



Non-stunned Halal Slaughter



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The Quran

Several passages of the Quran impose dietary requirements that Muslims are committed to follow:

Surah 2 ‘*The Cow*’

172. “O you who believe! Eat of the good things that We have provided you and give thanks to God if it is he whom you worship.

173. **He has forbidden you only carrion, blood, the flesh of swine, and what has been offered to other than God.** But whosoever is compelled by necessity – neither coveting nor transgressing – no sin shall be upon him.
Truly God is Forgiving, Merciful”

Surah 5 ‘*The Table Spread*’

3. “Forbidden unto you are carrion and blood, the flesh of swine and that which has been strangled or beaten to death, that which has been killed by falling or has been gored to death, that which has been mangled by beasts of prey – save that which you may purify – and that which is sacrificed on stone altars and that which you allot with divining arrows: that is iniquity. This day¹ those who disbelieved have despaired of your religion. So fear them not but fear Me! This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed my blessing upon you, and have approved for you as religion Submission [Islam].

But whosoever is compelled by hunger without inclining towards sin, then surely God is Forgiving, Merciful.

4. They ask thee what is lawful unto them? Say:

‘Lawful unto you are all good things’

And **as for the hunting animals** you have taught, teaching them from that which God has taught you, **eat of what they catch for you, and mention the name of God over it.** And reverence God. Truly God is swift in reckoning!

¹ The verse is often thought to have been announced during Mohammed’s farewell pilgrimage to Mecca.

5. This day all good things are made lawful unto you. **The food of those who have been given the Book is lawful unto you and your food is lawful unto them.**

And likewise the chaste women of the believers and the chaste women of those who were given the Book before you, when you have given them their bridewealth as married women, not as fornicators nor as paramours...”

Surah 6 ‘The Cattle’

118. “So eat of that over which the Name of God has been invoked, if you are believers in his signs.”



142. “And He produces the cattle, some for burden and some of slaughter. Eat of that which God has provided you, and follow not the footsteps of Satan. Truly he is a manifest enemy unto you.

143: Eight pairs: of sheep, two, and of goats, two. Say:

‘Is it the two males that He has forbidden or the two females or that which the wombs of the two females contain? Tell me with knowledge if you are truthful?’

144. And of camels, two, and of oxen, two. Say:

‘Is it the two males that He has forbidden or the two females or that which the wombs of the two females contain? Or were you present when God enjoined this upon you?’

Who does greater wrong than one who fabricates a lie against God that he may lead men astray without knowledge.?

Truly God guides not wrongdoing people.

145. Say:

‘I do not find in that which is revealed unto me anything forbidden to one who would eat thereof, save of blood poured forth, or the flesh of swine – for that is surely defilement – or a sinful offering made to other than God.

But whosoever is compelled by necessity, without wilfully disobeying or transgressing, truly thy Lord is Forgiving, Merciful’

146. And unto those who are Jews, we forbade every animal with claws; and of oxen and sheep We forbade them the fat thereof, save that upon their backs, or their entrails, or that which is mingled with bone. Thus We did recompense them for their wilful disobedience, and surely We are Truthful.

147. But if they deny thee say:

‘Your lord is possessed of vast Mercy but His Might will not be averted from the guilty people.’”

Translation note

‘Every animal with claws’

The prohibition that God had imposed upon the Jews that *The Study Quran* translates as ‘every animal with claws’ is often² translated as ‘every animal with the cloven (or divided) hoof, deliberately replicating the words of the Books of Leviticus (11.2-3) and Deuteronomy (14.6).

Surah 16 ‘*The Bee*’

114. “So eat of the lawful and good things god has provided you and give thanks to the blessing of God if it is He Whom you worship.

115. **He has only forbidden you carrion, and blood and the flesh of swine. And that which has been offered to other than God.** But whosoever is compelled by necessity, without wilfully disobeying or transgressing, truly God is forgiving, Merciful.”

² Including Ali Qarai, Daryabadi, Hilali & Khan, Qaruibullah and Yusuf Ali.

Biblical Tradition

Gabriel Reynolds in *The Quran and The Bible* compares the Quran's dietary requirements with those adopted by the early Christian church at the Council of Jerusalem c.AD 50. Jesus and the twelve apostles had all been Jews and Jesus had expressed his teachings in relation to the Jewish scripture. This council, chaired by St Peter was convened to address whether the many gentile converts being converted to Jesus' teachings by St Paul should be required to abide by the Mosaic law set out in the Torah. In a critical moment in the development of Christianity the council answered the question that they were not, other than for these modest dietary prohibitions and 'illicit marriages'. This decision allowed the development of Christianity as a distinct religion separate to Judaism.

The decision is recounted in Acts of the Apostles:

"It has been decided by the Holy Spirit and by ourselves not to impose upon you any burden beyond these essentials:

*you are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from illicit marriages. Avoid these and you will do what is right."*³

In its form the Quran seems to resemble the Christian instruction by expressing the dietary requirements as being generally permissive with only limited prohibitions.

Surah 2: *"Lawful unto you are all good things ... He has forbidden you only..."*

Surah 5: *"This day all good things are made lawful unto you. The food of those who have been given the Book is lawful unto you and your food is lawful unto them."*

Surah 6: *"I do not find in that which is revealed unto me anything forbidden to one who would eat thereof save..."*

Surah 16: *"So eat of the lawful and good things God has provided you and give thanks to the blessing of God if it is He Whom you worship. He has only forbidden you..."*

5.5 even links the dietary rule to permissible marriages, similarly to Acts.

However, by the addition of 'carrion' and 'the flesh of swine' to the list of prohibited meat, both of which are prohibitions contained in the Mosaic law⁴, the Quran has the effect of striking a middle way between the modest Christian prohibitions decided at the Council of Jerusalem and the far stricter Jewish dietary requirements.

³ 15.28-29. This passage refutes the equivalence often drawn between the Quran and instructions to violence 'in the Bible', since reference to the Bible necessarily implies reading the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament that includes this disapplication of the Mosaic Law for non-Jewish Christians. See ***Violence in the Bible and the Quran: A Fundamental Difference*** on the IRG site.

⁴ Carrion is outlawed in Exodus 22.30, Leviticus 17.15 and 22.8, and Deuteronomy 14.8; pork is prohibited in Leviticus 11.7 and Deuteronomy 14.8.

Quranic dietary rules summarised

Within the Quran then, '*all good things*' are permitted to be eaten, so long as God's name has been pronounced over it, save for:

- ❖ food that has been offered to idols;
- ❖ the flesh of swine,
- ❖ blood, and
- ❖ an animal that has been found as carrion or that has been:

“strangled or beaten to death, that which has been killed by falling or has been gored to death, that which has been mangled by beasts of prey [save for that which can be purified]”

It should be noted that, although the Quran instructs that animals not be eaten if they are found dead or which has died from a number of specific injuries there is no Quranic instruction as to how livestock should be killed. Indeed the fact that the limitations that are given are expressed as the only limitations to restrict the eating of Muslims, and the assertion that the additional rules of the Mosaic law were imposed as a recompense for the Jews' disobedience make it explicit that, other than those specifically adopted, the dietary rules of the Mosaic law do *not* form part of Islam.

Dhabihah (halal slaughter)

Although the Quran and hadith do not set out a prescribed method for religious slaughter, such rules, known as *dhabihah*, were agreed by all four major schools of Sunni fiqh. These rules are set out in the pre-eminent Shafi'i legal text ***Umdat al Salik*** (the ***Reliance of the Traveller***) by Ahmad ibn Naqib al-Misri (completed 1368) :

“It is not permissible to eat any animal until it has been properly slaughtered, the only exceptions to which are fish and locusts which are permissible to eat when they die unslaughtered.

It is unlawful to eat meat slaughtered by a Zoroastrian, someone who has left Islam or an idol worshipper. Or a Christian of the desert Arab tribes.

It is permissible to slaughter with anything that has a cutting edge, but not a tooth, bone or claw, whether human or otherwise, attached to the body or not.

The necessary condition for slaughtering any animal which is within one's capacity to slaughter is to cut both the windpipe and the gullet. It is not necessary for the validity of slaughtering to cut the carotid arteries encompassing the windpipe.

If the slaughterer neglects to cut any part of either the windpipe or the gullet and the animal dies, it is considered an unslaughtered dead animal, as is an animal with purely reflexive movement left when one finishes cutting a part of the windpipe or gullet previously missed.

If the slaughterer cuts from the back of the neck until he severs the windpipe or gullet it is a sin because of the excess pain caused. The slaughterer should cut swiftly and not take his time such that he has to cut two or more times. If he does and there is no life remaining in the animal on the second swipe then the animal has died unslaughtered and is impermissible to eat. The determining factor is whether the life remains in the animal when the knife is applied at the beginning of the last stroke.

It is recommended when slaughtering:

1. *to turn the animal towards the quibla [direction of prayer],*
2. *to sharpen the knife,*
3. *to cut rapidly,*
4. *to mention Allah's name,*
5. *to bless the Prophet...,*
6. *and to cut the large blood vessels.*

It is recommended to slaughter camels by thrusting the knife into the hollow at the base of the neck since it is easier than cutting the throat., and it speeds the exit of the spirit from the body by bypassing the length of the neck, being the preferable way to slaughter any animal with a long neck such as a duck, goose, ostrich or giraffe, with the camel left standing

It is recommended to slaughter other than camels across the throat after laying them on their left side.

It is a necessary condition that the slaughterer not raise his knife hand while slaughtering. If he lifts it before completely severing both the windpipe and the gullet then returns to cut them, then the animal is not lawful to eat.”⁵

Although there are some minor differences (the Hanafi school requires the saying of Allah's name as obligatory rather than recommended) all schools require strict adherence to the practice of exsanguination, the draining of blood from the animal.

This practice, appears to be based, apart from imitation of the Jewish method of execution, upon three hadith:

1. *“Narrated Rafi` bin Khadij:*

The Prophet ... said:

‘Eat what is slaughtered (with any instrument) that makes blood flow out, except what is slaughtered with a tooth or a nail.’

⁵ J17 1-8

Sahih al-Bukhari (Book 72.32)

2. *“Sayyiduna Abd Allah ibn Abbas... reports that the Messenger of Allah... said:*

‘Whatever cuts the jugular veins, then (after cutting it) eat the animal.’”

Al Muwatta of Imam Malik (2/489)

3. *“Ibn Abbas and Abu Huraira... report:*

“The Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him & give him peace) prohibited the Sacrifice of Shaytan.

Abulsa added:

‘It is an animal which is slaughtered by cutting it open and the veins are not cut, and it is then left to die.’”

Sunan Abu Dawud (15.2820)

However none of these actually instruct that slaughter must be carried out by exsanguination.

Effect on animals of slaughter by exsanguination whilst conscious

In 2003 the Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC), an independent body established to advise government, published a report on the 'Welfare of Farmed Animals at Slaughter or Killing – Part 1: Red Meat Animals' that considered the effect of animals of traditional Jewish and Islamic slaughter methods without stunning.

It found:

*“It is difficult to measure pain and distress during the slaughter process in an objective scientific manner and subjective indicators, such as behavioural responses and vocalisation, are prevented from being displayed because of the degree of restraint and the severance of the trachea respectively. By the same token, it is impossible to state with objectivity that an animal would not feel pain and distress following such a procedure. When a very large transverse incision is made across the neck a number of vital tissues are transected including: skin, muscle, trachea, oesophagus, carotid arteries, jugular veins, major nerve trunks (e.g. vagus and phrenic nerves) plus numerous minor nerves. **Such a drastic cut will inevitably trigger a barrage of sensory information to the brain in a sensible (conscious) animal. We are persuaded that such a massive injury would result in very significant pain and distress in the period before insensibility supervenes....***

*The scientific evidence shows that **sheep become insensible within 5-7 seconds** of the cut (3-7 seconds in goats). **Adult cattle, however, may take between 22 and 40 seconds** to become insensible. This period may be extended should occlusion of the carotid arteries take place. **Work done on calves has shown a variation in period to insensibility from 10-120 seconds** depending on the extent of occlusion of the carotid arteries or ballooning in blood vessels... (The difference in the times to loss of sensibility between the various species is due to anatomical differences in the blood supply to the brain).⁶*

In addition to the trauma of the cutting, the FAWC also commented upon the level of restraint necessary to apply to prior to the killing:

*“The level of restraint required to expose the throat, perform an effective cut and hold the animal still until it has bled out is greater than is needed for conventional slaughter **We are concerned about the effectiveness of restraint and the distress caused to animals that we observed during our visits, particularly when smaller cattle were restrained. For instance, the head could slip out of the restraining mechanism and there is also a risk of leg injuries. The operation of the restraint itself takes particular skill to ensure that the animal is held in an appropriate position with the neck extended for an effective cut to be made with speed and accuracy. Restraining pens ... may cause higher levels of distress than conventional stunning boxes and for a longer period of time...***”

⁶ Para. 186-201

Modern pre-slaughter Stunning

Modern abattoirs are generally obliged to stun animals prior to slaughter, in order to minimise pain and distress to the animal.

Common methods include:

Large animals	<p>Penetrating captive bolt/percussion stunning</p> <p>A metal bolt fired by a pistol into the brain of the animal causing the animal to lose consciousness immediately</p> <p>Electrical (reversible)</p> <p>An electrical current is passed through the animal's brain causing temporary loss of consciousness.</p> <p>Electrical (irreversible)</p> <p>An electrical current is passed through the animal's heart, so the animal is not just stunned but also killed.</p> <p>Gassing (normally reserved for pigs and therefore not relevant to halal slaughter)</p>
Poultry	<p>Electrical stunning</p> <p>Birds are normally hung upside down and passed through electrically charged water that stuns them until they are, usually mechanically, killed with a blade.</p> <p>Gassing (fatal)</p>

British-Islamic attitudes to stunning

In 2016 the authors of an article in *Meat Science*⁷ conducted a survey of sixty six Islamic scholars from 55 organisations. Of these sixty two agreed that it was permissible for Halal slaughter to include pre-stunning provided that the stun did not cause death, physical injury or obstruct bleed-out and that slaughter was carried out by a Muslim.

However, many expressed the view that stunning caused more pain to the animal than non-stunned slaughter, and also believed that stunning slowed blood loss thereby prolonging the dying process, and increased the blood content in the meat, affecting its quality and, from a religious perspective, desirability. In a review of the research, the Veterinary Policy Research Foundation proceeds to counter these points with scientific evidence.⁸

The Halal Food Authority, which claims to certify 70% of UK halal meat, contains the following on the FAQ section website:

“Does Halal Food Authority allow stunning of birds and animals?”

Yes, however, one has to be reminded that HFA has always maintained “no stunning to kill”.

- 1. Captive Bolt Stunning – proscribed – prohibited*
- 2. Percussion Stunning – proscribed – prohibited (although above procedures for cattle are allowed by some Ulema’s in Africa & Germany)⁹*
- 3. Gas Stunning – proscribed – prohibited (although Turkish Ulema’s have approved this method for pre-slaughtering of chicken)*
- 4. Halal Food Authority **allows controlled electric stun-with-minuscule amperage**, with official Veterinary Surgeon validating that the animal or the birds do not die prior to slaughtering.*

⁷ *The perception and acceptability of pre-slaughter and post-slaughter stunning for Halal production: The views of UK Islamic scholars and Halal consumers*, Awal Fuseini, Steve B.Wotton, Phil J.Hadley and Toby G. Knowles., January 2017.

⁸ Citing:

Anil, M.H., Yesildere, T., Aksu, H., Matur, E., McKinstry, H.R., Erdogan, O., Hughes, S. and Mason, C. (2004). Comparison of religious slaughter of sheep with methods that include pre-slaughter stunning, and the lack of differences in exsanguination, packed cell volume and meat quality parameters. Animal Welfare: demonstrating no significant difference between the rate of blood loss between stunned and non-stunned animals; and

Warris, P.D. (1984) Exsanguination of animals at slaughter and the residual blood content of meat. Veterinary Record: demonstrating ‘no evidence that the residual blood content of lean meat was affected by different slaughter methods’...

For animal suffering see above.

⁹ It is unclear why captive bolt and percussive stunning are listed separately, since captive bolt is a form of percussive stunning. Possibly it means that some ulemas in Africa and Germany allow forms of percussive stunning other than captive bolt.

There are two types of electric stunning that Halal Food Authority approves:

- 1. Water-bath Stun – for Poultry*
- 2. Electric-tong stun – for Ovine meat.*

There are up to ten smaller UK-based halal certifiers some of whom cast doubt upon the strictness of other certifiers, and present themselves as guaranteeing a stricter standard. Largest amongst these is the *Halal Monitoring Committee UK* which states on its website:

“The word Halal has been misused by Muslims and non-Muslims, with the word Halal being displayed everywhere without regulation. Muslim consumers are led to believe that the products they are often eating are Halal, when unfortunately, in many cases these products are not. According to research, statistics show that over 90% of Halal labelled meat and poultry in the UK is in doubt. The word Halal displayed at butchers, food outlets and takeaways is therefore not sufficient anymore.”

Halal slaughter and UK law

UK legislation (for England) is currently contained within The Welfare of Animals at Time of Killing (England) Regulations 2015 (WATOK) made under the European Communities Act 1972 to implement the latest EU Directive (1099/2009) on animal welfare.¹⁰

These regulations require the pre-stunning of animals before slaughter, save for permitting an exception is contained within paragraph 2 of Schedule 3 that states:

No person may kill an animal in accordance with religious rites without prior stunning unless it is a sheep, goat, bovine animal or bird killed in a slaughterhouse in accordance with this Schedule.

Schedule 3 proceeds to establish rules for the restraint and handling of animals prior to slaughter, and establishes that:

Any person who kills a sheep, goat or bovine animal in accordance with religious rites without prior stunning must—

(a) ensure it is killed by the severance of both its carotid arteries and jugular veins by rapid, uninterrupted movements of a hand-held knife; and

(b) immediately before killing, inspect the knife to be used to ensure it is—

(i) undamaged; and

(ii) of sufficient size and sharpness to kill the sheep, goat or bovine animal in the manner described in sub-paragraph (a).

Slight variations exist for the comparable regulations for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

In 2017 Lancashire became the first local authority in the UK to prohibit the sale of meat from non-stunned slaughter in its schools.

¹⁰ In fact an exception in UK law for Jewish and Islamic religious slaughter methods has existed in 1928 (Scotland) 1933 (England & Wales).

Halal slaughter in the UK

According to Food Standard Agency (FSA) figures the religiously slaughtered share of the UK meat market has long exceeded that which is proportionate to the Muslim and Jewish population of the UK which was recorded as 4.9% (4.5% Muslim, 0.4% Jewish) at the last census and currently estimated at 6.8%.¹¹

The proportion of animals slaughtered by a religious method is now growing rapidly: from 11 per cent of slaughtered animals in 2001 to a 25 per cent today. From a total of 16m animals that are killed per week; 51% of the lamb, 31% of chicken, and 7% of beef is now religiously slaughtered.

As the proportion of religiously slaughtered meat has increased, so within that category the proportion of non-stunned slaughter has increased.

In 2018 a fact sheet produced by the Veterinary Policy Research Foundation based upon the last FSA figures compiled produced the following chart showing an increasing tendency in halal slaughterhouses not to pre-stun animals.

% of halal-slaughtered animals that are not pre-stunned

	2011	2013
Cattle	16	25
Sheep & goats	19	37
Poultry	12	16

The same sheet showed that although the rate of cattle being killed without pre-stunning expressed as a percentage of all slaughtered cattle has reduced in recent years, the rate of non-stunned slaughter of sheep and poultry had increased very markedly:

% of all slaughtered animals that are not pre-stunned

	2011	2103	2015	2017
Cattle	3.6	1.9	1.2	1.2
Sheep & goats	10.2	15.4	22.5	27.2
Poultry	4	3.5	4.3	18

¹¹ Adding the estimate that 6.4% of the UK is Muslim, from Pew Research Centre: *Europe's Growing Muslim Population* (2017) to 0.4% Jewish figure from the last census.

Possible reasons for the supply of religiously slaughtered meat so vastly outstripping demand include:

- abattoirs using religious slaughter operating more cost effectively than non-halal abattoirs;
- the purchasing of religiously slaughtered meat by public and private bodies for all their customers in order to accommodate the dietary preferences of Muslims without the inefficiency of storing, processing and labelling of multiple types of meat, for example by schools, hospitals and prisons, restaurants such as KFC, Nandos and Subway; and some food manufacturers (eg Cadbury and Mars);
- UK abattoirs becoming a source for halal food exports; and
- Non-Muslim consumers having greater confidence in halal food chains than traditional commercial suppliers (suggested in *The Guardian*, 24.6.2017)

Whatever the source it seems unavoidable that vastly more animals are suffering the pain and distress of non-stunned slaughter than would be necessary to accommodate the preferences of those Muslims who wish to eat non-stunned animals.

Conclusion and Comment

Given that:

unnecessary pain is caused to animals through non-stun slaughter;

there is no basis for requiring non-stunned slaughter in the Quran and hadith;

the rules of *dhabihah* was laid down in Islamic law books many centuries before the future availability of stunning could have been anticipated; and

95% of Islamic religious scholars are said to have ruled that stunned but religiously slaughtered meat is halal (permitted)

it is unavoidable that a huge amount of suffering is imposed upon animals through non-stunned slaughter for no good reason whatsoever, even accommodating the core beliefs of Islam.

In so far as any reason can be identified for Muslim's preference for non-stunned meat it appears to consist of one or a combination of the following:

- an anxiety that a stun may kill the slaughtered animal seconds before that animal would have died through blood loss: a concern based upon an obsessively legalistic application of the Quran's instruction to Muslims not to eat 'carrion' or animals

"that [have] been strangled or beaten to death, [or] killed by falling or ... gored to death" (Quran 5.3),

- a preference for conservative (not to say regressive) practices and resistance to modernity for its own sake,
- competition to make the most prominent demonstration of religiosity; and
- misplaced compassion for the animal though the scientifically disproven belief that a stunned animal will die more slowly than a stunned one.

It is suggested that there may also be an element of satisfaction from knowing that an animal has been slaughtered by hand whilst still conscious. In the annual Eid al Adha celebration great theatre is made of the butchering of animals in a way that appears to celebrate a primal enjoyment of killing, arguably comparable with the western traditions fox hunting or bull fighting.

Even allowing for the general benefits to society of permitting people to celebrate religious beliefs and culture, none of the above are good reasons for permitting cruelty to animals.

All non-stunned slaughter of animals is opposed as a matter of principle by:

the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons,

the British Veterinary Association,

the Farm Animal Welfare Committee,

the Humane Slaughter Association,

Compassion in World Farming,

Humanists UK, and

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals.

UKIP supports compulsory labelling of halal meat products.

The For Britain Movement is the only UK party which campaigns to end non-stunned slaughter, stating in its (2018) manifesto:

“For Britain cares deeply about all life within its territory, and we believe that as an animal-loving nation, we have fallen foul in recent years and have allowed unnecessary and grotesque cruelty to be committed against animal life.

For Britain is very concerned for example about the proliferation of religious un-stunned slaughter of farm animals, in contravention to all animal protection laws. Halal slaughter i.e. unstunned slaughter in accordance with Islamic ritual, is now served routinely in British schools, hospitals, government buildings, and sporting venues.[34] Kosher meat, from animals slaughtered in accordance with Jewish tradition, also involves cutting the throat of a conscious animal. British law requires animals to be stunned to unconsciousness prior to slaughter, but allows for a religious exemption.

Halal certification is becoming more and more commonplace and is often applied to non meat products. Certification that a product is permissible to Muslims is obtained by major companies from various Islamic advocacy groups on payment of a fee/tax, and we have little insight in to how that money is used.

For Britain believes that all unnecessary suffering of animals should be legally prevented. We understand the natural order of things, and understand that animals will prey on each other naturally as a matter of course, but unnecessary entrapment, pain, or suffering should be brought to an end and respect for animals promoted.

For Britain also understands that meat is a staple of the British diet and that farming is the backbone of food production. We seek to reform farming, working with British farmers, and aim towards a re-prioritisation of organic and natural farming, rather than factory farming.”