Halal Food Laws and Regulations

Mian N. Riaz and Munir M. Chaudry

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The basic guidance about halal food laws is revealed in the Quran (the divine book) from God (the Creator) to Muhammad (the Prophet, PBUH) for all people. The food laws are explained and put into practice through the Sunnah (the life, actions, and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad) as recorded in the Hadith (the compilation of the traditions of the Prophet).

In general, everything is permitted for human use and benefit. Nothing is forbidden except what is prohibited either by a verse of the Quran or an authentic and explicit Sunnah of the Prophet. These rules of Islamic law bring freedom for people to eat and drink anything they like as long as it is not haram (prohibited) (Battour et al., 2010).

There are five fundamental pillars of belief in Islam: (1) to believe that there is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his last prophet; (2) to pray five times in a day; (3) to give zakat (charity) to the poor; (4) to fast in the month of Ramadan; and (5) to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca once in a lifetime (if one can afford it). In addition, guidelines direct the daily life of a Muslim. Included in these guidelines is a set of dietary laws intended to advance wellness. These laws are binding on the faithful and must be observed at all times, even during pregnancy, periods of illness, or traveling (Twagery and Spillman, 1989). The life of a Muslim revolves around the concept of halal and haram. The laws are quite comprehensive, because they are applicable not only to eating and drinking, but also to earning one’s living, dress code, and dealing with others. This discussion will focus primarily on food.

Food is considered one of the most important factors for interaction among various ethnic, social, and religious groups. All people are concerned about the food they eat: Muslims want to ensure that their food is halal; Jews that their food is kosher; Hindus, Buddhists, and certain other groups that their food is vegetarian. Muslims follow clear guidelines in the selection of their food (Qureshi et al., 2012).
The principles behind halal food are described here.

**PRINCIPLES REGARDING PERMISSIBILITY OF FOODS**

Eleven generally accepted principles pertaining to halal (permitted) and haram (prohibited) in Islam provide guidance to Muslims in their customary practices (Al-Qaradawi, 1984):

1. The basic principle is that all things created by God are permitted, with a few exceptions that are specifically prohibited.
2. To make lawful and unlawful is the right of God alone. No human being, no matter how pious or powerful, may take this right into his own hands.
3. Prohibiting what is permitted and permitting what is prohibited is similar to ascribing partners to God.
4. The basic reasons for the prohibition of things are impurity and harmfulness. A Muslim is not required to know exactly why or how something is unclean or harmful in what God has prohibited. There might be obvious reasons and there might be obscure reasons.
5. What is permitted is sufficient and what is prohibited is then superfluous. God prohibited only things that are unnecessary or dispensable while providing better alternatives.
6. Whatever is conducive to the “prohibited” is in itself prohibited. If something is prohibited, anything leading to it is also prohibited.
7. Falsely representing unlawful as lawful is prohibited. It is unlawful to legalize God’s prohibitions by flimsy excuses. To represent lawful as unlawful is also prohibited.
8. Good intentions do not make the unlawful acceptable. Whenever any permissible action of the believer is accompanied by a good intention, his action becomes an act of worship. In the case of haram, it remains haram no matter how good the intention, how honorable the purpose, or how lofty the goal. Islam does not endorse employing a haram means to achieve a praiseworthy end. Indeed, it insists not only that the goal be honorable, but also that the means chosen to attain it be proper. “The end justifies the means” and “secure your right even through wrongdoing” are maxims not acceptable in Islam. Islamic law demands that the right should be secured through just means only.
9. Doubtful things should be avoided. There is a gray area between clearly lawful and clearly unlawful. This is the area of “what is doubtful.” Islam considers it an act of piety for Muslims to avoid doubtful things and for them to stay clear of the unlawful. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said (Sakr, 1994): “Halal is clear and haram is clear; in between these two are certain things that are suspected. Many people may not know whether these items are halal or haram. Whosoever leaves them, he is innocent toward his religion and his conscience. He is, therefore, safe. Anyone who gets involved in any of these suspected items, he may fall into the unlawful and the prohibited. This case is similar to the one who wishes to raise his animals next to a restricted area, he may step into it. Indeed the restrictions of Allah are the unlawful.”
10. Unlawful things are prohibited to everyone alike. Islamic laws are universally applicable to all races, creeds, and sexes. There is no favored treatment of any privileged class. Actually, in Islam, there are no privileged classes; hence, the question of preferential treatment does not arise. This principle applies not only among Muslims but between Muslims and non-Muslims as well.

11. Necessity dictates exceptions. The range of prohibited things in Islam is very narrow, but emphasis on observing the prohibitions is very strong. At the same time, Islam is not oblivious to the exigencies of life, to their magnitude, or to human weakness and capacity to face them. It permits the Muslim, under the compulsion of necessity, to eat a prohibited food in quantities sufficient to remove the necessity and thereby survive.

**Five major terms are used to describe the permissibility of food:**

- **Halal**: Means permissible and lawful. It applies not only to meat and poultry, but also to other food products, cosmetics, and personal care products. The term also applies to personal behavior and interaction with the community (Al-Hanafi, 2006).

- **Haram**: Means prohibited. It is directly opposite of halal.

- **Mashbooh**: Is something questionable or doubtful, either due to the differences in scholars’ opinions or due to the presence of undetermined ingredients in a food product.

- **Makrooh**: Is a term generally associated with someone’s dislike for a food product or, while not clearly haram, is considered dislikeable by some Muslims.

- **Zabiha or dhabiha**: Is a term often used by Muslims in the U.S. to differentiate meat that has been slaughtered by Muslims as opposed to being slaughtered by Ahlul Kitab (Jews or Christians) or without religious connotation.

**HALAL AND HARAM**

General Quranic guidance dictates that all foods are halal except those that are specifically mentioned as haram. All foods are made lawful according to the Muslim scripture The Glorious Quran (Arabic text and English rendering by Regenstein et al. [2003]):

> O ye who believe! Eat of the good things wherewith We have provided you, and render thanks to Allah, if it is (indeed) He whom ye worship.

**Chapter II, Verse 172**

The unlawful foods are specifically mentioned in The Glorious Quran in the following verses:

> He hath forbidden you only carrion, and blood, and swine flesh, and that which hath been immolated to (the name of) any other than Allah.

**Chapter II, Verse 173**
Forbidden unto you (for food) are carrion and blood and swine flesh, and that which hath been dedicated unto any other than Allah, and the strangled, and the dead through beating, and the dead through falling from a height, and that which hath been killed by (the goring of) horns, and the devoured of wild beasts saving that which ye make lawful (by the death-stroke) and that which hath been immolated unto idols. And (forbidden is it) that ye swear by the divining arrows. This is an abomination.

Chapter V, Verse 3

Consumption of alcohol and other intoxicants is prohibited according to the following verse:

O ye who believe! Strong drink and games of chance, and idols and divining arrows are only an infamy of Satan’s handiwork. Leave it aside in order that ye may succeed.

Chapter V, Verse 90

Meat is the most strictly regulated of the food groups. Not only are blood, pork, and the meat of dead animals or those immolated to other than God strongly prohibited, it is also required that halal animals be slaughtered while pronouncing the name of God at the time of slaughter.

Eat of that over which the name of Allah hath been mentioned, if ye are believers in His revelations.

Chapter VI, Verse 118

And eat not of that whereon Allah’s name hath not been mentioned, for lo! It is abomination. Lo! The devils do inspire their minions to dispute with you. But if ye obey them, ye will be in truth idolaters.

Chapter VI, Verse 121

Accordingly, all foods pure and clean are permitted for consumption by Muslims except the following categories, including any products derived from them or contaminated with them:

- Carrion or dead animals
- Flowing or congealed blood
- Swine, including all by-products
- Animals slaughtered without pronouncing the name of God on them
- Animals killed in a manner that prevents their blood from being fully drained from their bodies
- Animals slaughtered while pronouncing a name other than God
- Intoxicants of all types, including alcohol and drugs
- Carnivorous animals with fangs, such as lions, dogs, wolves, or tigers
- Birds with sharp claws (birds of prey), such as falcons, eagles, owls, or vultures
- Land or amphibious animals such as frogs or snakes
From the Quranic verses, the hadith, and their explanations and commentary by Muslim scholars, the Islamic food (dietary) laws are deduced. Additional verses in The Glorious Quran related to food and drinks are as follows:

O’ mankind! Eat of that which is lawful and wholesome in the earth, and follow not the footsteps of the devil. Lo! He is an open enemy for you.

Chapter II, Verse 168

Oh ye who believe! Fulfill your indentures. The beast of cattle is made lawful unto you (for food) except.

Chapter V, Verse 1

They ask thee (O Muhammad) what is made lawful for them. Say: (all) good things are made lawful for you. And those beasts and birds of prey which ye have trained as hounds are trained, ye teach them that which Allah taught you; so eat of that which they catch for you and mention Allah’s name upon it, and observe your duty to Allah. Allah is swift to take account.

Chapter V, Verse 4

This day are (all) good things made lawful for you. The food of those who have received Scripture is lawful for you and your food is lawful for them.

Chapter V, Verse 5

Oh ye who believe! Forbid not the good things, which Allah had made lawful for you, and transgress not. Lo Allah loveth not transgressors.

Chapter V, Verse 87

Eat of that which Allah hath bestowed on you as food lawful and good, and keep your duty to Allah in whom ye are believers.

Chapter V, Verse 88

How should ye not eat of that over which the name of Allah hath been mentioned, when He hath explained unto you that which is forbidden into you, unless ye are compelled thereto.

Chapter VI, Verse 119

And eat not of that whereon Allah’s name hath not been mentioned, for lo! It is abomination. Lo! The devils do inspire their minions to dispute with you. But if ye obey them, ye will be in truth idolaters.

Chapter VI, Verse 121

And of the cattle He produceth some for burden and some for food; Eat of that which Allah hath bestowed upon you, and follow not the footsteps of the devil, for lo! He is an open foe to you.

Chapter VI, Verse 142
Say: “I find not in that which is revealed unto me ought prohibited to an eater that he eat thereof except it be carrion, or blood poured forth, or swine flesh—for that verily is foul—or the abomination which was immolated to the name of other than Allah. But who so is compelled (there to), neither craving nor transgressing, (for him) Lo! Your Lord is forgiving, merciful.”

Chapter VI, Verse 145

So eat of the lawful and good food, which Allah has provided for you and thank the bounty of your Lord if it is Him ye serve.

Chapter XVI, Verse 114

He hath forbidden for you only carrion, and blood and the swine flesh, and that which hath been immolated in the name of any other than Allah; but he who is driven thereto, neither craving nor transgressing, Lo! Then Allah is forgiving, merciful.

Chapter XVI, Verse 115

The haram foods are mainly pork, alcohol, blood, dead animals, and animals slaughtered while reciting a name other than that of God. This may also include halal items that have been contaminated or mixed with haram items. In general, most Muslims deem meat and poultry items not slaughtered in the name of God to be haram or makrooh at best.

**BASIS FOR THE PROHIBITIONS**

In the Islamic faith, Allah is the Almighty God. He has no partners. The first requirement of a Muslim is to declare: “There is no god but God (Allah).” So everything has to be dedicated to God only. There is no challenge to this fact, and no explanations are required or necessary. The basis for the prohibition of the above categories is purely and strictly Quranic guidance. However, some scientists have attempted to explain or justify some of these prohibitions based on their scientific understanding as follows:

- **Carrion and dead animals** are unfit for human consumption because the decaying process leads to the formation of chemicals that are harmful to humans (Awan, 1988).

- **Blood** that is drained from the body contains harmful bacteria, products of metabolism, and toxins (Awan, 1988; Erbil, 2001; Hussaini and Sakr, 1984).

- **Swine** serves as a vector for pathogenic worms to enter the human body. Infection by *Trichinella spiralis* and *Taeniasolium* are not uncommon. Fatty acid composition of pork fat has been mentioned as incompatible with the human fat and biochemical systems (Omojola et al., 2009).

- **Intoxicants** are considered harmful for the nervous system, affecting the senses and human judgment. In many cases they lead to social and family problems and even loss of lives (Al-Qaradawi, 1984; Awan, 1988; Wan Hassan and Awang, 2009).

Although these explanations may or may not be sound scientifically, the underlying principle behind the prohibitions remains the divine order, which appears in the
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Glorious Quran in several places: “Forbidden unto you are” is what guides a Muslim believer. Thus, the acceptance and accuracy of these “scientific” statements is not crucial to the acceptance of these guiding principles.

HOW DOES ONE TRANSLATE MAJOR PROHIBITIONS INTO PRACTICE IN TODAY’S INDUSTRIAL ENVIRONMENT?

Let us look at how the laws are translated into practice:

- **Carrion and dead animals**: It is generally recognized that eating carrion is offensive to human dignity, and probably nobody consumes it in modern civilized society. However, there is a chance of an animal dying from the shock of stunning before it is properly slaughtered. This is more common in Europe than in North America. The meat of such dead animals is not proper for Muslim consumption (Regenstein et al., 2003).

- **Proper slaughtering**: There are strict requirements for the slaughtering of animals: the animal must be of a halal species, that is, cattle, lamb, and so on; the animal must be slaughtered by an adult Muslim; the name of God must be pronounced at the time of slaughter; and the slaughter must be done by cutting the throat of the animal in a manner that induces rapid, complete bleeding and results in the quickest death (Al-Qaradawi, 2013).

- **Certain other conditions should also be observed**: These include considerate treatment of the animal, giving it water to prevent thirst, and using a sharp knife (preferably without any nicks in the knife). These conditions ensure the humane treatment of animals before and during slaughter. Any by-products or derived ingredients must also be from duly slaughtered animals to be good for Muslim consumption (Apple et al., 2005; Hambrecht et al., 2004; Kannan et al., 2003; Ljungberg et al., 2007; Schaefer et al., 2001).

- **Swine**: Pork, lard, and their by-products or derived ingredients are categorically prohibited for Muslim consumption. All chances of cross-contamination from pork into halal products must be thoroughly prevented. In fact, in Islam, the prohibition extends beyond eating. For example, a Muslim must not buy, sell, raise, transport, slaughter, or in any way directly derive benefit from swine or other haram materials (Omojola et al., 2009).

- **Blood**: Blood that pours forth (liquid blood) is generally not offered in the marketplace or consumed, but products made from blood and ingredients derived from it are available. There is general agreement among religious scholars that anything made from blood is unlawful for Muslims (Mickler, 2000).

- **Alcohol and other intoxicants**: Alcoholic beverages such as wine, beer, and hard liquors are strictly prohibited. Foods containing added amounts of alcoholic beverages are also prohibited because such foods, by definition, become impure. Non-medical drugs and other intoxicants that affect a person’s mind, health, and overall performance are prohibited too. Consuming these directly
or incorporating them into foods is not permitted (Wahab, 2004). However, there are certain acceptable allowances for naturally present alcohol or alcohol used in processing of food, as discussed in Chapter 16.

Foods are broadly categorized into four groups for the ease of establishing their halal status and formulating guidelines for the industry.

• **Meat and poultry:** This group contains four out of five haram (prohibited) categories. Hence, more restrictions are observed. Animals must be halal. One cannot slaughter a pig the Islamic way and call it halal. Animals must be slaughtered by a sane, adult Muslim while pronouncing the name of God. A sharp knife must be used to sever the jugular veins, carotid arteries, trachea, and esophagus, and the blood must be drained out completely (Qureshi et al., 2012). Islam places great emphasis on humane treatment of animals, so dismemberment must not take place before the animal is completely dead, as described earlier.

• **Fish and seafood:** To determine the acceptability of fish and seafood, one has to understand the rules of the different schools of Islamic jurisprudence, as well as the cultural practices of Muslims living in different regions. All Muslims accept fish with scales; however, some groups do not accept fish without scales such as catfish. There are even greater differences among Muslims about seafood, such as mollusks and crustaceans. One must understand the requirements in various regions of the world, for example, for exporting products containing seafood or seafood flavors (Mickler, 2000).

• **Milk and eggs:** These products from halal animals are also halal. The predominant source of milk in the West is the cow and the predominant source of eggs is the chicken. All other sources are required to be labeled accordingly. There are a variety of products made from milk and eggs. Milk is used for making cheese, butter, and cream. Most of the cheeses are made with various enzymes, which could be halal if made using microorganisms, plants, or halal-slaughtered animals (Guerrero-Legarreta, 2010). The enzymes could be haram if extracted from porcine sources or questionable when obtained from non-halal-slaughtered animals. Similarly, emulsifiers, mold inhibitors, and other functional ingredients from non-specified sources can make milk and egg products doubtful to consume (Ermis, 2017).

• **Plants and vegetables:** These materials are generally halal except alcoholic drinks or other intoxicants. However, in modern-day processing plants, vegetables and meats might be processed in the same plant and on the same equipment, increasing the chance of cross-contamination. Certain functional ingredients from animal sources might also be used in the processing of vegetables, which make the products doubtful. Hence, processing aids and production methods have to be carefully monitored to maintain the halal status of foods of plant origin (Regenstein et al., 2003).
From this discussion on laws and regulations, it is clear that several factors determine the halal or haram status of a particular foodstuff. It depends on its nature, how it is processed, and how it is obtained. As an example, any product from a pig would be considered as haram because the material itself is haram. Similarly, beef from an animal that has not been slaughtered according to Islamic requirements would still be considered unacceptable. And, of course, a stolen foodstuff or any products that are acquired through means that are incompatible with Islamic teaching would also be haram. Food and drink that are poisonous or intoxicating are obviously haram even in small quantities because they are harmful to health.

REFERENCES


