



## Halal Food—the New Organic

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*Husband and father*

# THE GOAL OF SLAUGHTERING

Organic food—thought to be tastier, healthier, safer for the environment, and more humane—is the fastest growing sector of the American food marketplace, according to the United States Department of Agriculture. The demand for halal food, or food that is permissible under Islamic dietary guidelines, has increased in the United States for similar reasons. For example, zabiha (Islamically-slaughtered meat) is perceived to be healthier, more flavorful, and have a more humane form of killing.

Generally, all foods are considered halal with the exception of the following: swine/pork and its by-products; animals improperly slaughtered or dead before slaughtering; foods containing alcoholic drinks and intoxicants; carnivorous animals, birds of prey and certain other animals; and foods contaminated with any of the aforementioned products.

The Qu'ran is consistent with the Old Testament in its prohibition of pork. The prohibition is for health reasons as the pig has a limited excretory system and only excretes 2 percent of its uric acid content. High uric acid levels can be injurious to human health. The pig is also known to be a host for parasites and diseases and cannot be slaughtered Islamically because it does not have a neck.

The goal of slaughtering under Islamic law is to cause as little pain as possible to the animal and to rid the meat of toxins caused by remaining blood, which is considered a toxin as it contains an abundance of uric acid. A proper slaughter must meet strict requirements. The animal must be fed as usual and given water just prior to slaughter. The area in which the animal is to be slaughtered must be clean. The animal must be positioned facing Mecca and no other animals can view the kill. And the actual slaughter must be undertaken by a Muslim using a single cut on the throat with a sharp blade, while reciting the name of God. Finally, all blood must be drained from the animal.

I rarely ate properly slaughtered meat (zabiha) as a child. My family experimented with vegetarianism for a short time. Once that stage had passed, we consumed zabiha meat on holidays and on the rare occasions when my father or a family friend would slaughter an animal. If you wanted zabiha meat in those days, you had to slaughter your own animal. Zabiha meat was not offered by any area restaurants, nor was it available at the grocer.

As a Muslim youth, I followed the prohibition against pork and intoxicants, but rarely consumed zabiha meat. I watched my friends consume Twinkies, Ding-Dongs, Skittles, Starburst, Oreo cookies, and Wonder Bread. I was not able to join them. All of these items contained pork and were off-limits to me. The pervasiveness of pork during my youth, as well as public disregard for such religious dietary restrictions, led me to ingest pork on several occasions despite my diligence. I specifically recall ordering pizzas with ground beef only for it to arrive with sausage.

My dietary patterns changed after living in Singapore and being exposed to widely available zabiha meat. When I returned to Indianapolis, I attempted to only eat zabiha meat, but the transition was not easy. Many restaurants I used to frequent, I no longer can. I eliminated my favorite Thai, Indian, and assorted ethnic restaurants. Fortunately for my waistline, I refrain from patronizing my favorite fast food joints also. I tend to eat at home more and buy my own zabiha meat, which is increasingly available in area stores. It's more expensive than non-zabiha meat, however. If I want to dine out, four restaurants in the Indianapolis area serve zabiha meat.

Both for religious and dietary reasons I am glad that Indianapolis and Central Indiana increasingly offers options to satisfy both the demands of my faith and the desires of my taste buds. It not only means that I feel more at home here, but I also will no longer have to leave the city to have my favorite ethnic fare.