

KFC or Khuri Khichri?

By

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We were seated in a five-star restaurant surrounded with all types of delectable dishes. For starters, we had *shish kebab*, *aloo paratha*, *paapad*, and corn soup. Not sure with what dish to start with, someone piped up: “What dish is Sunnat to eat first?” The question caught us all off-guard. A lively debate then followed as to whether it’s sunnat to eat the dessert before or after the meal. Whilst all this was going on, someone who had some free airtime decided to phone Shaikh Mithai who shocked everyone with his answer: “Never mind when to have dessert, our Noble Master, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was never lavish in his meals. He never had a two-course meal ever in his life; at times, days would pass and no food was cooked in his home. His bread was made of coarse barley and at times of severe hunger, he would tie stones on his blessed belly. His simplicity was such that he preferred picking up the dates from the ground, rather than shaking the branches of the tree to make the fresh fruit fall upon him. His sunnat was hunger and his table was the floor.”

As Shaikh Mithai was on speaker phone, everyone heard and instantly, no one felt hungry anymore. Of all animals, man is the only specie that eats without being hungry, drinks without being thirsty, and speaks without necessity. Today, whilst some of us routinely spend over R1000-00 per meal in a posh restaurant, some twenty million Muslim refugees are forced to adopt the extreme sunnat of hunger adopted by our Noble Master (peace be upon him) as his regular habit. This is the irony of life. The Almighty, out of His sheer kindness, forces some of us to become close to Him through death and suffering, whilst some are given a chance of attaining the same level through thanks and appreciation. If we do not show our thanks by means of moderation in our lifestyle, we might be also be given the “cup of bitterness” in order

to realise our follies. So let us change our extravagant lifestyles before it's too late!

Getting back to the above example, it shows how we South Africans have come to understand Islam only in a modern context. No one bothers to understand the Sunnah in its original context anymore. You see, Islam must be bent to suit our lifestyles, and not our lifestyles adjusted to accommodate Islam. Because of this, we have misunderstood many aspects of Islam. One of our most basic needs is food choices, and yet our understanding of this is very important aspect of life is very different from how it's supposed to be understood. Let us examine only the aspect of Halaal which we have grossly misunderstood:

Definition of Halaal

Many may have learnt what is Halaal in Grade Three whilst studying in Madrasah, but it seems many have forgotten that lesson. For many of us now, "Halaal" simply means looking for a stamp which resembles a moon and a star on packet of crisp, chocolates, sweets or drinks. It also means looking for the same sign on the door of a restaurant or a cafe, whether the outlet sells wine and pork, or not, whether Muslim-owned or not. Surprisingly, today we actually have Muslims who think that the concept of Halaal only applies in one's hometown; on a journey, anything can be eaten and drunk. Others think that it's not important to slaughter an animal according to Islamic rites. The recitation of "Bismillah" before eating is sufficient. Some believe that you can play a recording of "Bismillah" to an animal when slaughtering it, whilst others believe that even if a Christian or a Jew slaughters it without the recitation of "Bismillah," it is Halaal. Some believe in machine-slaughter, and some do not.

A friend was once travelling through the Free-State and happened to stop at a cafe which had a Halaal sign on the door. After ordering his meal, he casually asked the owner if he knew what

the sign on the door meant. He said: "It's a lucky charm. Many people have started buying my hamburgers since a friend gave me the sign." He quickly cancelled the order and decided to rather buy his meal from the next town. Here, he was in for a bigger shock. The waiter told him: "When a person says he wants Halaal, it means I must put some per-peri sauce in it!" The poor guy had to settle for an apple and a bun that day! In another instance, a person was standing in a queue waiting for his order when the waiter arrived with a trolley full of chickens bought from the supermarket down the road. When he asked her if it was halaal, she said: "Whenever we run short of chickens, we buy from that supermarket. As long as the first batch of chickens are halaal, we can mix any chickens with them in the middle of the month. When the Halaal inspectors come, we only show them the halaal invoices!" For this franchise owner, Halaal meant a teaspoon of sugar to sweeten up his cup of tea!

So, everybody understands Halaal differently, when in fact, there supposed to be no difference at all in this issue. In South Africa, every few months, we have huge fights over whether our chickens are halaal or not, and which E-Numbers are suitable or not. Modern methods of mass-slaughter have indeed posed serious challenges, so it's important for you, the end-user, to independently find out, from both parties as to why do they believe its halaal or haraam. Then you should satisfy the inner voice in your heart. If there remains even an iota of doubt, rather abstain.

It must be understood that the issue of halaal and haraam, like fundamental beliefs ('*aqidah*) is not negotiable. Let's not fall in to the modern trap of "respecting unbridgeable differences" to neutralise the truth, place the truth on par with falsehood, or present it as an acceptable variation of the truth. Many a time, unacceptable differences are artificially created and we are asked to respect such differences in the name of "unity" on a particular issue. Such unity only causes further disunity. Such unity is indicative of a lack of principle and ethics. It's grounded in expediency and personal gain.

Understand it in this way. We may have minor differences with our wives or partners – differences in temperament, food habits, and travel preferences. These should be overlooked and negotiated. Then we have un-unacceptable differences in behaviour like cheating, perpetually lying, drinking and drugging. You can accept a burnt pot of food now and then, but who will accept living with an adulteress (unless if you are an adulterer yourself)? In such instance, the two shall amicably part and pursue their separate ways.

Back to Basics

So let's go back to basics. Halaal is what's slaughtered in the name of the Almighty, physically, at the hands of a Muslim. Care should be taken that the animal be treated as humanely as possible in all respects. The jugular veins of the animal should be slaughtered in a way that the blood freely flows out of the carcass, taking with it all the toxins contained in the blood. The spinal cord should not be injured or the animal stunned to the extent that the nerves become paralysed. In the washing process, no blood should contaminate the meat, and similarly no contamination should take place in the packaging, transportation, and refrigeration phase.

Halaal does not end here. Let's examine the following few examples:

1) Eating ice-creams from non-Muslim vendors where different flavours are scooped. Most of these vendors serve flavours that contain some liquor like "Rum & Raisin." A scoop of Rum & Raisin is served to a non-Muslim. Immediately thereafter, the scoop is juggled in a dish of water before serving a Vanilla flavour to a Muslim customer. This may seem correct, but what is not realised is that essentially the water in which the scoop is juggled has already been contaminated by the liquor.

2) When ordering vegetarian food from a non-halaal eatery, are separate knives and cutters used? Also, did the waiter change the gloves when switching from meat to vegetable Foods? More importantly, do the waiters wash their hands after visiting the bathroom? Many cases of food poisoning have been reported when traces of faeces were found in the food.

3) A Muslim family spent a weekend at a popular non-Muslim holiday resort where a supper buffet was included in the package. The vegetable food section was placed immediately next to the meat food section. Whilst in the queue, it was noticed that a few people used the spoon from the meat casserole to dish out the vegetable casserole!

4) For supper, the food griddle was used to prepare meat-balls, but for breakfast, omelettes were made on the same griddle. Although it was washed after supper, but nobody can guarantee that every bit of fat or meat residue was removed from the griddle. During re-heating, the residue is melted and combined with whatever food is being cooked!

5) In the same vein, many people use public braai-stands without replacing the iron griddle placed on it, or placing a foil over it. The fat residue from the meat of previous users is inevitably combined to the meat placed on it by the next user. This is severe contamination! Basting brushes should also be checked.

6) Industrial dishwashers used by hotels and restaurants use a large amount of water per wash. In order to save on water usage, the water used is recycled especially for washing drinking tumblers. Also, the crockery and cutlery are not separated. All are washed together, so the remnants of wine and non-halaal food residue may be mixed during washing process, then dried with the residue stuck on.

Even after strictly observing all the rules of halaal, if we purchased the food with ill-gotten wealth, the food will also be termed as haraam. Haraam food is such a serious matter that it has been effectively used by many tyrannical kings in the past and the present to ensure that the prayers of the pious against them are not accepted. Also, it seems that Halaal has become big business nowadays. Instead of only halaal food, we now get “halaal” cruises, “halaal” phones, “halaal” game lodges and even “halaal” prostitutes! Halaal is about protecting the consumer, not exploiting him.

Eating in Public

Another important issue is the concept of the modern restaurant. It may come as a surprise to many that eating in public was regarded in classical Islam as the hallmark of lowly behaviour. Eating is a sacred act, and food is a gift of the Almighty to sustain life in order to worship Him. It should be taken with dignity in the privacy of one's home. The testimony of a person who habitually ate in the market-place was not accepted in a court of law. Today, however, the trend has completely reversed. Eating has become an art and an entertainment, not a necessity. People crave to be seen in the best restaurant, sipping exotic drinks in the most eye-catching spot. Eating a cooked meal at home over a weekend is a sign of senility.

Fast-foods were initially meant for immigrant labourers who did not have families, and

sandwiches were used by gamblers at the gambling table. Today, everybody uses them for their convenience – a convenience which is not free from many dangers. I'm not against KFC or any other fast-food outlet, and I really look forward to my Khuri Kichri for Friday lunch, but when the balance is between convenience and the acceptance of my worship, I will opt for the latter, and so would you.

Finally the saying "What you put in is what you get out." cannot be more accurate with regards food. Just as infected food causes sickness to the body, haraam food spiritually affects us. A person can not be near to his Lord with haraam food in his belly; and so, the devil guides us to the worst type of thoughts and actions in this condition.