

Animal slaughter and Islamic rules

Asalet Sancakdaroglu - Eyes on Animals

Introduction:

Contrary to common belief, there are no explicit rules in the Koran about the method of slaughtering an animal. It is not written in the Koran that animals must be conscious when having their throat cut nor that animals can only be slaughtered by slicing it's neck with a knife. The rules in the Koran pertain just to what type of meat and in what state it is in, with the intent to protect consumers from getting really sick (food safety). For example, in the Koran it is explicitly written that „carrion“ is not allowed. Carrion is the decaying flesh from dead animals that died for unknown reasons. Carrion is not Halal, it is forbidden to eat it. The reason for this is that eating carrion is extremely dangerous. When an animal dies, its body will slowly begin to decay leading to the production of cadaveric toxins (spermine, putrescine, cadaverine). These toxins can make people very sick, and may lead to their death when consuming them. This rule in the Koran was to teach and prevent people from eating eat cadavers of animals that they found in their vicinity.

In the Koran there is no specific slaughter method being advocated. The rules that many Muslims think of when they hear the term „Halal slaughter or Islamic slaughter“ are not from the Koran but are guidelines or interpretations that Imams from all over the world have, over centuries, developed themselves. For example, some Imams do not accept stunning (ie. rendering the animals unconscious before throat cut by such tools as a captive bolt stunner) in the slaughterhouse, because stunning sometimes leads to the instantaneous death of the animal (brain dead, heart still beats for some time after stunning). They thus consider the animal that died from stunning in a slaughterhouse is carrion and thus no longer halal. This is unfortunate, as an animal that „died“ from being stunned by a captive bolt stunner right before having its throat cut is not carrion (“mayta“ in Arabic). Carrion is decaying flesh from an animal that died on its own (from illness or old-age) and cannot be further processed in a timely manner to make it's meat still safe for consumption. An animal that died from being stunned with a captive bolt stunner immediately before having it's throat cut during the slaughter process at a slaughterhouse is not carrion but perfectly healthy to eat. Veterinarians are in slaughterhouses to be sure that the carcasses are of healthy animals and safe for consumption. If stunning animals prior to cutting their throats created dangerous decaying meat (carrion), then there would be many sick and dead people in countries where animals are always first stunned during slaughter. This is not at all the case. Veterinarians approve carcasses from animals that were stunned via a captive bolt pistol, even ones that died instantaneously right before the throat cut, as their meat is totally safe for human consumption.

So when a human knows the cause of death of the animal (in this case, humans wanted to slaughter the animal for meat) and when the animal is quickly bled out (its flesh has no time to start decaying) then one is speaking of healthy (Halal) meat, not carrion. Stunning can therefore be seen as a modern and acceptable part of the slaughter process that improves


animal welfare and meat quality, and is not at all in conflict with Halal rules. There are no rules in the Koran that say that stunning is forbidden.

This document aims to explain why there are so many different opinions about Islamic slaughter methods, and looks at the original religious scripts to find out what was the real intent in order to clarify some very deep misconceptions.

First let's look directly in the Koran

Koran Chapter 5 Surat Al-Mai'dah (The Table Spread), verse 3:

حُرِّمَتْ عَلَيْكُمُ الْمَيْتَةُ وَالْدَّمُ وَلَحْمُ الْخِنْزِيرِ وَمَا أُهْلَ لِغَيْرِ اللَّهِ بِهِ
وَالْمُنْخَنِقَةُ وَالْمَوْقُوذَةُ وَالْمُتَرَدِّيَةُ وَالنَّطِيحَةُ وَمَا أَكَلَ السَّبُعُ إِلَّا مَا
ذَكَيْتُمْ وَمَا ذُبِحَ عَلَى النُّصُبِ وَأَنْ تَسْتَقْسِمُوا بِالْأَزْلَمِ ذَٰلِكُمْ فِسْقٌ
الْيَوْمَ يَئِسَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ دِينِكُمْ فَلَا تَخْشَوْهُمْ وَاخْشَوْنَ الْيَوْمَ
أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَتَمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيْتُ لَكُمُ الْإِسْلَامَ دِينًا
فَمَنْ اضْطُرَّ فِي مَخْصَصَةٍ غَيْرِ مُتَجَانِفٍ لِإِثْمٍ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ



Here below is a word-for-word translation of the original Arabic verse:

ḥurrimat = Prohibited
alaykumu = for you is
el-maytatu = carrion, (decaying flesh from animals that died
of unknown reasons and on its own)

(all current, well-respected Imams agree on the fact that „El-Maytatu“ is forbidden because the eating of animals found already dead for unknown reasons and unknown length of time may have died from disease and thus pose the serious risk of making humans sick when consumed).

wa-d-damu = shed (spilled) blood,
wa-laḥmu l-ḥinzīri = the flesh of swine,
wa-mā uhillā li-ḡayri llāhi biḥī = and which any other name than that of
Allah has been invoked,
wa-l-munḥaniqātu = and animals strangled to death,

wa-l-mawqūdatu	= and animals that have been beaten to death,
wa-l-mutaraddiyatu	= and animals that fell to their death,
wa-n-naṭīḥatu	= and animals gored by horns to their death,
wa-mā akala s-sabu‘u	= and animals which have been eaten by a wild animal,
illā mā	= <i>except which</i>
dakkaytum	= the butchering process can be completed timely (can be carried out before the time expires to bleed them out. You know the reason of (recent) death and thus can complete the slaughtering process timely before the flesh starts to decay)
wa-mā dubiha alā n-nuṣubi	= and animals which are slaughtered on altars.

We see here that dead animals are *not* considered as carrion („el maytatu“) if the slaughtering process can still be completed safely. If the animal died for known reasons (as listed above) and thus not due to unknown and potentially dangerous-for-human-consumption reasons (e.g. disease) and if their death was recent, with the flesh not yet in a state of decay, one can still complete the (slaughter) process by bleeding them out.

The definition of this last term, „dakkaytum“ is often misunderstood by Muslims. It is thought to mean the slaughter of an animal that is alive and practiced in the field as the slaughter of an animal that is fully alert and conscious at the moment of the cut! This is false. As you can see above, the word „dakkaytum“ is used in the context of providing an exception („illā“) for animals that are already dead from known reasons (beaten, strangled, fallen, gored) *but* are still fit for human consumption as you can still timely bleed them out. Dakkaytum (dakka) has nothing to do with slaughtering an animal but with the ability to complete the entire slaughter process, thus also bleed out, timely. In the next sentence we see anyhow that the word for just slaughter is „dubiha“ and not „dakkaytum“.

wa-mā **dubiha** alā n-nuṣubi = and animals which are slaughtered on altars.

Furthermore, the animals listed in the verse above do not need to show signs of life. They are animals that are already dead. Normally animals found already dead are haram, as they are carrion but in these specific cases listed above, the cause of death is known (from a physical acute event/accident, and not from a dangerous disease) and the slaughter process can be finished on a timely manner, thus their flesh is healthy to consume (halal). The meat of these specific animals in the verse is not „el-maytatu“ (carrion).

Additionally, it is important to note that the term „Dekka“ (definition: the butchering process can be completed timely) is only used once in the Koran, in the verse above. The term used for slaughter on the other hand, found in many other locations in the Koran, is „Dubiha“. This further confirms that some animals that are dead can be consumed, when the cause is known and the butchering process can be completed out timely (Dekka), before the meat decays. The fact that the Koran has a separate term for this further confirms that it is not as simple as „alive animal = halal“ and „dead animal = haram“ as often, falsely, practiced and interpreted today.

It is a great injustice to animals in so many Islamic slaughterhouses that they continue to be

slaughtered while fully conscious and fully sentient, without any benefit of modern stunning equipment to limit their fear and pain, because of humans falsely and unnecessarily arguing that they must be fully alive and conscious at the moment of the cut. It is also missing the essence of the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed, which are to show compassion wherever possible, as we will see later in this document.

To summarize: Prohibited is carrion, shed (spilled) blood, the flesh of swine, that on which any other name than that of Allah has been invoked, the flesh of animals killed by strangulation, killed by being beaten, killed by a fall, killed by being gored to death, eaten by wild animals, except when you know the reason of death is not compromising food safety and the slaughter process can be completed timely.

Often Muslims think that cutting with a knife is slaughtering an animal, but cutting is just part of the entire process of slaughtering an animal. Slaughtering is a *process* with the goal of killing an animal and preparing its carcass for consumption. Cutting the throat is just one part of the slaughter process aimed at removing the blood. The difference in these terms is also evident in the Arabic language, the original language of the Koran.

ḍabiha = slaughter

qata'a = cutting

ḍakka = complete the process.

So far we have covered the definition of what haram is. Now we come to the definition of halal. Many Muslims, including even Imams and officials from the Presidency of Religious Affairs in Islamic countries, think that halal means that a live animal, and also fully conscious, is slaughtered with only a knife. They think that halal means the animal cannot be rendered unconscious first. However, the Koran says something totally different. Halal in the Koran simply means healthy food fit for human consumption. In other words, food that will not make people sick (food safety). There is no description or definition for „Halal slaughter“ in the koran or in a hadith.

Koran Chapter 5 Surat Al-Mai'dah (The Table Spread), verse 4:

يَسْأَلُونَكَ مَاذَا أُحِلَّ لَهُمْ قُلْ أُحِلَّ لَكُمْ الْطَيِّبَاتُ وَمَا
عَلَّمْتُم مِّنَ الْجَوَارِحِ مُكَلِّبِينَ تُعَلِّمُونَهُنَّ مِمَّا عَلَّمَكُمُ اللَّهُ
فَكُلُوا مِمَّا أَمْسَكْنَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَاذْكُرُوا اسْمَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ وَانْقُوا اللَّهَ
إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَرِيعُ الْحِسَابِ ﴿٤﴾

Word by word translation

yas alūnaka = They ask you

māḍā uḥilla lahum = what is halal (permitted) for them

qul	= Say,
uḥilla lakumu	= halal is for you
ṭ-ṭayyibātu	= food that is healthy (fit for human consumption).

The entire verse: They ask you what is halal? Say, halal is food that is healthy (fit for human consumption).

Now we know how haram and halal are defined in the Koran. We have also seen how haram food can become halal in Chapter 5, verse 3 of the Koran. But how was this verse understood and practiced in earlier times, 1000 years ago? How did the very early Imams interpret and teach these terms found in the Koran, just after Mohammed died?

Imam Muhammed (born 130 years after the death of Prophet Mohammed) and a scholar of Imam Abu Hanife, said that if you have difficulty slaughtering an animal, you can kill him first and then bleed him out to complete the slaughter process. Why? Cattle can fight for their life and because you cannot control them it is dangerous to slaughter them. It is perfectly acceptable to kill them before completing the slaughter process to make it safer for a person to get close and bleed him out. The meat is still halal (from the book El Hidaye by Imam Merginani).

The wonder term „dakka“ **ذَكَ - ذَكَّيْتُمْ**

According to Imam Abu Hanife (born 67 years after Mohammed), dakkaytum means that when one makes a decision, it needs to be well-founded. One needs a good reason to explain the decision taken.

(For example, when you know that an animal died due to a recent fall, and not due to an illness, and the flesh is still fresh and not in a state of decaying, you can decide to complete the slaughter process as the meat is still healthy and thus halal).

According to Imam Merginani in his book El Hidaye Islam rules (born 485 years after Mohammed) „dakkaytum“ is the confirmation of the accuracy of the event. For example, make sure that the testimonies of those who testify in court are credible (make sure you know for sure why the animal died and that the death was recent before completing the process of slaughter for consumption). In summary, make smart and well-founded decisions.

According to Imam Ibnu'l Arab'i (born 533 years after Mohammed) „Dakkaytum“ is the completion of an action.

These definitions are from the book „Islamic Terms“ by Huseyin Kerim Ece.

It is obvious from these definitions that earlier Imams, closer to the time of Mohammed, interpreted terms related to meat and slaughter differently than many Muslim's today. People asked the Prophet at the time when he was alive: „people bring meat to us and offer it as a gift but we do not know whether or not they evoked the name of Allah on it, may we still eat it or is it forbidden?“. The Prophet replied: „mention the name of Allah and enjoy eating it“. We can understand from this that the Prophet is not concerned if the animal was slaughtered using a specific method, but simply on the meat being fit for human consumption and appreciate the gift.

The definition of „dakkaytum“ nowadays by more recent Imams and Muslims is quite varied. Many now insist that animals that have been strangled, fallen, gored by a horn or receive a blow/hit can only be slaughtered if they are still alive! They write in their own words of interpretation „before its death“ in **brackets**, as this is their own interpretation but not the original script from the Koran. That is why so many Imams and Muslims are told not to accept stunning of animals because stunning can kill the animal before the slaughter process is complete. But the original meaning is that it is ok to complete the slaughter process even if the animal is dead, as long as it died for known and safe reasons, and you can timely complete the slaughter process of de-bleeding. There is logic in this, as animals that died for unknown reasons and whose flesh is decaying are a real threat to the health of the human consumer- it is very dangerous to eat carrion. It is however not dangerous at all to first render animals insensitive to pain and fear during slaughter.

Mohsin Khan: Forbidden to you (for food) are: Al-Maytatah (the dead animals - cattle-beast not slaughtered), blood, the flesh of swine, and the meat of that which has been slaughtered as a sacrifice for others than Allah, or has been slaughtered for idols, etc., or on which Allah's Name has not been mentioned while slaughtering, and that which has been killed by strangling, or by a violent blow, or by a headlong fall, or by the goring of horns - and that which has been (partly) eaten by a wild animal - unless you are able to slaughter it (before its death) and that which is sacrificed (slaughtered) on AnNusub (stone altars). (Forbidden) also is to use arrows seeking luck or decision, (all) that is Fisqun (disobedience of Allah and sin). This day, those who disbelieved have given up all hope of your religion, so fear them not, but fear Me. This day, I have perfected your religion for you, completed My Favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion. But as for him who is forced by severe hunger, with no inclination to sin (such can eat these above-mentioned meats), then surely, Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

Shakir: Forbidden to you is that which dies of itself, and blood, and flesh of swine, and that on which any other name than that of Allah has been invoked, and the strangled (animal) and that beaten to death, and that killed by a fall and that killed by being smitten with the horn, and that which wild beasts have eaten, except what you slaughter, and what is sacrificed on stones set up (for idols) and that you divide by the arrows; that is a transgression. This day have those who disbelieve despaired of your religion, so fear them not, and fear Me. This day have I perfected for you your religion and completed My favor on you and chosen for you Islam as a religion; but whoever is compelled by hunger, not inclining willfully to sin, then surely Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.

What is important is that decaying dead animals are not brought to the slaughterhouse to be slaughtered- thus animals that are already dead for unknown reasons should never be brought to the slaughterhouse or be slaughtered as consumption is dangerous! This shows how advanced the Prophet Mohammed was in his rules of what meat is haram and halal as he knew what could cause harm to the health of humans. One should bring live and healthy animals into the slaughterhouses to be slaughtered. But this does not mean that the animal cannot be stunned during the slaughter process in the slaughterhouse! it also does not mean that the animal must be killed by a knife to the throat while it is fully alive and conscious. When one uses a stunner, such as a captive bolt pistol, the animal is at least insensitive to pain (unconscious).

The Prophet has always blamed those that make animals suffer unnecessarily. He said to a man who forced an animal down without yet sharpening the knife, „Why are you inflicting suffering on this animal twice?“. He ordered that the knife be sharpened out of sight of the

animal and before restraining the animal in position for slaughter. Why? So that the fear of the animal is kept to a minimum.

A modern tool to render animals unconscious during the slaughter process, such as a captive bolt stunner, should thus be seen as something that follows the teachings of the Prophet. To render an animal unconscious first, thus insensitive to pain and fear, before restraint and cutting the throat, is completely in respect with the intent of the Prophet's teachings because we further limit the animals' pain and fear. Stunning the animal during the slaughter process better protects the animal from pain and suffering inflicted during slaughter. Stunning should be seen as a new, modern tool to be used in the slaughter process to render slaughter less painful and fearful to the animal, even when in some cases the stunning may kill the animal during the slaughter process.

In books written by early Imams, they spoke about animal-welfare during slaughter in relation to how the Prophet behaved towards animals during his life. This information is not in the Koran but in the Hadiths. Hadiths are recorded teachings/lectures by the Prophet Mohammed. Practices that caused unnecessary suffering back then, such as dragging an animal to the location of slaughter by a rope or chain around the leg, or beating an animal to make it move, were frowned upon. One should not pull or pinch an animal by its tail. The animals should not see the slaughter of each other, as this would cause distress. One should not prepare an animal for slaughter before the equipment to kill the animal is ready to use immediately, in order to reduce the time of fear (for example the knives are nearby and already sharp instead of sharpening them while the animal waits and watches). But nowadays most halal slaughterhouses and halal certifying companies trash the humane and logic content of the Religion, and focus just on if the animal was conscious at the moment of the bleed out by the knife. Slaughtering animals with a much higher degree of compassion complying with the essence of Prophet Mohammed's teachings would be a great way in the future to improve halal slaughterhouses and make the certificates more valuable and credible than they are now. A first and logical step would be to limit the amount of time animals suffer in the slaughterhouse by rendering them unconscious as quickly as possible before leg restraint and cutting.

Wrong-way of thinking

Among Muslims, another term is often used, that of „Islamic way of slaughter“. They mean by this, that the animal is slaughtered by using a sharp knife, as the Prophet Mohammed practiced in his days.

This is the wrong way of thinking. We do things so differently now in so many different aspects of our life, it is wrong to think that we must always stick to old-fashioned methods and technologies in order to be a good Muslim. What is important is the essence of the teachings. The Prophet carried his loads on camels, if he were alive today, he would have likely transported them using a truck just as we all do. We use now toothbrushes, even electric ones, also very different from the sticks (miswak) used to clean between the teeth as the Prophet practiced. There is no reason why the slaughter of animals must be practiced in the old-fashioned way when new technologies can help make slaughter less stressful for the animal and slaughter-person. What does remain valid however is to show compassion, and always choose for the more compassionate choice, as the Prophet taught.

Another needless worry.

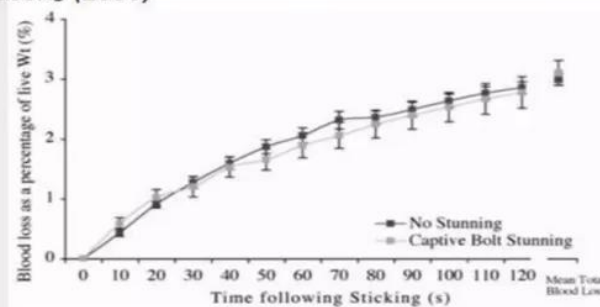
Blood does not clot or stop flowing immediately after an animal dies. In the slaughterhouse you cut the throat 10-20 seconds after you stun the animal, so quickly that it is just a part of the slaughter process. After stunning the heart of the animal continues to beat for about 10 minutes, even if the part of the brain responsible for pain reception is switched off by the application of the captive bolt stunner. The captive bolt stunner renders the animal unconscious, insensitive to pain, but does not immediately stop the heart or blood from pumping.

The blood that spills out after stunning an animal prior to cutting its throat is just as much as when the animal is not pre-stunned. Please see the figure below.

Percentage blood loss

Comparison of Halal slaughter with captive bolt stunning and neck cutting in cattle: exsanguination and quality parameters

MH Anil*†, T Yesildere‡, H Aksu‡, E Matur‡, JL McKinstry†, HR Weaver†, O Erdogan‡, S Hughes† and C Mason§ (2006)



Similar results confirmed by Neves et al. (2009). Velarde et al. (2003) & Khalid (2011)

Besides, only the blood that has spilled is forbidden, not what is left in the animal (Surah Enam 145).

Demam Mesfuhan (running blood)

Just like the Koran, in the Torah eating dead animals is also not allowed. If someone finds an animal that is already dead they are advised not to eat it. Here is the verse of Torah Deuteronomy 14 "21 Do not eat anything you find already dead." For this reason many people of the Jewish faith knew that it is dangerous to eat dead animals that are found already dead.

But in my opinion, stunners should also be used during slaughter for kosher meat, because the stunner is just a modern tool used in the slaughtering process of a healthy animal to render the slaughter process less stressful and painful for the animal. The aim of the slaughter process is to kill the animal, so the fact that it may die from the stunner or from the knife during the slaughter process is irrelevant and not a part of the intent of this verse.

Nobody brings a dead animal to the slaughterhouse or no animal dies of its own accord in a slaughterhouse. Healthy living animals are intentionally killed at slaughterhouses by humans to be eaten. Therefore, stunning and then cutting in a slaughterhouse is perfectly kosher and halal.

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