

Religious rules and requirements – Halal slaughter

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Provision and consumption of meat for Muslim communities is an essential part of the religious life and certain conditions must be met so that the meat is lawful, Halal. If the treatment and slaughter of meat animals do not meet the criteria then the meat may be regarded as unlawful, Haram. Some species such as pigs, carnivorous animals and carrions are forbidden. Rules relating to Halal slaughter are based on i) The Holy Quran; ii) Sunnah and Hadith and iii) Views of religious scholars.

There are direct and indirect references in the Quran relating to food in general and slaughter (1).

The following verses are some examples Sura: Verses 2: 168,172,173; 5: 1,3,5,87,88;6: 118,119,121,145,146; 16: 114-118, 5: 93.

(2:173) 'He has forbidden you only the Maytatah (dead animals), and blood, and the flesh of swine, and that which is slaughtered as a sacrifice for others than Allah (or has been slaughtered for idols, etc., on which Allah's Name has not been mentioned while slaughtering). But if one is forced by necessity without wilful disobedience nor transgressing the limits, then there is no sin on him. Truly, Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful'

In addition to the Quran, Sunnah and Hadith are used for guidance. Sunnah is the tradition and the examples set by the Prophet, model for Islamic life and practice, whereas Hadith is stories and the sayings of the Prophet. Importance and requirement of animal welfare in Islam have often been emphasized. The following Hadith of the prophet is a good example:

"Allah Who is Blessed and Exalted, has prescribed benevolence towards everything; so when you must kill a living being, do it in the best manner and, when you slaughter an animal, you should sharpen your knife so as to cause the animal as little pain as possible"



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Animals are restrained but there are no specific religious regulations as to how this should be done. However, treatment of animals during restraint must not compromise animal welfare.

The act of slaughter (Al-Dhabh) is allowed in the name of God; therefore pronouncing the name of Allah is the usual practice (Tasmiyyah). This is to remind the slaughterer that he is taking the life of a living creature. Following restraint, slaughter is carried out by severing the neck including both carotid arteries and jugular veins using a sharp knife. The usual type of incision is severance of the vessels in the retrograde fashion following an initial stab incision in the neck.

Dialrel project team members have prepared a more detailed report on Halal rules to be posted on the project website (<http://www.dialrel.eu>). This report is the result of consultations with Muslim representatives, scholars and scientists in Europe. In addition, meetings with Islamic scholars on Sharia Law and animal scientists at Al-Azhar and Mansoura Universities in Egypt have provided the following conclusions:

- Animal must be healthy and alive before the slaughter
- Blood must flow out of the body before death and in sufficient quantities
- Reciting the name of Allah (Tasmiyyah) is necessary
- Eating of any meat in necessity and from animals slaughtered by people of the books acceptable
- Kible (facing of Mecca) is not necessary but optional
- Recommendation for latest techniques
- Stunning acceptable if conditions are met and stunning must not result in:
 - Animal's death, not impede blood loss
- Misunderstandings of techniques and effects apparent and need addressing

Stunning and Halal slaughter:

Preslaughter stunning is carried out for conventional killing of meat animals with the aim of managing the carcass and preventing potential pain and distress during the neck cut. Stunning is required to induce immediate unconsciousness that should last until death usually by exsanguinations. There are various stunning techniques that include electrical, mechanical and gas stunning with different applications and effects on both welfare and product quality.

Whether stunning should be acceptable before Halal slaughter has been subject to controversy for decades. Certain types of stunning methods have been regularly used for decades in some countries. For example New Zealand, where stunning is compulsory, has been exporting Halal red meat since the 80s and in UK, Germany, Holland, France and Spain Halal meat is produced from both stunned and non-stunned animals (where legislation provides exemption) for the Muslim market. Poultry slaughter in large numbers also often employs preslaughter stunning in these countries and in Turkey. Some European countries, however, such as Sweden, Norway and Switzerland have imposed bans on slaughter without stunning. A New European Union regulation that will come into force in 2013 will maintain the exemption. However, each member country will have the option to implement it or have derogation.

The most popular stunning method is the use of electrical currents. Specific electrical currents and frequencies need to be used for Halal slaughter, mainly so that death is prevented but only a stun is achieved. Either non-lethal voltages and currents or high frequencies (>100 Hz) are used only to stun animals for Halal slaughter.

There are 3 views in regard to stunning: i) Those who accept it if conditions are met because welfare of animals is protected and rules are maintained (3); ii) Some reject the idea of stunning completely as they think stunning is not necessary, against religious rules or creates problems for animals (2); iii) Others either not sure or want assurances in both cases. Dialrel project has found that consumer trust in Halal products is low in Europe. In addition to legislative changes post-cut stunning is also being considered as a compromise for the objectors in Europe.

Halal Standards and Certification:

Efforts are being made to produce agreed Halal standards. Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC) and Malaysian Standards are examples. However, issues listed below need to be resolved before universal standards are agreed. Similarly, the issue of fragmented certification system is also a problem. Existing self-appointed certification bodies in different countries compete with each other by claiming their products to be more Halal than others at present.

Problem/contentious areas:

The following is a list of current outstanding issues that have emerged:

- Authenticity of Halal Certification
- Illegal slaughter and unfit meat sale
- Lack of auditing standards (from stable to the table)
- Mechanical killing of animals (Poultry)
- Recorded Tasmiyya (Islamic prayer)
- Animal welfare compromises
- Labelling- stun/non-stun
- Islamic rules-interpretation
- Lack of training for Muslim slaughter men in Europe
- Almost all attention of Halal on fresh, rather than processed meat
- Hygiene

References:

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This report is part of WP1
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A report on religious rules and requirements in regard to treatment and slaughter of animals in Islam has been prepared following research and consultations by the DIALREL project team.

The present study is part of the DIALREL project which has been co-financed by the European Commission. The text represents the authors' views and findings and does not necessarily represent a position of the Commission who will not be liable for the use made of such information.

The DIALREL project (Religious slaughter: improving knowledge and expertise through dialogue and debate on issues of welfare, legislation and socio-economic aspects) is a Framework Programme 6 "specific support action" intended to address issues relating to the practice of religious slaughter and the market and consumers, contract no. FOOD-2006-043075. The principle aims of this project are to explore the conditions for promoting the dialogue between interested parties and stakeholders and facilitating the adoption of good religious slaughter practices. The additional aim is to review and propose a mechanism for implementation and monitoring of good practices. Sixteen scientific partners, representing eight European countries and Turkey, Israel and Australia, participate in this specific support action.