

Meat of the People of the Book (part 2 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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Objectives

- To understand the slaughterhouse procedures in the West for poultry and livestock and the Islamic rulings related to them.
- To understand the ruling on meat about which it's not known who slaughtered it and how, like meat found in a grocery store or a restaurant.
- Practical tips on buying your meat.

Arabic Terms

- *Shariah* - Islamic Law.
- *Halal* - permissible.
- *Haram* - Forbidden or prohibited.

Slaughterhouse Procedures in the West

There is much documented evidence of slaughterhouse procedures in the West.

Poultry Procedures

- Shackling:

At the slaughterhouse, the birds sit in the trucks without food or water for 1 to 9 hours or more waiting to be killed. Inside the plant, in the "live-hang" area, they are jammed into a metal rack that clamps them upside down by their feet.



- Stunning Tank for Electrical Immobilization:

The birds' heads and upper bodies are then dragged through a splashing water trough called a "stunner." This water is cold and salted to conduct electricity. Its purpose is to immobilize, to keep them from thrashing and to paralyze the muscles of their feathers so they can pop out easily. Sometimes the machine breaks down and the chicken are left hanging in this water for hours.

- Neck-Cutting:

After being dragged through the "stun" bath, the birds have their necks partially sliced by a rotating machine blade and/or a manual neck cutter. Many times arteries are missed as they are embedded in the bird's neck.

- Bleed-Out Tunnel and Scalding Tank:

Still alive - the industry intentionally keeps the birds alive during the slaughter process so their hearts will continue to pump blood -- they then hang upside down for 90 seconds in a bleed out tunnel where they're supposed to die from blood loss, but millions of birds do not die, while an unspecified number of birds drown in pools of blood when the conveyer belt dips too close to the floor. Dead or alive, the birds are then dropped into tanks of semi-scalding water. In 1993, of 7 billion birds slaughtered in U.S. facilities, over 3 million birds were plunged into the scald tanks alive.[\[1\]](#) According to a former slaughterhouse worker, when chickens are scalded alive, they "flop, scream, kick, and their eyeballs pop out of their heads. They often come out of the other end with broken bones and disfigured and missing body parts because they've struggled so much in the tank."

- From the *Shariah* perspective, this method is problematic due to following reasons:

(a) Stunning can possibly lead to death. Some estimates state up to 90% of chicken die due to electrocution. If it does, then the chicken will be dead before its neck is cut and considered carrion.

(b) The blades of neck-cutting machines often miss the neck or cut it partially. The poultry industry has a special name for such chicken, 'redskins.' They are later killed in the scalding tank. Such chickens will be considered carrion as well.

(c) When a machine is slitting throats, it is not possible to pronounce *Bismillah* for every chicken. At most the person may pronounce it before starting the machine. Pronouncing *Bismillah* at the time of slaughter is a requirement for the animal's meat to be *halal*.

Livestock Procedures

Before being slaughtered, cattle in the West are kept in what is called 'feedlot' - or cow city. Instead of grass, they are fed corn, which is cheap, to make them fat in a short period of time. Corn creates health problems, so they are given antibiotics. There are up to 100,000 animals in a couple of hundred acres. Cows have barely enough space to stand, they sleep and rest in manure. The first thing is removing the manure when they arrive to the slaughterhouse from the feedlot. It is a difficult process; some gets mixed with the

meat. Manure contains E-Coli and other pathogens. That's why the meat is irradiated.

In the US, by law, livestock must be stunned by electric shock, gas, a blow on the head with a sledgehammer, or a shot between the eyes from a spring-loaded bolt (known as the 'captive bolt system') before being hung upside down and slaughtered by their throats. During this stage of the process only two jugular veins are slit and the esophagus and respiratory tract are left intact.

Here is a typical procedure: a man holding an object that looks like a power nailing gun, called a stunner injects a metal bolt into the cow's brain, right between the eyes. It's about the size and length of a thick pencil. This should render the animal brain dead.

Is a stunned animal *halal* after it is slaughtered by a Muslim, Jew, or Christian? In some cases the animals certainly die before being slaughtered which will render them *haram*. The scholars who have eye-witnessed some of these procedures doubt if the animal is alive after being shot between the eyes. In some cases, electric shock and gassing also cause certain death by asphyxiation. This seems to be an area of investigation for Muslim experts. At the very minimum stunning animals in this manner is a doubtful practice and it is worth mentioning that the Jews do not practice it.

Consuming Meat Sold in Western Grocery Stores Cannot be Considered *Halal* Due to the Following Reasons:

(a) There is no way to know the religion of the person performing the slaughter, since many people work in the slaughterhouses who are Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, atheists, and people who have no religion.

(b) If majority of people living in the area where a slaughterhouse is located are from People of the Scripture, there is no way to know whether the slaughter-man is just an American with a Christian name as many people in the West today have Christian names, but they are not Christians.

(c) Even if it is assumed the person is a Christian, most of the methods employed in slaughterhouses would render the animal outright *haram* or at the very least doubtful (like stunning cows).

Given the above considerations, a Muslim is not permitted to purchase his meat from grocery stores in the West unless there is certainty the meat was slaughtered according to *Shariah* standards.

'Adi ibn Hatim reported: I asked Allah's Messenger about hunting. He said: When you shoot your arrow, recite the name of Allah, and if you find the arrow killed it then eat, except when you find it fallen into water, for in that case you do not know whether it is water that caused its death or your arrow.[\[2\]](#)

This hadith indicates: if there are some indications of meat being *halal* and some of it being *haram*, indications of *haram* will be given preference. Also, meat is taken to be

impermissible, until proven to be *halal* as mentioned by many jurists.

What If We Do Not Know If God's Name was Pronounced on Meat Slaughtered by a Jew or Christian?

Without any scholarly dispute, it is allowed in such a case.

Meat Slaughtered by Pagans, Hindus, & Atheists

Scholars agree that such slaughtered meat is *haram* and cannot be eaten.

If a Hindu or any polytheist does not slaughter the meat himself, but purchases *halal* meat, then one may eat it.

What If It Is Unknown Who Slaughtered It & How, Like Meat Found in a Grocery Store of a Restaurant?

(i) If it is found in a Muslim majority country one may buy the meat from the market and eat it without any scholarly dispute even if we do not know the name of the person who slaughtered it or whether if it was done according to the *Shariah*. This is because what is found in Muslim lands is assumed to meet the criteria set by the *Shariah*.

'A people asked the Prophet who were given meat by some people and they did not know if *Bismillah* was pronounced on it or not. The Prophet instructed them to say *Bismillah* on it and eat it.'

(ii) In a country where the majority of people are neither Jews nor Christians, the meat may not be purchased from the markets and cannot be eaten, unless one ascertains or has good reason to believe that it was slaughtered properly by a Muslim or a Jew or Christian.

(iii) If it is found in a country where *halal* and *haram* meat both are found, then it is not permitted because of doubt; because in a scenario where *halal* and *haram* coexist, preference is given to *haram*; therefore, one must avoid such meats. This is the position of the majority of scholars. It is based on the hadith of 'Adi who asked, 'Suppose I send my dog but I find another dog at the game, and I do not know which dog caught it?' The Prophet replied, 'Do not eat it, for while you mentioned the name of Allah over your dog, you did not mention it over the other dog.'

(iv) If it is found in a land where majority of people are Jews and Christians, the original ruling is the same as Muslim lands because their meat is permissible just as the Muslim's. But, when it is known for certain or there is good reason to believe they do not slaughter according to the criteria set by the *Shariah*, then it is not allowed to eat their meat unless proper slaughtering has been ascertained. This is the predominant case in Western countries as declared by many scholars who have actually lived here or have investigated this issue during their visits.

Practical Tips

- Search online for *halal* Muslim stores in your area or neighboring cities.
- Contact your local mosque or ask Muslim friends for information on stores that sell *halal* meat.
- In relation to meats slaughtered by Jews and Christians, caution should be practiced that the meats remain unprocessed. If they are processed one should read the label for ingredients. In many cases alcohol (red wine/white wine) is added to meat products to tenderize and flavour them.
- You can buy raw meat marked kosher from local grocery stores.

Endnotes:

[1] Freedom of Information Act #94-363, Poultry Slaughtered, Condemned, and Cadavers, 6/30/94

[2] Saheeh Muslim

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