutions rooted in Islamic teachings.

Food Waste Due to Unnecessary Abundance

One of the key contributors to food waste identified in the Qur'ān is the excessive abundance of food. In the Qur'ān, Allah presents “an example of a city which was safe and secure, its provision coming to it in abundance from every location, but it denied the favors of Allah. So, Allah made it taste the envelopment of hunger and fear for what they had been doing.”⁴⁶

⁴³ FAO, *Global Food Losses and Food Waste*.

⁴⁴ Karolin Schmidt and Ellen Matthies, “Where to Start Fighting the Food Waste Problem? Identifying Most Promising Entry Points for Intervention Programs to Reduce Household Food Waste and Overconsumption of Food,” *Resources, Conservation and Recycling* 139 (2018): 1-14, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resconrec.2018.07.023>.

⁴⁵ Violeta Stancu, Pernille Haugaard, and Liisa Lähteenmäki, “Determinants of Consumer Food Waste Behaviour: Two Routes to Food Waste,” *Appetite* 96 (2016): 7-17, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2015.08.025>.

⁴⁶ Qur'ān 16:122.

According to exegetical accounts, the inhabitants of this city were granted such abundance that they eventually began to misuse it in acts of arrogance and disrespect. One narration describes their use of bread, shaped like a pestle, for personal hygiene instead of stones, reflecting their disregard for divine blessings. In response, Allah sent a plague of insects smaller than locusts that destroyed their crops, leading them to a state of desperation where they resorted to eating the very bread they had once dishonoured.⁴⁷

This narrative illustrates that unchecked abundance can foster negligence and ultimately lead to wastefulness. Contemporary empirical studies attest to this observation. Research indicates that wealthier households, due to their higher purchasing power, tend to overbuy food, a practice closely linked to increased levels of waste.⁴⁸ Additionally, the lack of awareness or concern regarding the financial implications of discarded food further exacerbates the problem.⁴⁹ In contrast, households with limited financial means generally exhibit more prudent food management practices, resulting in comparatively lower levels of waste.⁵⁰

To counter the negative tendencies associated with abundance, the Qur'ān offers a framework grounded in ethical guidance and moderation.

Moderation and Balance

The Qur'ān consistently emphasizes moderation (*i'tidāl*) as a virtue and condemns excess (*isrāf*) in all forms. It identifies wasteful individuals as “brothers of devils,” underscoring the moral implications of such behaviour. In one striking verse, Allah states, “Indeed, the wasteful are brothers of the devils, and ever has Satan been to his Lord ungrateful.”⁵¹ This verse underscores the ethical dimensions of wastefulness, associating it with satanic ingratitude and spiritual deviance. Conversely, moderation is portrayed as a sign of moral uprightness, “And the servants of the most merciful are . . . those who, when they

⁴⁷ Al-Nu'mān, *Da'ā'im al-Islām*, 2:113.

⁴⁸ Robin Osner, “Food Wastage,” *Nutrition & Food Science* 82, no. 4 (1982): 13-16, <https://doi.org/10.1108/eb058904>; Brook Lyndhurst, Jayne Cox, and Phil Downing, *Food Behaviour Consumer Research: Quantitative Phase* (2007), <https://www.wrap.ngo/sites/default/files/2020-12/Food-behaviour-consumer-research-quantitative-phase.pdf>.

⁴⁹ David Evans, “Blaming the Consumer – Once Again: The Social and Material Contexts of Everyday Food Waste Practices in Some English Households,” *Critical Public Health* 21, no. 4 (2011): 429-40, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09581596.2011.608797>.

⁵⁰ Mohamed Ali Mekouar, “Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO),” *Yearbook of International Environmental Law* 24, no. 1 (2013): 587-602, <https://doi.org/10.1093/yiel/yvu027>.

⁵¹ Qur'ān 17:27.

spend, are neither extravagant nor stingy, but are ever, between that, [justly] moderate.”⁵² This emphasis on moderation is particularly significant in sustainable food consumption, where the balance between abundance and restraint plays a critical role. Notably, out of the four instances in which the Qur’ān admonishes wastefulness, two specifically pertain to food. Allah commands, “O children of Adam, take your adornment at every masjid, and eat and drink, but be not excessive. Indeed, He likes not those who commit excess.”⁵³ At another instance, Allah states, after mentioning his bounty of providing humans with food, “Eat of [each of] its fruit when it yields and give its due [*zakāh*] on the day of its harvest. And be not excessive. Indeed, He does not like those who commit excess.”⁵⁴

These verses clearly indicate the Qur’ān’s firm commitment to mitigating food waste and promoting sustainable consumption practices. Empirical studies reinforce these Qur’ānic teachings. Research has shown that overconsumption not only leads to significant food waste but also contributes to environmental degradation through increased greenhouse gas emissions and resource depletion.⁵⁵ Hence, sustainable food consumption is critical for environmental conservation.⁵⁶ Aligning modern sustainability frameworks with Qur’ānic principles of moderation can thus offer a spiritually enriched and ethically grounded approach to combating food waste.

Source Reduction

Abundance of food can be manifested in various forms, one being the overproduction of crops. Around the world, there are various reported instances where farmers have to destroy their own harvest and dump millions of litres of overproduced milk. The practice is not limited to affluent, developed countries;⁵⁷ even in highly impoverished countries

⁵² Ibid., 25:67.

⁵³ Ibid., 7:31.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 6:141.

⁵⁵ Paola Garrone et al., “Food Waste Reduction: Empirical Findings from the Italian Food Supply Chain” (2012), available at SSRN, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2109587>.

⁵⁶ Iris Vermeir et al., “Environmentally Sustainable Food Consumption: A Review and Research Agenda from a Goal-Directed Perspective,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 11 (2020), <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01603>.

⁵⁷ Danielle Wiener-Bronner, “Why Farmers Are Dumping Their Milk,” *CNN Business*, April 15, 2020, accessed December 17, 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/04/15/business/milk-dumping-coronavirus/index.html>.

like Pakistan, mature fruit-bearing vegetable crops are systematically rotated by farmers.⁵⁸

The Qur'ān implicitly proposes source reduction—a strategy that addresses food waste at its point of origin—as a preventive measure. The practice discussed above parallels exactly the parable of a lady described by the Qur'ān in the following verse: “And do not be like the woman who untwisted her spun thread after it had become strong, turning it into loose fibers.”⁵⁹ This verse is a metaphor for a foolish woman who would spin thread, then twist it in the opposite direction, causing it to unravel and spoil.⁶⁰ Thus, the Qur'ān forbids such wasteful investments of personal effort, especially in actions that must later be undone due to poor planning or flawed execution. Interpreted within the framework of sustainability, this verse implicitly advocates for source reduction—minimizing waste at its origin—as a key strategy in addressing food waste.

Source reduction holds significant practical implications. For instance, agricultural production can be calibrated more closely to actual consumption needs, thereby preventing surplus and spoilage. At the consumer level, supermarkets and food companies can eliminate marketing strategies that encourage over-acquisition, such as “Buy one get one free” (BOGOF) promotions.⁶¹

Notably, some governments have taken proactive steps to implement such measures. In Denmark, BOGOF offers on food items have been restricted to discourage unnecessary purchasing.⁶² Supermarket chains such as REMA 1000 have eliminated bulk discounts and downsized certain products—most notably reducing their house-brand bread loaves by 40-50 per cent—in response to statistics indicating that bread alone accounts for approximately 29,000 tonnes of annual food waste.⁶³ These policy shifts reflect a practical application of the Qur'ānic principle of

⁵⁸ See Khalid Saeed Wattoo and Waqar Ahmad, “The Paradox of Bountiful Harvests,” *Dawn*, April 29, 2024, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1830173>.

⁵⁹ Qur'ān 16:92.

⁶⁰ Al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān b. Muḥammed, *Sharḥ al-Akhbār fī Faḍā'il al-A'immah al-Aṭḥār* (Mumbai: Aljamea-tus-Saifiyah Press, 1427 AH), 11:67.

⁶¹ “Supermarket ‘Bogof’ Deals Criticised over Food Waste,” *BBC News* (UK), April 6, 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-26908613>.

⁶² Jessica Aschemann-Witzel, Ilona De Hooge, and Anne Normann. “Consumer-Related Food Waste: Role of Food Marketing and Retailers and Potential for Action,” *Journal of International Food & Agribusiness Marketing* 28, no. 3 (2016): 271-85, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08974438.2015.1110549>.

⁶³ Second Harvest, “How Denmark Reduces Food Waste by Changing Consumer Habits,” *Second Harvest Blog*, February 6, 2024, <https://blog.secondharvest.ca/2024/02/06/how-denmark-reduces-food-waste-by-changing-consumer-habits/>.

source reduction and affirm the relevance of scriptural guidance in shaping sustainable consumption practices.

Overcoming “Good Provider” Tendency

A related issue to overproduction is the social and cultural norm of overcooking, particularly during gatherings, weddings, and household meals, where preparing excessive quantities of food is equated with hospitality and generosity. However, this practice often leads to considerable waste. Prophet Muḥammad addressed this tendency in a *ḥadīth*, “Food for one person is sufficient for two, and food for two is sufficient for four.”⁶⁴ This statement encourages a mindset of moderation and sufficiency, discouraging excess and waste in food preparation. An illustrative example of this principle appears in the narrative of the People of the Cave. When they awoke from their long sleep, one of them said, “So send one of you with this silver coin of yours to the city and let him look to which is the best and most sufficient of food, and bring you provision from it, and let him be cautious. And let no one be aware of you.”⁶⁵

Al-Qurṭubī interprets the term *azkā* in this verse as referring to food that is both pure and sufficient for more individuals than initially intended. The People of the Cave were cautious about being discovered and therefore sought food in modest quantities to avoid raising suspicion. This prudence ensured that the provision appeared to serve only a small group, thus reducing the likelihood of their location being revealed. The chosen food—believed by some scholars to be rice—demonstrated its sufficiency by meeting the needs of more people than anticipated.⁶⁶

This Qur’ānic injunction is especially pertinent in the context of preparing *iftār* meals during Ramaḍān—a period that, paradoxically, often sees a significant rise in food waste.⁶⁷ By emphasizing that a modest amount of food should suffice, the verse implicitly discourages the preparation of excessive quantities that are unlikely to be consumed. The essence of this verse can also be applied to reduced plate size and portion size at feasts. Oversized portions driven by the use of large plates often result in unfinished plates, significantly contributing to food waste. Reducing plate size and portion size decreases the total calorie

⁶⁴ Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, kitāb al-ashribah, bāb faḍīlat al-muwāsāh fi ’l-ṭa’ām al-qalīl. . . .

⁶⁵ Qur’ān 18:19.

⁶⁶ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi’ li Ahkām al-Qur’ān*, 10:375.

⁶⁷ “Arab States Waste Heaps of Food during Ramadan.”

intake and food waste.⁶⁸ In one such study focused on the effect of size on food waste among hotel guests in Norway, the plate diameter was reduced from 24 to 21 cm at buffets in 7 hotels. The study found that, on average, food waste was reduced by almost 20%.⁶⁹ These findings reinforce the Qur'ānic call for resource-conscious behaviour, demonstrating how practical changes rooted in ethical guidance can yield substantial food waste reduction.

Charity as a Response to Surplus

Despite best efforts to reduce overproduction or over-preparation, surplus can still occur due to unpredictable factors such as economic downturns, supply chain disruptions, or reduced consumer demand. The Qur'ān addresses this reality by encouraging charity as a means to ensure that surplus is channelled towards social good rather than wasted. A clear directive is found in the following verse: “And give its due [*zakāh*] on the day of its harvest, and do not be excessive. Indeed, He does not love those who commit excess.”⁷⁰ This verse directs producers to give a portion of their yield at the point of harvest, highlighting a proactive approach to surplus management. By doing so, waste is prevented at the source, while food is redirected to those in need—simultaneously promoting sustainability and social equity.

Keeping the factors discussed above in mind can help alleviate unnecessary abundance in its various forms and also propose solutions for effectively dealing with it. The Qur'ānic injunction aligns with many prevalent practices in line with surplus food charity. For instance, Feedback's Gleaning Network mobilizes volunteers to harvest food left unharvested in the field on farms for charitable redistribution.⁷¹

Spoilage as a Contributor to Food Loss and Waste

In addition to abundance, spoilage constitutes a major cause of food loss and waste, particularly due to the perishable nature of many food items. Spoilage results from biochemical changes—often induced by microbial activity—that diminish the nutritional value, texture, safety, and

⁶⁸ Marjorie R. Freedman and Carolina Brochado, “Reducing Portion Size Reduces Food Intake and Plate Waste,” *Obesity* 18, no. 9 (2010): 1864-66, <https://doi.org/10.1038/oby.2009.480>; Barbara J. Rolls, Erin L. Morris, and Liane S. Roe, “Portion Size of Food Affects Energy Intake in Normal-Weight and Overweight Men and Women,” *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 76, no. 6 (2002): 1207-13, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ajcn/76.6.1207>.

⁶⁹ Steffen Kallbekken and Håkon Sælen, “‘Nudging’ Hotel Guests to Reduce Food Waste as a Win-Win Environmental Measure,” *Economics Letters* 119, no. 3 (2013): 325-27, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econlet.2013.03.019>.

⁷⁰ Qur'ān 6:141.

⁷¹ Reynolds, *Routledge Handbook of Food Waste*, xxiv.

edibility of food.⁷² Factors such as inadequate storage, temperature fluctuations, and excessive handling further accelerate this deterioration, leading to significant losses.⁷³ Perishable items like milk are especially susceptible to spoilage if not stored properly.

The Qur'ān subtly acknowledges this perishability through its description of the rivers of Paradise. It mentions rivers of water that are “never stagnant” and rivers of milk “whose taste never changes,”⁷⁴ implicitly contrasting these eternal blessings with their earthly counterparts, which are subject to spoilage and decay. Similarly, the Qur'ānic reference to the miraculous preservation of food for one hundred years⁷⁵ serves as an allusion to the natural tendency of worldly food to spoil without divine intervention.

The spoilage may arise due to the intrinsic human trait of forgetfulness. Forgetfulness is so closely attributed to humans; it is said that the term “*insān*” (human) is etymologically linked to “*nisyān*” (forgetfulness).⁷⁶ Individuals often tend to forget the provisions they have stored until the food spoils and becomes unfit for consumption. Similarly, leftovers are frequently placed in refrigerators for future use but are subsequently forgotten or overlooked amidst other items, leading to their eventual spoilage.⁷⁷ The concept of forgetfulness, particularly in relation to food, is illustrated in the Qur'ānic anecdote of Prophet Moses and his companion:

But when they reached the junction between them, they forgot their fish, which took its course into the sea, slipping away. So when they had passed beyond it, he said to his servant, “Bring us our morning meal. We have certainly suffered in this, our journey, [much] fatigue.” He said, “Did you see when we retired to the rock? Indeed, I forgot the fish. And none made me forget it except Satan—that I should mention it. And it took its course into the sea amazingly.”⁷⁸

⁷² Luxita Sharma and Dhananjay Sharma, “Food Spoilage, Storage, and Preservation,” in *Futuristic Trends in Agriculture Engineering & Food Sciences Volume 3 Book 13*, ed. Veerabhadra Swamy et al. (n.p.: Iterative International Publisher (IIP), 2024), 37, <https://doi.org/10.58532/V3BCAG13P1CH2>.

⁷³ Lauren G. Block et al., “The Squander Sequence: Understanding Food Waste at Each Stage of the Consumer Decision-Making Process,” *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* 35, no. 2 (2016): 294, <https://doi.org/10.1509/jppm.15.132>.

⁷⁴ Qur'ān 47:15.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 2:259.

⁷⁶ Al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī, *Kitāb al-'Ayn*, ed. Maḥdī al-Makhzūmī and Ibrāhīm al-Samarrā'ī (Beirut: Dār wa Maktabat al-Hilāl, n.d.), 7:304.

⁷⁷ Anna S. Salonen, “Ordinary Overflow: Food Waste and the Ethics of the Refrigerator,” *Food and Foodways* 30, no. 3 (2022):147, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07409710.2022.2089828>.

⁷⁸ Qur'ān 18:61–63.

This Qur'ānic passage underscores the natural tendency of humans to forget and its consequences in loss of provisions, which in this case was the fish. The Qur'ānic narrative serves as an allegory for the broader issue of wastefulness arising from neglect and inattention. It also highlights that Satan, by evoking forgetfulness in humans, satiates his habit of wastefulness described in a Qur'ānic verse.⁷⁹ As it is recommended to recite “*basmalah*” to deny Satan from being a partner in the food,⁸⁰ similarly, one should also strive to be mindful of their provision and leftovers to deny Satan a chance to evoke forgetfulness, leading to food waste. Such Qur'ānic insights underscore the practical realities of food spoilage and the importance of adequate storage methods to minimize loss.

Qur'ānic Emphasis on Food Preservation

Food preservation plays a crucial role in reducing food waste by extending the shelf life of perishable items and preventing spoilage, thus allowing more efficient consumption of available food resources. Effective preservation techniques, such as canning, freezing, and drying, help retain the nutritional value and edibility of food, reducing the need for discarding surplus. Traditional methods like fermentation and pickling also offer sustainable, low-energy options to extend food's usability.⁸¹

The Qur'ān emphasizes proper storage of food, recognizing its crucial role in minimizing food loss and ensuring sustainability in food supply chains.⁸² At times, the Qur'ān has also devised practical solutions in this regard. The Qur'ān discusses the systematic preservation of honey in the context of honeybees. Before consuming nectar and producing honey, bees are first guided by divine inspiration to establish their hives in mountains, trees, or trellises constructed by humans, before indulging in honey making:

And your Lord inspired the bee, saying, “Make your homes in the mountains, in the trees, and in trellises which people construct. Then feed on all kinds of fruits and follow the paths laid down by your Lord with

⁷⁹ Ibid., 17:27.

⁸⁰ Al-Nu'mān, *Da'ā'im al-Islām*, 2:118.

⁸¹ Brian E. Roe et al., “Selection, Intake, and Plate Waste Patterns of Leftover Food Items among U.S. Consumers: A Pilot Study,” *Plos One* 15, no. 9 (2020): e0238050, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0238050>.

⁸² Rovshen Ishangulyyev, Sanghyo Kim, and Sang Lee, “Understanding Food Loss and Waste—Why Are We Losing and Wasting Food?” *Foods* 8, no. 8 (2019): 297, <https://doi.org/10.3390/foods8080297>.

ease.” From their bellies emerges a liquid of varying colors, in which there is healing for people.⁸³

The verse’s use of the preposition “then” implies sequential order, highlighting that storage—in the form of beehives—is a prerequisite for production. This prioritization ensures that the honey is well-preserved and does not spoil, preventing waste. This counsel highlights the importance of prior planning for preserving food even before production. The preservation of honey is particularly significant given its medicinal value, as highlighted in the latter part of the verse: “in which there is healing for people.” This parallels the care and attention given to preserving medicine for maintaining its optimal quality.

The importance of food preservation is also evident in Islamic practices related to *ḥajj* and the sacrificial meat offered during ‘Īd al-Aḍḥā. Before the advent of modern refrigeration, the large-scale sacrifice of animals resulted in an abundance of meat, which, in the hot climate of Arabia, was prone to spoilage. To prevent this, pilgrims traditionally dried slices of meat under the sun, a practice that gave rise to the term *Ayyām al-Tashrīq* (the Days of Sun-Drying).⁸⁴

Additionally, the day following ‘Īd al-Aḍḥā was historically called *Yawm al-Ru’ūs* (the Day of Heads), as pilgrims would consume the heads of the sacrificial animals on that day.⁸⁵ This may have been due to the difficulty in preserving the head’s components, prompting early consumption to avoid waste. Both these names and associated practices serve as implicit reminders for pilgrims to ensure that meat is either preserved or distributed efficiently.

The Qur’ān also encourages pilgrims to consume and share the sacrificial meat, emphasizing its proper utilization: “Then when their (camels) flanks have fallen, eat from it yourself and feed the one who patiently awaits, and the beggar.”⁸⁶ In alignment with this principle, Prophet Muḥammad once sacrificed 100 camels and ordered that a piece from each camel be cooked together. He then ate from the meat and drank from the broth,⁸⁷ exemplifying the practice of consuming sacrificial offerings efficiently.

A systematic approach to food storage and preservation is also exemplified in the narrative of Prophet Joseph. In his counsel to the king of Egypt, Prophet Joseph advised strategic preparation for an impending

⁸³ Qur’ān 16:68–69.

⁸⁴ Al-Nu’mān, *Da’ā’im al-Islām*, 2:553.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Qur’ān 22:36.

⁸⁷ Al-Nu’mān, *Da’ā’im al-Islām*, 2:546.

seven-year drought by storing surplus grain. The Qur'ān records his guidance as follows:

You will plant for seven years consecutively, and what you harvest, leave in its spikes, except a little from which you will eat. Then will come after that seven difficult [years] which will consume what you saved for them, except a little from which you will store.⁸⁸

The directive to retain the harvested grain in its spikes serves as an early example of natural food preservation, mitigating the risks of moisture exposure and pest infestation.⁸⁹ This practice ensured prolonged freshness and nutritional integrity, thereby securing food availability during the forecasted years of famine. This simple yet crucial instruction highlights the importance of food preservation from spoilage.

These Qur'ānic narratives emphasize food preservation as a practical necessity and a moral responsibility, whether through the structured approach of honeybees, the traditional methods used during *hajj*, or the strategic grain storage in Prophet Joseph's time.

Repurposing Spoilt Inedible Food

In situations where food becomes unfit for human consumption despite best efforts at source reduction and redistribution (as recommended in the EPA's Food Recovery Hierarchy), the Qur'ān suggests repurposing as a viable alternative. Surplus or spoiled food can be redirected for animal feed, thereby ensuring its utility within the broader food system. If food deteriorates beyond edibility even for animals, composting emerges as the most sustainable option.⁹⁰

The Qur'ān alludes to the concept of food repurposing by feeding it to animals. In the narrative of Prophet Joseph, one of the two imprisoned men recounts a dream in which birds eat bread from above his head: "And the other said, 'Indeed, I see myself carrying bread on my head, from which the birds are eating.'"⁹¹ Bread is a staple human food and is not deliberately prepared for birds. But here, albeit allegorically, it has been mentioned that it was fed to the birds, which supports the permissibility, and even desirability, of redirecting excess food to animals, especially when it would otherwise be wasted.

⁸⁸ Qur'ān 12:47-48.

⁸⁹ Hamdollah Eskandari and Abdolzahra Jalali, *Agriculture Landscape in the Holy Quran*, (2013), <https://www.cabidigitallibrary.org/doi/pdf/10.5555/20133097530>.

⁹⁰ Paola Garrone et al., "Surplus Food Recovery and Donation in Italy: The Upstream Process," *British Food Journal* 116, no. 9 (2014): 1460-77.

⁹¹ Qur'ān 12:36.

Repurposing food scraps as animal feed is a long-standing practice that helps reduce food waste while delivering essential nutrients to livestock. Additionally, research has shown that converting bread waste into animal feed is more environmentally beneficial than anaerobic digestion.⁹² However, the food provided to animals must be safe and uncontaminated, as spoiled or chemically tainted food may cause illness, even in animals.

When food is no longer fit even for animal consumption, it may still be repurposed for non-edible uses or ultimately composted. Composting breaks down organic matter into nutrient-rich material that can improve soil health, reduce the need for chemical fertilizers, and contribute to a more sustainable food system. In this way, composting not only prevents waste from contributing to environmental harm but also supports a circular economy in food production. The principles of composting align with several teachings in the Qur'ān that emphasize the cycle of life and death, and the regeneration of life from that which is dead. Allah states, "He brings the living out of the dead, and He brings the dead out of the living."⁹³ This verse reflects a profound understanding of the life cycle, where organic material that has served its purpose can be returned to the earth to nourish new life. In the context of composting, inedible food waste can be seen as dead matter that, when responsibly handled, contributes to the creation of new life by enriching the soil.

An additional Qur'ānic analogy reinforces this regenerative cycle. Referring to human creation and return to the earth, the Qur'ān states, "And Allah has caused you to grow from the earth like a plant. Then He will return you into it, and bring you forth again."⁹⁴ This analogy between human life and plant growth reinforces the idea of the cyclical nature of life, and composting mirrors this natural process. Just as humans are created from and return to the earth, composting returns food waste to the earth, facilitating the growth of new plants. This cycle supports the sustainability of both the environment and food systems, as composted material becomes a source of nourishment for future agricultural growth.

Modern waste management strategies increasingly recognize composting as a key component of sustainable environmental practice.

⁹² T. Vandermeersch et al., "Environmental Sustainability Assessment of Food Waste Valorization Options," *Resources, Conservation and Recycling* 87 (2014): 57-64, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resconrec.2014.03.008>.

⁹³ Qur'ān 30:19.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 71:17-18.

Elana and others advocate composting as an ecologically responsible solution for managing organic solid waste,⁹⁵ while Kuligowski and others highlight its role in closing the loop within circular economies.⁹⁶ These insights affirm the relevance of composting as a process consonant with the Qur'ānic worldview of life's interdependence and continuity.

Mindful Consumption for Food Waste Mitigation

While strategies such as source reduction, redistribution, animal feeding, and composting address the post-consumption stages of food waste, the Qur'ān also emphasizes the importance of preemptive spiritual and ethical attitudes—particularly mindful consumption—as a foundational principle in waste mitigation.

Reflecting on the Complex Food Production Processes

The Qur'ān critiques the indulgent and unreflective consumption of worldly pleasures exhibited by non-believers, as illustrated in the verse: “And those who disbelieve enjoy themselves and eat as cattle eat.”⁹⁷ This description underscores that such individuals consume food without a higher purpose, akin to animals that eat solely to satisfy their physical needs, devoid of any mindfulness or spiritual reflection. Furthermore, this verse can be interpreted in the context of food waste, suggesting that, like animals, these individuals exhibit a lack of concern for the implications of food waste.

Modern contributors to food waste include not only material excess but also a significant psychological and cultural disconnect from the sources and processes of food production. In modern, urbanized societies, there is often a disconnect between people and the complex, laborious, resource-intensive agricultural processes that produce their food. According to Parfitt and others, this lack of awareness contributes to food waste, as consumers are distanced from the origins of their food and its production.⁹⁸ Fischler further explains that this detachment leads

⁹⁵ Elena Elisabeta Manea et al., “Composting as a Sustainable Solution for Organic Solid Waste Management: Current Practices and Potential Improvements,” *Sustainability* 16, no. 15 (2024): 6329, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16156329>.

⁹⁶ Ksawery Kuligowski et al., “Evaluation of Kitchen Waste Recycling as Organic N-Fertiliser for Sustainable Agriculture under Cool and Warm Seasons,” *Sustainability* 15, no. 10 (2023): 7997, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15107997>.

⁹⁷ Qur'ān 47:12.

⁹⁸ Julian Parfitt, Mark Barthel, and Sarah Macnaughton, “Food Waste within Food Supply Chains: Quantification and Potential for Change to 2050,” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 365, no. 1554 (2010): 3065–81, <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2010.0126>.

to a lack of appreciation for the effort and resources involved in bringing food to the table.⁹⁹

In addressing this phenomenon, the Qur'ān encourages believers to reflect deeply on the origins and cycles of food production. The following verse provides a vivid depiction of the agricultural process:

And it is He who sends down rain from the sky, and We produce thereby the growth of all things. We produce from it greenery from which We produce grains arranged in layers. And from the palm trees - of its emerging fruit are clusters hanging low. And [We produce] gardens of grapevines and olives and pomegranates, similar yet varied.¹⁰⁰

This verse not only reveals the diversity and beauty of agricultural produce but also invites a reflective posture towards the divine origins and intricate processes involved in food creation. Similarly, the Qur'ān calls on humanity to contemplate the entire food lifecycle:

Then let mankind look at his food, how We poured down water in abundance, then We broke open the earth, splitting it, and caused to grow within it grain, and grapes and herbage, and olive trees and palm trees, and gardens of dense shrubbery, and fruit and grass, as provision for you and your grazing livestock.¹⁰¹

These verses encourage consumers to “look” at their food, urging them to consider both the complex process and the extensive resources involved in its production—from the pouring of rain to the splitting of the earth and the subsequent growth of crops. Such reflection is intended to cultivate a deep respect for food, thereby discouraging waste. This Qur'ānic emphasis is echoed in contemporary awareness campaigns aimed at mitigating food waste through educational strategies.¹⁰² The emphasis on understanding the food production process is a key theme in various awareness campaigns aimed at reducing food waste.

Modern psychological studies also support this connection. Parfitt and others found that public campaigns that highlight the complexities of food production are often effective in encouraging sustainable practices.¹⁰³ Wadhera and Capaldi-Phillips further note that sensory engagement with food—such as appreciating its visual qualities—enhances mindfulness in consumption and curbs overeating. The study

⁹⁹ Claude Fischler, “Food, Self and Identity,” *Social Science Information* 27, no. 2 (1988): 275-92, <https://doi.org/10.1177/053901888027002005>.

¹⁰⁰ Qur'ān 6:99.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 80:24-32.

¹⁰² For instance, see “Ramadan New Video 2016 I Dont Waste Your Food” directed by Al Marai, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iS_YDpGZfU4.

¹⁰³ Parfitt et al., “Food Waste within Food Supply Chains.”

also suggests ways to increase fruit and vegetable intake by enhancing their visual cues.¹⁰⁴ The Qur'ān's vivid descriptions of various fruits serve a similar purpose, aligning spiritual reflection with practical outcomes for sustainability.

Preparing One's Own Food

Another powerful method for promoting mindful consumption—and by extension, food waste reduction—is the practice of preparing one's own meals. The Qur'ān, while emphasizing that all sustenance ultimately comes from Allah, also acknowledges human effort and labour in the food preparation process. This balance is captured in the following verse: “Let them eat of the fruit, and their hands' labor. Will they not then give thanks?”¹⁰⁵

Similarly, the notion that food is not only consumed but also earned through labour fosters a deeper sense of gratitude and ethical responsibility. This Qur'ānic view is reinforced by Prophetic traditions. Prophet Muḥammad is reported to have said, “No one has ever eaten better food than what he earns from the work of his own hands. Prophet David (peace be on him) used to eat from the work of his own hands.”¹⁰⁶

The Qur'ān and *ḥadīths* emphasize the importance of personal effort in food preparation and procurement and promote mindful and sustainable food consumption. Empirical studies affirm this perspective. Strasser notes that meals prepared by oneself or by loved ones tend to be more highly valued and therefore less likely to be wasted.¹⁰⁷ Conversely, in many developed societies, there has been a marked decline in home cooking. The frequency of dining out or consuming commercially prepared takeout meals has increased substantially,¹⁰⁸ with estimates suggesting that nearly half of the U.S. food budget is now allocated to food consumed away from home.¹⁰⁹ This shift may weaken the emotional and

¹⁰⁴ Devina Wadhera and Elizabeth D. Capaldi-Phillips, “A Review of Visual Cues Associated with Food on Food Acceptance and Consumption,” *Eating Behaviors* 15, no. 1 (2014): 132-43, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eatbeh.2013.11.003>.

¹⁰⁵ Qur'ān 36:35.

¹⁰⁶ Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, kitāb al-buyū', bāb kasb al-rajul wa 'Amalihi bi yadih.

¹⁰⁷ Susan Strasser, *Waste and Want: A Social History of Trash* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1999).

¹⁰⁸ Mary Griffin, Jeffery Sobal, and Thomas A. Lyson, “An Analysis of a Community Food Waste Stream,” *Agriculture and Human Values* 26, nos. 1-2 (2009): 67-81, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-008-9178-1>.

¹⁰⁹ “USDA ERS - Food Expenditure Series,” accessed December 17, 2024, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-expenditure-series/>.

ethical connection to food, thus exacerbating patterns of wastefulness. To rebuild these connections, communities are reviving the tradition of hand-preparing food. For example, one can observe the symbolic revival of bread-making by hand within the Dawoodi Bohra community, inspired by the Qur'ānic narratives mentioned above. Some prominent personalities, like the President of Kenya and the Prime Minister of India, also symbolically participated in bread-making during their visits to community institutions.¹¹⁰ This shows that a return to Qur'ānic principles restores a meaningful connection with food, which serves as a powerful framework for reducing food waste in contemporary societies.

Conclusion

This thematic study of food and food waste in the Qur'ān has provided a deeper understanding of the multifaceted attributes of food as presented in the scripture. It has illuminated the Qur'ānic perspective on food as both a divine bounty and a fundamental aspect of human existence—symbolizing human mortality and dependence on Allah's provision.

The research highlights the Qur'ān's profound concern with the identification and mitigation of food waste. Through emphasizing values such as moderation, gratitude, and social responsibility, the Qur'ān offers comprehensive guidance that is both spiritually enriching and practically applicable for addressing food waste across various contexts.

For waste resulting from abundance, the Qur'ān advocates source reduction, responsible consumption, and charitable redistribution. Recognizing the inevitability of food spoilage, it provides practical solutions for preservation, while also suggesting the repurposing of inedible food—such as using it as animal feed or compost.

Importantly, beyond post-consumption management, the Qur'ān underscores the critical role of pre-emptive ethical attitudes, particularly mindful consumption, as foundational to waste prevention. This holistic approach integrates both ethical consciousness and practical action.

By incorporating these Qur'ānic principles into contemporary food management and policy, individuals and communities can contribute significantly to building a sustainable future. The enduring relevance of Islamic teachings to the contemporary global context offers a valuable and holistic framework for reducing food waste and conserving resources, aligned with broader sustainability goals.

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¹¹⁰ “The Handmade Roti: The significance of making roti for the Dawoodi Bohra community,” last updated September 20, 2024, <https://www.thedawoodibohras.com/the-handmade-roti-the-significance-of-making-roti-for-the-dawoodi-bohra-community/>.