

382570 - What is the ruling on consuming fruit that is coated with shellac wax and carmine that are extracted from insects?

the question

The scholars say that shellac wax, and carmine which is used as a red food colouring, are najis (impure), but if what is derived from insects is najis, then honey should be haraam too, shouldn't it? If we assume that shellac wax is haraam, and it is used in most cases to coat fruit, but the Brazilian carnauba wax is also used widely to coat fruit, then when I buy fruit I do not know which type of coating it is. Is it permissible for me to assume that it is taahir (pure), noting that this plant (carnauba) is used commercially on a wide scale for coating fruit? In fact, what makes my problem more confusing is the fact that in some cases, alcohol is used to dilute shellac, and you can see traces of the insect on the fruit. Is it sufficient to check the fruit to see if there are any pieces of insect bodies on it? What is the ruling on fruits or vegetables that are coated with wax and can only be washed (scrubbed) by hand? We are sure that the wax that is used is lac gum (shellac).

Summary of answer

There is nothing wrong with eating fruits that are coated with shellac wax or in which carmine has been used, if it does not cause any harm. If there are traces of insects on the fruit, the fruit may be washed and eaten. If you wash the fruit with soap and water, or something that will dissolve the wax, or you peel the fruit, that is a good idea.

Detailed answer

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Firstly:

Shellac wax

Shellac wax is extracted from the female *Kerria laca* insect which feeds on the sap of trees, after which it secretes a sticky substance to make tunnels in which it lives. This insect is commonly found in India and Thailand. It is believed that the name of the insect is derived from the South Asian languages, in which the word lakh refers to one hundred thousand. It is believed that the reason why it is so called is the large number of insects needed to produce one kilogram of this substance. The number of insects needed to produce one kilogram of shellac varies between 50,000 and 200,000.

With regard to carmine, it is a dye that is bright red in colour. It is obtained from carminic acid, which is produced by some scale insects such as the Kermes insect and the Polish cochineal. The word carmine is used to refer to one of the shades of dark red. It may also be called Crimson Lake, Cochineal, Natural Red 4, C.I. 75470 or E120. Carminic dye is used in the manufacturing of colourings for foods, medicines and cosmetic products. It is also used in the manufacture of artificial flowers, nail polish, lipstick, magenta ink, and foodstuffs such as yoghurts and some types of juice, especially those that have an enriched red colour.

End quote from Wikipedia.

Alcohol is usually used in dyes, colours and thinners.

Secondly:

Ruling on insects if they have turned into another substance after processing

If insects are processed and turned into another substance, there is nothing wrong with adding them to food and other things, on condition that they do not cause any harm.

Similarly, a small amount is to be overlooked that could be absorbed by that to which it is added, such as alcohol when it is used for thinning or extracting colours.

It says in *Tawsiyaat Nadwah ar-Ru'yah al-Islamiyyah li ba'd al-Mashaakil at-Tibbiyyah*:

Additives in food and medicine that come from a source which is najis (impure) or haraam may be turned into a substance that is permissible according to Islamic teachings in one of two ways:

1.. *Istihalah* (transformation)

What is meant by *istihalah* (transformation) in fiqhi terminology is a change in the nature of a substance that is impure or haraam to consume, whereby the substance is changed into another substance that differs from it in name, characteristics and description.

In common scientific terminology, this refers to any chemical process that transforms a substance into a different substance, such as turning oils and fats of various origins into soap, and breaking a substance down into its various components, such as breaking down oils and fats into fatty acids and glycerin.

Just as chemical processing may be carried out deliberately by technical scientific means, it may also occur in a way that is not noticeable in the scenarios that were mentioned by the fuqaha', as in the case of vinegar making, tanning and burning, for example.

Based on that, we may note the following:

Additives that are of haraam animal origin or of impure origin that have been processed and transformed – as referred to above – are regarded as pure (*taahir*) and permissible to consume in food and medicine.

2.. *Istihlaak* (absorption)

This occurs when a small amount of a substance that is haraam or impure is mixed with a larger quantity of another substance that is pure and halaal, provided that the characteristic that makes it impure or haraam is no longer present. This means that all the

characteristics of that absorbed substance – such as taste, colour and smell – disappear completely, so that the small amount of the added substance is completely absorbed by the larger amount of the substance to which it is added. This ruling is based on the characteristics of the substance that is of a larger quantity. For example:

- 1.. Additives that are alcohol-based solutions that are used in very small quantities in food and medicine, such as colourings, preservatives, emulsifiers and antioxidants.
- 2.. Lecithin and cholesterol, which are extracted from haraam sources without undergoing a process of istihalah (transformation). It is permissible to use them in food and medicine in very small quantities that are completely absorbed into the larger amount of the halaal and pure substance with which they are mixed.
- 3.. Enzymes of porcine (pig) origin, such as pepsin and the like, which are used in very small amounts that are absorbed into larger amounts of food or medicine.

End quote.

It says in *Fataawa al-Majlis al-Urubi li'l-Ifta' wa'l-Buhooth* (fatwa no. 34):

In the list of ingredients of some foods there appears the letter E followed by a number. It is said that this means that it contains a substance manufactured from pork fat or pig bones. If that is proven, what is the Islamic ruling on those foods?

Answer:

What is referred to by the letter E followed by a number are additives of which there are more than 350. They are either preservatives, colourings, flavour enhancers, sweeteners, or other things.

They are divided, according to their origins, into four categories:

1. Ingredients of an artificial chemical origin
2. Ingredients of plant origin

3. Ingredients of animal origin

4. Ingredients that are dissolved in alcohol

The ruling thereon is that they do not have any impact on the permissibility of the food or drink, for the following reasons:

With regard to the first and second categories, that is because they come from a permissible source and there is no harm caused by using them.

With regard to the third category, it does not remain in the same state as when it was taken from its animal source; rather it has been subjected to a chemical process that has changed its nature completely, as it has been transformed into a new, pure substance. This change affects the Islamic ruling on that substance. If it was itself prohibited or impure, then its transformation into a new substance means that it comes under a new ruling, as in the case of alcohol, if it is turned into vinegar, then it becomes good and pure, and as a result of this transformation the ruling on alcohol no longer applies to it.

With regard to the fourth category, in most cases this refers to colourings, which are usually used in very small quantities, so that they are absorbed into the final products, and this is overlooked.

So whatever foods and drinks contain any of these substances in their list of ingredients remain permissible as they originally were, and there is nothing wrong with the Muslim consuming them.

Our religion is easy, and it forbids us to overburden ourselves; making excessive enquiries into such matters is not something that Allah, may He be exalted, or His Messenger have enjoined upon us.

End quote from *Fiqh an-Nawaazil* by Dr Muhammad al-Jeezaani (4/263-267).

Thus it becomes clear that there is nothing wrong with consuming fruits that are coated with shellac wax or in which carmine has been used, if it does not cause any harm.

If there are traces of insects on the fruit, the fruit may be washed and eaten.

If you wash the fruit with soap and water, or something that will dissolve the wax, or you peel the fruit, that is a good idea.

And Allah knows best.