

Meat of the People of the Book (part 1 of 2)

Description: Two lessons will shed light on the Islamic rules and regulations of slaughtered meats and the prevailing practices in Western slaughterhouses and provide guidance on where to buy meat from.

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Category: Lessons > [Islamic Lifestyle, Morals and Practices](#) > [Dietary Laws](#)

Objectives

- To understand the importance of learning Islamic regulations of food.
- To understand the elements of Islamic procedure for slaughter and the wisdom behind Islamic rules of slaughtering.

Arabic Terms

- *Qiblah* - The direction one faces during the formal prayers.
- *Halal* - permissible.

Importance of Learning Islamic Regulations of Food

For a Muslim, a lot of confusion surrounds the question on foods and meats sold in grocery stores and eating them in restaurants in the West. The matter of slaughtering animals is not a mundane issue in which an individual may act as he desires, rather it is regarded an act of worship. The Messenger of Allah, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him, said:



“Whoever prays our prayer and faces our *qiblah* and eats our slaughtered animals, is a believer who is under Allah’s and His Messenger’s protection.” [\[1\]](#)

This hadith of the Messenger of Allah is clear: the slaughtering of animals holds a significant position in Islam. The Prophet counted the slaughtering of animals with prayer and facing the *qiblah*.

Two Categories of Food

Vegetables and Fruits

Naturally, neither fruits nor vegetables have any special slaughtering regulations. By the agreement of the scholars, they are *halal* and permissible, regardless of who cultivated it or owns it as long as it is healthy and safe from impurity. Therefore, a Muslim may eat them from a member of any other religion.

Animal meat is further divided into two categories: seafood and terrestrial animals.

Seafood

By agreement of scholars, seafood is *halal* in general regardless of where it was raised or who caught it. Since fish does not require special slaughtering procedures, they are considered lawful. This includes shrimps and prawns according to vast majority of scholars. A few exceptions are:

- Crocodiles
- Frogs
- Otters and turtles (but *halal* after slaughtering them)

Prohibited Meats of Domesticated Animals

A wild animal, i.e. non-domesticated, is allowed to eat it if prerequisites of hunting were met.

Meat of domesticated animals with the condition it has been slaughtered according to Islamic guidelines is permissible. If it falls into one of the categories mentioned in the following verse, it becomes forbidden:

“Forbidden to you (for food) are the dead animals, blood, the flesh of swine, and the meat of that which has been slaughtered as a sacrifice for others than Allah...” (Quran 5:3)

Ibn ‘Abbas reported that Allah’s Messenger prohibited the eating of all carnivorous animals that have canine teeth that are fashioned to tear flesh (i.e. beasts of prey, like dogs and foxes), and all birds having talons (like eagles and falcons).[\[2\]](#)

Elements of Islamic Procedure for Slaughter

- What Must be Cut:
 - two jugular veins (large blood vessels of the neck)
 - throat (channel for breathing; windpipe)

- esophagus (tube for the passage of food and water; gullet)
- Any instrument capable of making the animal bleed is permissible, be it made of steel, iron, sharp stone or wood, except bone, tooth, or nail. The instrument must be sharp. It is discouraged for one to use a blunt instrument so that the animal will not be distressed or put through unnecessary suffering.

Wisdom behind Islamic Rules of Slaughtering

The wisdom of the Islamic rules of slaughtering is to take the animal's life in the quickest and least painful way; the requirements of using a sharp instrument and of cutting the throat relate to this end. It is forbidden to slit the throat by using teeth or nails since this will cause pain to the animal and is likely to strangle it. The Prophet recommended sharpening the knife and putting the animal at ease, saying, Allah has ordained kindness in everything, "and when you slaughter, do it in the best manner by first sharpening the knife and putting the animal at ease."[\[3\]](#)

Is Pronouncing *Bismillah* a Prerequisite?

First, this practice is in opposition to the practice of the idolaters before Islam, who mentioned the names of their non-existent gods while slaughtering animals.

Second, animals, like human beings, are creatures of Allah, and they are living beings. Therefore, it is important to say 'Bismillah' before taking the life of one of these animals as this practice is tantamount to obtaining permission from Allah. Mentioning the name of Allah while slaughtering the animal is a declaration of this divine permission, as if the one who is killing the animal were saying, "This act of mine is not an act of aggression against the universe nor of oppression to this creature, but in the name of Allah I slaughter, in the name of Allah I hunt, and in the name of Allah I eat."

According to the majority of Muslim scholars, pronouncing *Bismillah* is required otherwise the meat becomes forbidden. This is based on 6:121, 5:4, 22:34, 22:36, 6:138, 6:119. The Prophet said, "So slaughter in the Name of Allah."[\[4\]](#)

Who Is Qualified to Slaughter?

A Muslim, Jew, or a Christian are qualified to perform the slaughter. According to the vast majority of the scholars, the meat slaughtered by a Jew or a Christian must meet the same criteria a Muslim must meet. If he does not meet that criteria, then the meat will be considered of a 'dead animal' or something similar.

Common Objection

Some people say that as long as the People of the Scripture consider what they killed (by electric shock, etc) as *halal* and they deem it to be permissible in their religion, it is

halal for Muslims.

It is incorrect because:

(a) Allah has forbidden for us an animal that has been strangled or suffocated to death (for instance by tying a rope), or beaten to death by a club as stated in 5:3 and all Muslim scholars agree about their prohibition. So, an animal killed by a Jew or Christian without proper slaughtering will be considered forbidden and the meat will be forbidden just like the flesh of the swine and there is no difference whether a Muslim strangles it or beats it to death or someone else. According to Quran 5:3 it is forbidden.

(b) Pork is eaten by the Christians, yet no single scholar considers it to be permissible. Similarly, an animal killed by a Jew or Christian by breaking the neck or any other way that does not meet Islamic criteria of slaughtering will be forbidden. Why? Because all of them, the flesh of swine, carrion, an animal strangled or beaten to death, all have been made impermissible by Allah in the same verse in Quran 5:3. The verse makes no distinction between the pig, an animal killed by strangling, or stunned/electrocuted, or beaten to death, or whose head is smashed.

Endnotes:

[1] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari*

[2] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim*

[3] *Saheeh Muslim*

[4] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari*

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