

## **WE ARE WHAT WE EAT**

**Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environment Sciences, Birmingham**



*An organic iftar at Birkbeck College (Source: IFEES)*

*Most people are familiar with religious commandments regarding the consumption of food, such as Jewish kosher food and Islamic halal food to the Hindu vegetarian diet and Christian fasting during Lent. Through the centuries, the practices of what and when to eat have endured, but perhaps not so much the reasons why. The Birmingham-based Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environment Sciences (IFEES) intends to change that.*

According to the Quran, Muslims are directed to eat food which is both halal (food that is permissible according to Islamic law) and tayyib (pure, wholesome, nutritious and safe). But as with most cultural events that revolve around food, many iftars, the fast-breaking evening meal during the month of Ramadan, do little to avoid extravagance, gluttony and consumerism. So says Mizan Raja, the volunteer Head of the IFEES Communications team.

For the past 3 years, IFEES volunteers have organised an organic iftar in different cities around the country. According to the organisation, the use of certified organic halal food is more wholesome than non-organic food, especially when questions of the authenticity of halal meat and chicken were raised last year.

“In a world of instant gratification and over-indulgence, we lose sight of the fact that we are what we eat. Eat the wrong foods and our bodies will become polluted because food is our fuel and we must help the engine that drives our bodies,” Mizan explains. Since Ramadan is the month of purification, IFEES wants to bring a more holistic understanding to the table.

The busy schedules of volunteers meant IFEES was only able to organise a small organic iftar in Birmingham this year. However, last year’s event at Birkbeck College in London attracted a large crowd of both Muslims and non-Muslims to share a Ramadan meal in an informal setting. It also served as an opportunity to meet members of the IFEES family and to hear about the work it was doing worldwide.

**“As the environmental debacle the human race has created for itself looms larger and becomes closer each passing day, Muslims have a clear role to play. This places a responsibility squarely on our shoulders, to see ourselves as serving the entire planet. I see this as a path to regaining the dignity and the moral leadership in human affairs Muslims once used to have.”**

*Hajj Fazlun Khalid, founder of IFEES*

Thanks to Q-News who supported IFEES in the venture, about 200 people turned up, compared to just 7 people the year before. Every Muslim participant was a host in the true Islamic sense as they responded enthusiastically by bringing home-cooked organic meals and inviting non-Muslim friends.

The evening began with a poem and messages from distinguished guests such as Abdul Rehman Maik of Q-News, Shaykh Abdal-Hakim Murad of Cambridge University, and Jeremy Smith of The Ecologist magazine. “The fast was then broken in the traditional fashion with the Adhan and after Maghrib prayers, people shared and partook of the food they had brought,” Mizan explains.

Mizan admits to being amazed both at the length of the menu and the organic variations available. “There were curries from chicken to chick peas, salads, cakes and other delicious dishes, all homemade using organic ingredients,” says Mizan. The organisers also spotted supermarket and FairTrade items and were assured that these dishes were both halal and tayyib.

The founder of IFEES, Hajj Fazlun Khalid, could not attend the iftar but sent a message to the attendees. He wrote, “The fast of the Ramadan has many aspects to it that is both spiritual and physical and one of these is a basic expression of conservation. In this sense, voluntarily denying ourselves sustenance that is our right is a supreme act of conservation.”

### **Facts and Information**

- IFEES outreach is comprehensive and they now have contacts in over forty countries, including environmental organisations; UN agencies; grassroots groups; mosques; schools; universities and committed individuals world-wide.
- Some examples of IFEES’s work include:
  - Islam and Ecology – the first book of this kind, now translated into Malay and Turkish
  - Animals in Islam – a selection from Hadith literature
  - Qur’an, Creation and Conservation – a teaching resource for schools and adults. IFEES also organise courses and conduct workshops worldwide.

### **Further Resources**

- For more information about IFEES, visit [www.ifees.org.uk](http://www.ifees.org.uk) or call them at 0121 440 3500
- The Black Environment Network was established to promote equality of opportunity with respect to ethnic communities in the preservation, protection and development of the environment. Contact BEN at [www.ben-network.org.uk](http://www.ben-network.org.uk) or call 01286 870 715.

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