

In Bangladesh, Mohammed Hossef was the medicine man. In America, he is the Halal guy.

Both nicknames fit.

Hossef studied medicine in Bangladesh through university and medical school, but is restricted from practicing in the United States because of strict regulations regarding international degrees. Upon arriving in the U.S. in 2009, Hossef changed his profession to food hospitality in the form of running a halal cart.

His cart is located on 14th and 3rd Ave., in front of the Trader Joe's *wine* store--Hossef emphasized the detail--but not in front of the Trader Joe's grocery store that is located nearby. New York University's Palladium Hall, a dormitory and athletic facility for students, is also adjacent to the cart. Location is important to Hossef, who benefits from the myriad of people around Union Square.

"Being in front of Palladium is good for business. I have competition but most of my customers are students or Uber drivers," Hossef explained. "Without them, I wouldn't make any money."

New York City is crime-ridden and sometimes a dangerous place. Yet, in his eleven years of operation, Hossef has been lucky. The only inconvenience that Hossef deals with is the frequent intoxicated customer, whom he says will likely order a chicken over rice combo.

"This street is good. I have never seen [any] problems," Hossef said, understanding that his situation could be more dire. "My other [halal cart] friends, they sometimes have issues."

Operating a halal cart is neither glamorous nor lucrative. The cart is open every day for nineteen consecutive hours, regardless of weather, with customers frequenting the cart at all times. At 4:30am, the cart is driven to Queens where it is cleaned and restocked for the next day. Hossef estimates that the cart makes about \$700 a day, but after paying for the food and taking out the yearly cost of a business permit, he takes home around \$150 per day.

The constant demand of his job has an impact on Hossef, who spends little time

with his wife and two children, a son and a daughter. But his appreciation for his family and the pride he exudes from managing his own cart motivates him to persevere.

“I enjoy my job,” Hossef added. “I meet and feed people, even the mean ones. People love cheap food.”

Ordering from Hossef’s halal cart will get you a smile, a greeting, and a positive attitude.

And perhaps even a chicken over rice combo.

--