



What is halal?

Halal means 'lawful', it pertains to what Muslims can do, especially in regards to food and drink. The opposite of halal is haraam meaning 'forbidden'. In Australia there are numerous organisations governing halal standards and issuing halal certificates to businesses, charging varying amounts per year. The Qur'an sets out what constitutes halal and is reflected in Sharia law, Sharia law governs every aspect of the lives of Muslims and is sourced from the Qur'an and the Hadith (the traditions of the Prophet Mohammed).

What does the Qur'an say about food and drink?

Allah has forbidden Muslims to eat animals that did not die as the result of man, contain blood, are pigs, or have been sacrificed to another god (Qur'an 2: 173). Allah also decreed that the animal must not have died as the result of: been killed by strangulation, by a violent blow, head-long fall, the goring of horns, and animals attacked by other animals unless man has been able to kill it (Qur'an 5: 3). Allah also forbade Muslims to consume alcohol. Aside from this very short list Muslims can consume everything else. It is important to note that Allah forbids Muslims to consume these products, they can realistically look at, handle, and sell them.

How must food be prepared in order for it to be halal?

If the food is not meat it does not need to be slaughtered (obviously) but Allah decreed that his name must be mentioned before consuming (Qur'an 6: 118); this particular passage pertains to meat, however Qur'an 6: 119 affirms the need to say Allah's name over everything you eat. This cannot be done at any other time than before one consumes food, the reasons for this are as follows: food prepared by People of the Book (Jews and Christians) is lawful (halal) for Muslims (Qur'an 5: 5) and since Jews and Christians do not believe in Allah or his Prophet they cannot and should not say Allah's name over food or drink. To expect the butcher to say Allah's name over the slaughtered animal is to place a burden on an already burdened person, Allah forbade this (Qur'an 59: 39). The one exception to this is meat prepared during the Hajj in Mecca, Saudi Arabia (Qur'an 22: 36).

What about slaughtering animals?

Islam prohibits the cruel treatment of animals, what constitutes cruel is a matter for cultural perspective but in Australia the Australian culture deems ritualised slaughter of animals to be a form of animal cruelty. Islam dictates that animals must be slaughtered or killed for a specific purpose (i.e. not for fun) and should be as painless and humane as possible, among other guidelines. Animals have been ritually slaughtered by Muslims the same way for the past 1,345 years (the time Islam has been around): by facing the animal towards Mecca and slitting its throat with one swipe of a sharp blade. It is not a religious requirement for animals to face Mecca, Jews and Christians do not face animals towards Mecca and yet the animals they slaughter are permissible for Muslims to eat, rather it is a custom.

Since the time of the Prophet advances in slaughtering techniques have made it possible to kill the animal in less time than it takes the animal to bleed to death, this results in a more painless and humane slaughtering method. Islamic nations, slaughterhouses, and some individuals have struggled to come to terms and adopt these advances, or flat out refuse to adopt them.

Many of Australia's export markets accept pre-stunning of animals before slaughter, the religious requirement is that the meat from the animal must not contain blood before eating. Modern slaughtering methods and food regulations enforce this bloodletting and stunning the animal before draining it of blood is both effective and humane. Slitting the throat of an animal ensures a slower and more painful death, no matter how sharp the blade the animal will feel its throat been cut and blood rushing forth. Numerous leaked videos from abattoirs reveal that the slaughtering methods are cruel and tantamount to torture, from Indonesia to Egypt footage has emerged that shocks millions, including Muslims, yet the meat is still considered halal and sold.

The fundamental basis of slaughtering animals under Islam is to ensure blood is completely removed from the animal, the animal is not tortured, beaten, or maltreated, and is killed painlessly and quickly as possible.

Jewish law also requires ritualised slaughter and has certification schemes.

Jews slaughter animals in the same way Muslims do: by slitting the throat. The same principles and expectations apply in regard to kosher slaughter: that so long as the animal is drained of blood, is not a forbidden type of animal, and is killed as painlessly and quickly as possible should trump any need or desire to kill the animal exclusively by slitting its throat. Businesses do not face the same pressure to be kosher certified as many businesses do to be halal certified, products certified as kosher are labelled and money raised goes into publishing literature that informs the public on what products are certified. Approximations of certification costs are made publically available. Jewish religious law dictates how food and drink are to be prepared and this makes the manufacturing of goods complicated for Jewish people, knowing that a product has been manufactured in a religiously appropriate way helps Jewish people outside Israel sustain themselves without inadvertently committing a sin. There is not the same strict requirements under Islam to warrant a certification scheme. With this in mind, businesses should not have to pay for this certification as it is an unnecessary cost burden that can limit availability of products suitable to people of a particular faith or no faith at all.

Why do we need halal certification?

The short answer is we do not need halal certification, unless you are in the business of extortion and exploitation. Imam Habib Bewley of the Jumu'a mosque Cape Town, South Africa spoke out against Halal certification because of its profiteering nature and perversion of Allah's law. Halal certification has only been around in Australia since roughly the 1960s, not taking off until the 1980s. Essentially a business pays an annual sum in exchange for a label that says the product is halal. Certain products from the business can be certified as halal, the price differs between certifiers and products.

Muslims know what they can and cannot consume, and have been consuming products that are now certified halal long before they were certified. One has to only read the ingredients to determine if they can consume the product, be it for dietary or religious reasons. If in doubt one can contact the manufacturer for more information on a product's contents.

Having a label that businesses pay for exploits the Islamic faith, businesses, and Muslims especially. Labelling something, especially meat or one brand of product, as halal implies that all other meat or brands of that product are not permissible for Muslims to eat which is deceitful conduct. Islam in this way is used for financial gain and not spiritual sustenance.

Having paid hundreds, even thousands for a halal certificate does not guarantee any of the business's products are halal. The recent case of Cadbury confectionary company losing its halal accreditation in Malaysia because pork DNA was found in their chocolates is testament to this. The reaction from the Malaysian public is nothing short of frightening: several Islamic organisations called for jihad against Cadbury. Cadbury has suffered a substantial financial loss because of the pork contamination and been halal certified.

The money raised from halal certification schemes has at times gone to terrorist organisations such as Hamas, the certifiers lost the rights to issue halal certificates. Even with auditing of certifiers here in Australia the practice of certifying opens the door to corruption and mismanagement of funds. Charity and welfare programmes are catered for through the Red Crescent and other not-for-profit organisations and the Zakat (almsgiving, one of the five Pillars of Faith) adopted as a tax in many Islamic countries to help the poor.

Insisting that businesses must be halal certified is both unnecessary and unethical. It should not cost more for businesses to provide the same goods and services which they were providing to Muslims before halal certification schemes.

There is growing concern among Muslims and non-Muslims alike about halal certification. This concern is twofold: the encroachment of Sharia law and halal by stealth. Commercialising the halal process legitimises one aspect of Sharia law, the laws governing the preparation and consumption of food and drink, this gives a legal system contrary to Australia's own legal system a foot in the door and gives impetus for supporters of Sharia law to push for greater concessions, like Sharia compliant family law. The second concern is many products that are certified halal do not have the halal label on them. This creates two major ethical problems: many people for religious reasons cannot eat food that has been sacrificed to another god (Jews, Christians, and Sikhs) and denies people the ability to make a conscientious choice about what they wish to support or associate with when purchasing goods and services. This is disingenuous behaviour and begs the question as to why buy halal certification in the first place?

Lastly, halal certification has spread into the provision of services and transportation of goods. This is not required by the Qur'an or Hadith. It is blatant profiteering and exploitation. Insisting that services and transport are halal compliant is increasing and represents the halal industry's slip into fundamentalism.

Where to from here?

Paying for certification should be abolished, individuals are able to determine for themselves if a product is suitable for them, be it dietary, religious, or ethical reasons. If there is any doubt they can contact the manufacturer for clarification. There is no religious requirement to pay to label anything halal or to imply that one product is permissible while similar products are not by way of having the halal label.

Due to the complex rules governing what constitutes kosher food there should remain kosher certification but at no expense to the tax payer or businesses and clear labelling should remain so people can make ethical and religious choices. This need is not found with Islam and halal because there are no special preparatory requirements that exist beyond Australian health and safety standards for food under Islam.

Denmark, Sweden, and Norway have banned ritualised slaughter (especially for Kosher and Halal purposes) without pre-stunning and this should be adopted here in Australia. All livestock slaughtered should be killed as quickly and as painlessly as possible, this means stunning. The blood can then be drained from the carcass and processed for markets both domestic and international.

Informing people, organisations, and countries that insist on halal certification schemes should be reminded about the religious requirements on the matter, the unethical nature of the schemes, and that they have been trading for centuries without the supposed need or desire for people and businesses to pay for halal certification.

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