

PORK

CALEB POWELL

The Koran, 2:173: “He only prohibits for you the eating of animals that die of themselves (without human interference), blood, the meat of pigs, and animals dedicated to other than God. If one is forced (to eat these), without being malicious or deliberate, he incurs no sin. God is Forgiver, Most Merciful.”

Ayesha: “I never eat marshmallows because they contain gelatin. Gelatin is made from the hooves of cows or pig.”

Ahmed Ahmed, Egyptian American comedian: “How do you know you’re a Muslim? When you drink, gamble, and have sex – but don’t eat pork.”

When I proposed to Ayesha I

hoped she shared the certainty we could overcome religious differences. A knights and princesses fairy tale of passionate and eternal love beckoned. She accepted.

Deuteronomy 14:8: “And the swine, because it divideth the hoof, yet cheweth not the cud, it is unclean unto you: ye shall not eat of their flesh, nor touch their dead carcass.”

We avoided discussions about compatible financial goals, children, location, lifestyle, and the ubiquitous mines planted between agnosticism and religion.

Dr. Zakir Naik, founder of the Mumbai-based Islamic Research Foundation (IRF): “The pig is the most shameless animal on the face

of the earth. It is the only animal that invites its friends to have sex with its mate. In America, most people consume pork. Many times after dance parties, they have swapping of wives; many say 'you sleep with my wife and I will sleep with your wife.' If you eat pigs then you behave like pigs."

Ayesha had never explicitly requested that I not eat pork in front of her, and I willfully abstained. When she was not around I compensated. Especially concerning pizza.

Woody Allen's *Stardust Memories*: "You want to do mankind a real service? Tell funnier jokes."

And if your jokes target the Jew, and if they're bleeping hilarious, you might get a call from a Hollywood entertainment attorney named Weinstein, and he'll ask if you're interested in writing a screenplay.

Sarah Silverman wrote, "Why didn't I choose to depict Mohammed having sex? The answer is simple. I don't want to get blown up by explosives. I am

afraid of angering Muslims; but not afraid of angering Jews and Christians, so I chose to depict the Judeo-Christian God."

My view of the cloven-hoofed mammal took that science, agriculture, and pharmaceuticals have solved many of the epidemiological and hygienic concerns. A vegetarian case on health or moral grounds might be worthy of polemics, but divine interventions I found problematic.

Bobby Henline: "What I want to do is to help more people than the guy who blew me up can hurt."

Henline survived an IED explosion in Iraq that saw four fellow soldiers killed. He suffered burns on 40% of his body, including on his face and head, and lost one hand and both ears. These days he works as a standup comedian.

Two weeks after I proposed, at a party, a plate of salami, cheese, and bread graced a table. I grabbed a toothpick, stabbed a few morsels, put them on my napkin, and chomped without immediate compunction. But I saw Ayesha

watching. Her reaction subtle. She became reticent. In a group she held her composure, but furtive and knowing glances, the expected flirtations, disappeared. I changed snacks.

Imam and a Priest—Priest asks, “Tell me, have you ever tried pork?”

Imam says, “Well, I have to admit—I was curious, and once I did have a bite. Or two.”

“What’d you think?”

“Pretty tasty, but I felt very guilty about it afterward. Very guilty.”

“Hmm. I see.”

Imam then asks, “What about you? You are celibate, correct?”

“Yes.”

“Have you ever, umm, you know?”

“Yes,” the Priest says, “I have sinned. I have had sex.”

Imam says, “It’s a lot better than pork, isn’t it?”

On the way home from the party she told me, “You ate sausage.”

“It was salami.”

“What’s the difference?”

Laurie Goodstein in the *New York*

Times: “As an observant Hindu, Brij Sharma considers cows sacred. He believes the gentle creatures are helpmates to human beings, and it would be as unthinkable for him to eat beef as it would for a cowboy in Montana to eat his own horse.”

Ayesha explained that *haram* and *halal*, the forbidden and permitted, had many interpretations. We enjoyed an active sex life. She had previous *haram* relationships. A divorcee and “Americanized” to a certain extent, Ayesha asked that I never again eat pig in her presence. I told her I would not.

Question: “What do you call a Muslim with a slab of ham on his head?”

Answer: “Ham’ad.”

Q: “What do you call a Muslim with two slabs on his head?”

A: “Mo’ham’ad.”

Before my employment in the United Arab Emirates I lived in a monastery in Thailand. Buddhists, of course, contemplate the ethics of food consumption and the humane slaughter of animals. Various schools have various opinions.

Buddhism universally prohibited eating tigers, crocodiles, elephants, and humans.

Every morning the monks went around a nearby village and collected alms. The locals presented gifts, including food, and the monks would give me a bowl, a combination of curry and fruit and vegetables and rice. Thousands of miles away from Ayesha, separated by time, surrounded by aphorisms of “right thought,” “all humanity suffers and suffering comes from desire,” and “pain is inevitable, suffering is optional,” I considered the disappearance and contradictory existence of true yet ephemeral love.