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Can We Eat Meat at Any Restaurant? How Can We Confirm Whether It Is Halal?

THE QUESTION

Can we eat meat from any shop? How can we make sure that the meat is halal? Especially in supermarkets?

THE SCHOLARLY RESPONSE

No, we cannot eat meat from just any shop or restaurant. Meat from shops and restaurants in Muslim-majority areas, however, may be eaten on the assumption that it is halal. In such areas, there is no need to find out each time who slaughtered it.

The default rule is that an animal is forbidden until it is slaughtered. The mere possibility that it was slaughtered according to the Shariah is not enough to lift that prohibition. There must be certainty that it was properly slaughtered, or clear signs that it was.

In matters like this, the Shariah allows a ruling to rest on the majority of a place's people (al-ghalib) and on outward appearances (al-zahir). So meat obtained in a place where most people are those whose slaughter is lawful may be treated as halal. Likewise, if someone whose slaughter is lawful says that he slaughtered it himself, the meat is halal.

Here, the majority of the population counts as an indicator (qarina), and such indicators have a definite role in deciding whether things are lawful. In such places, requiring people to verify the slaughter of every piece of meat would also cause them great hardship. See Tuhfat al-Muhtaj (9/315) and Asna al-Matalib (2/41).

That said, the most cautious course is to eat meat only from places where you

are certain it is halal.

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+91 **790 26 000 77** | mail@drmahazhari.com | drmahazhari.com | drmahazhari