

Halal Certification Guidelines

In view of the recent Orion debacle and the devastating consequences that arose from the halaal certification of some of its products, we deem it necessary to provide important guidelines for consumers regarding the halaal certification industry. It is incumbent upon Muslims to make informed decisions.

We receive daily queries on the halaal status of various outlets and butcheries who advertise halaal, and it is not possible to always remain abreast with the changing statuses of all these outlets. The best recourse, therefore, will be to provide the Muslim consumer with information that can assist him or her to make a decision in eating or purchasing from any outlet that advertises halaal food.

Muslims must realize that a mere certificate is not automatic authentication to the halaal status of any business. If certain structures and conditions are not set in place then a paper certificate means absolutely nothing. Sadly, there are a number of non-Muslim outlets that display halaal certificates but lack the basic procedures to ensure that the products they sell are indeed halaal. It is, therefore, a mockery of the halaal procedures instituted by Shariah when these businesses claim to be halaal only on the basis of a certificate, but are not.

In this regard, we have strict instructions from Rasoolullah sallallahu alaihi wa sallam in the following statements: Once he addressed Waabisa radhiallahu anhu and said: "O Waabisa, you have come to me asking about piety and sin. Well, seek fatwa from your conscience and seek fatwa from your heart, O Waabisa (He repeated this thrice). Piety is that to which the conscience and the heart comfortably incline, while sin is that which troubles your conscience and becomes doubtful in the heart, even if people give you fatwa (to the contrary)." In a narration mentioned by Imam Bukhari (rahmatullahi alayhi) in Tareekhul-Kabeer the words appear: "...even if the Muftis have given you a fatwa... The context within which we need to understand this hadith is obviously one where a fatwa of permissibility was given for a certain act, but one's heart does not feel satisfied and cannot reconcile with its lawfulness. In such a case the consumer searches his conscience and consults his heart. If there is doubt, then the heart will feel agitated and uneasy. That is the fatwa of the heart, and the fatwa of one's conscience. A Muslim with basic ieman and a certain degree of Deeni awareness will surely detect some sense of uneasiness and a queasiness in spite of the fatwa.

Rasoolullah sallallahu alaihi wa sallam also said: "Leave that which causes doubt, and move over to that which does not cause doubt." This is another clear guideline emphasizing the need to abstain from doubt. It is better to err on the side of caution than to fall prey to haraam. We exercise caution in so many aspects of our worldly lives; it is far more important to apply the law of caution to Deen and to matters that affect our acts of worship.

GUIDELINES

Based on the above, we provide the following principles that govern halaal and haraam.

As a rule avoid purchasing meat and poultry from non-Muslim butcheries and restaurants. This is a guaranteed safety-net against consumption of haraam, regardless of the certificates on display.

Never accept or trust the word of a non-Muslim in matters of halaal and haraam. The Jurists of Islam have written that it is not permissible to accept a non-Muslim's word to ascertain halaal and haraam. This is the view of all mazaahib. The rationale behind this is simply that the non-Muslim has no concern for Deeni matters. This rationale is even more profound in today's commercialised world, where values and morals have given way to vested commercial interests. In fact, even the word of a faasiq Muslim is not acceptable in matters of halaal and haraam. A faasiq means one who openly violates a major law of Shariah, or commits an immoral act openly.

Some halaal certifying bodies never certify non-Muslim outlets. This is an excellent policy and another fool-proof method of protecting the Muslim consumer from the consumption of doubtful foods. We strongly urge all organizations to seriously consider adopting such a policy as a blanket rule.

If the need arises for a non-Muslim food business or producer to be certified halaal, there are strict standards that must be complied with. In the very first instance, there must be strong motivation for such certification. The certifying body must satisfy itself that circumstances really warrant a non-Muslim outlet or restaurant to be certified halaal.

Once it has been established that there is a need for certification in that particular region, it is incumbent to have FULL-TIME Muslim supervision. The certifying body has to take upon itself the responsibility to provide reliable and trustworthy personnel to carry out this supervision. It will be permissible to charge fees for such inspection and certification. These fees should be utilized to remunerate the full-time supervisors, instead of allowing the non-Muslim business to pay them, thus resulting in a conflict of interests.

The onus is on the certifying body to ensure its supervisors are trained and equipped with the necessary knowledge that is required for such supervision.

Never purchase imported meat or poultry products. Ignore any halaal certification issued for such products. It is too difficult to monitor and control imported products.

With regard to meat and chicken slaughtered abroad we have established the following major discrepancies in some

countries: a) Slaughtering by non-Muslims believed to be ahle-kitaab; b) No recitation of bismillah allahu akbar; c) In some instances Shias were discovered to be doing the slaughtering; d) Machine slaughter of chickens. These methods all render the animals haraam. On this basis it is strongly advised to avoid the certifying, selling, and purchasing of imported meat products.

Rasoolullah sallallahu alaihi wa sallam regarded eating in the market places (shopping centres, malls etc) as a lowly and undignified act, as narrated in Tabarani. It, therefore, behoves Muslims, who boast of noble character and conduct, to avoid the common habit of 'eating out'. Rasoolullah sallallahu alaihi wa sallam also strictly forbade eating at a place where wine is being served. The above two factors should discourage Muslims for visiting modern day restaurants and eating houses.