



Definition of Halal

The word 'halal' literally means permissible- and in translation it is usually used as lawful.

The Halal food Authority rules for halal are based on Islamic Shari'ah. Opposite to halal is haram, which means unlawful or forbidden.

It is well known in the meat trade that Muslims consume halal meat. However, at times questions are asked, what is halal? In Arabic it simply means permissible or allowed. Opposite to it is haram, which means forbidden or not allowed. Arabic is the language of Qur`an, a scripture revealed to the Holy Prophet of Islam by the Almighty Allah to be followed in its entirety by the Muslims.

Now to make meat halal or permissible, an animal or poultry has to be slaughtered in a ritual way known as Zibah. To make it readily comprehended halal is somewhat like Jewish kosher and, Zibah is with some exception similar to Shechita. The Qur`an gives following underlined injunctions in chapter al-Maida 5:3 that

- Zibah require animals to be alive and healthy at the time of slaughter, since carrion is forbidden and, jugular vein, carotid artery and windpipe have to be severed by a razor sharp knife by a single swipe, to incur as less a pain as possible. Here the only difference is that a rabbi will read what is required by his faith and, a Muslim will recite tasmiya or shahada, which fulfils the requirement of dedication. The question of how to overcome the issue of recitation of shahada on individual bird whence we now have poultry being slaughtered at a rate of six to nine thousand per hour, has already been addressed. A Muslim is commanded to commence all his deeds in the name of Allah.
- All the flowing blood (al- An`am 6:145) must be drained out of the carcass, as blood is forbidden
- Swine flesh is also forbidden, and it is repeated in few other places in the Qur`an
- Forbidden is an animal that has been killed by strangling or by a violent blow, or by a headlong fall

What now becomes abundantly clear for halal purposes is that:

1. An animal should not be dead prior to slaughter
2. A Muslim should perform slaughter
3. Any flowing blood of the carcass should be completely drained
4. Choice of modern and in vogue method has to be considered with caution and, it should be mirroring to the Islamic ethos

Since pork is forbidden, halal slaughtering must not be done where pigs are slaughtered or in the vicinity of pigs slaughtering area. There are a few more edicts and rules that have to be followed in the interest of animal welfare. For example, animal has to be fed as normal and given water prior to slaughter, one animal must not see the other being slaughtered, knife should be four times the size of the neck and razor sharp, and as far as possible the slaughterer and the animal should face Qibla or Mecca and, animal must not be suffering with any ailments or any lacerations.

Law in support of Halal

First we had Slaughterhouse Act 1974 that is now replaced by Welfare of Animals Slaughter or Killing Regulation 1995. Halal Food Authority have been a privileged member of the Group which deliberated on behalf of the Muslim community to encapsulate the Muslim requirements to be read and included in the Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995 (statutory instrument (SI) no. 1995/731 as

amended by SI no. 1999/400). This statute law has to be followed now, for everyday halal slaughter and, for Udhia/Qurbani slaughter that takes place once a year at the time of Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca. On this occasion Muslims have to sacrifice an animal. This law directs that for halal slaughter:

- a licensed Muslim slaughterer would slaughter in a
- licensed slaughterhouse and
- in the presence or supervision of a Veterinary Official

It goes without saying and it is also obvious that ethics and ethos of animal welfare are always being complied with and more importantly, a discipline and decorum is being established for meat hygiene and environmental health laws.

Here it should be noted and understood that since in Islam carrion is not allowed to be consumed, an animal or bird should not be subjected to by any external force, so that it could be dead or seem to be irrecoverable to life, prior to slaughterer putting his knife to do the ritual act of killing. Hence stunning is a bone of contention, controversy and discord. We are aware that by cutting the throat we are killing the animal to consume. But it has to be in a humane way.

All religions allow the consumption of meat. Take it as a sequence of commensalisms, a cow eats grass and we eat the cow and we know that big fish eats small fish and lo and behold, man eats the small ones and the big ones both! It is to be iterated that the Halal Food Authority is on record to say firmly that no stunning is allowed to kill the animal prior to slaughter. However, since Islam is a religion of science, a science which without laboratory testing gave us a covenant that blood is not allowed to be consumed and its raw form could be a hazard and an imperilment to human health. Centuries later, we have the affirmation from Mister Scientist that it is harmful for humankind! Least we can do is to listen to experts who would slaughter animals in scores of numbers per hour and with humane methods.

Aids prior to slaughter

Generally it is believed that for humane killing stunning modes and methods have been in use for a long time. We all know that for sure it is not the fact and it is untrue. It is only a few decades old engineering and still is in experimental stages. It is the expediency of the machinery for the numbers and volume which the viable commercial enterprise requires, for some kind of immobilisation of animals on the slaughtering line, to avoid injury to all concerned and bruising of the carcass. Bruised and bloodshot parts are neither to be sold, nor are they allowed in any way in achieving required financial yields.

There are four known methods of rendering partially or completely immobilising the animals:

1. Captive bolt system used mainly on cattle
2. Gas system for asphyxiation
3. Electrical stunning for ovine animals and / or
4. Electric-water bath stunning, the type used for poultry

Captive bolt used on cattle smashes its brain to smithereens and this causes animal to die prior to slaughter. Hence it is irreversible procedure and cannot be deemed to be halal. Similarly gas smothers the animal or the bird and there is no known revival method, so this is also not allowed.

Since majority of abattoirs, because of the wordings of the EU directives or for some given reasons use stunning prior to slaughter, we at the Halal Food Authority have researched and scrutinised it. It was categorically then encapsulated in halal rules as stated earlier, that because of the possibility of death prior to slaughter, no stunning is allowed to be used to kill the animal. However, at the initiative of the Meat and Livestock Commission, Mr. Steve Wotton of Division of Food Animal Science of Department of Clinical Veterinary Science of the University of Bristol, has developed a prototype method of stunning and have produced a stunner together with Hellenic Co., by which the animal will not succumb to the shock and can also be sent back to grazing pasture duly revived. How does it work?

Unlike ordinary stunning method where animal loses only 50-60% of the blood volume at exsanguinations - that is bleeding in simple terms- because cardiac arrest takes place and animal never recovers consciousness and, there is a reduced convulsion. This somewhat fail safe new system of head-only stunning, is reversible. Electric dosage though is of high frequency and electrode are sharp, this pre slaughter stunning is not painful. It is defined as being at humane level and within the remit of the relevant EU law and with an auto-calibration system for current monitoring and there is a very accurate record of stunner's performance.

Logging systems enable a progress check separately on every animal individually. In test conditions it was found that animal whence slaughtered bled profusely with convulsions. Animals do revive naturally, within a safe period if spared from slaughter for whatever reason.

There could still be a prevailing opinion of a section that even this fail-safe method does not mirror to the Islamic requirement. For reasons that electric shock is unethical and, in the knowledge and opinion of the critics there is no guarantee of feasibility of revival. It has, time and again to the contrary to this belief, been proven that animals do regain consciousness within a desired period.

It is also argued that since even Jewish faith does not subscribe to stunning, why should the Muslims even contemplate to look at it. The evidence is that although the quantity of kosher meat is small and can be operated manually, it is now emerging that there is some leaning by some Rabbinical section towards the possibility of adopting the system. We Muslims have to be positive and should not appear to pre-typify technology and at the same time ensure that we do not change or seem to be changing the dietary laws as commanded by the Scripture, the Holy Qur`an and the Shari`ah, the Islamic jurisprudence.

Halal Food Authority is satisfied that this system is superior to, and there is potential for further improvisation and, safer than the one in use for halal slaughter in New Zealand and Australia. Thousands of tonnage of meat is exported from these aforementioned countries to a considerable number of Muslim States and, is used even here in the UK We are given to understand that Steve Wotton has nearly completed his work on Poultry Stunner Monitor as well, and this in due course could be a good news for providers of halal poultry and the consumers. Needless to say that there is a dire need of constant halal inspection, audit and stringent monitoring of the developing situation.

Animal Feed

Apart from slaughtering methods we have to ensure that the animals for the Islamic ritual slaughter are raised and procured from farms which do not feed them any thing that might contain animal derivatives. For regurgitating animal there is a laid down Qur`anic rule that says, "eat and pastures your cattle therein" **Ta Ha 20:54** This is a lucid and transparent axiom. There would have been no BSE or vCJD, millions of pounds and dozens of lives could have been saved, if only proper care was taken for animal feed and, this consideration had been implemented.

HACCP – Hygiene

Halal Food Authority takes it for granted and are appreciative of the fact that all slaughterhouses and abattoirs in the UK have established HACCP systems in their premises and operations, and are approved by the EU. No carcass comes out of the abattoir without having been passed by the Veterinary Officer, both for quality and to be deemed to be fit for human consumption. As a majority of slaughterhouses partaking in halal slaughter are neither owned, leased nor at times operated by the Muslim fraternity, a number of these abattoir do both halal and non-halal slaughtering, It has to be ensured that the carcasses are not mixed, whilst within the compounds or on their way to chosen destination. Along with the MHS inspectors' stamp there should be a tag or a marking on the halal carcass to differentiate and identify. Perhaps the MHS stamp itself could have the word H for halal inscribed on it together with the number of the abattoir. Halal Food Authority would be pleased to audit and authenticate contractually the halal validity of products.

To curtail unregulated, haphazardly authenticated halal imports of meat and, to boost the

UK meat trade, we implore you to make provisions, in case do not already have, for halal slaughtering in your premises. There are two million Muslims within these shores alone. With your exporting facilities you could reach with your audited quality products a further six to eight millions Muslim consumers in EC countries.

It should be noted that by adopting correct method of slaughtering for halal, together we will be instrumental in providing what is required by the Islamic laws and, enhance abattoir and meat trade by making it modestly priced at par with other non-halal carcasses. It is manifestly clear that the only station which is manned by a Muslim in this operation of slaughter is the first one - where the animal is killed, in other words where Zibah or every day slaughter takes place. The remainder of stations in the abattoir, for example, for de-skinning, taking the guts out, weighing, portioning, in preparation of carcasses for maturing, labelling, storage and transporting carcasses to prospective customers are entrusted to be manned and operated normally by other loyal employees and of course, as usual by Jack - if we may say so, the non Muslim colleague.

Part of transcript of the talk given by
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