

## **MEAT HANDLED, PROCESSED, PACKED AND TRANSPORTED BY NON-MUSLIMS**

by Muhammad Ibn Adam - Darul Iftaa

### **Question:**

Is it necessary for meat to be considered Islamically Halal that after slaughter, it is handled, processed, packed and transported by Muslims only? It was recently said to me that even if an animal is slaughtered according to the rules of Shari'ah, if the meat was handled by a non-Muslim, it would be rendered as haram. I was told that this was the position taken by Mawlana Ashraf Ali Thanawi in his *Behashti Zewar*. Is this correct?

### **Answer:**

**In the name of Allah, Most Compassionate, Most Merciful,**

It is incorrect to say that Halal and lawfully slaughtered meat is rendered Haram simply due to the handling of a non-Muslim. As long as it is ensured that the animal is slaughtered in accordance with the rules of Shari'a, the handling, packaging and transporting of a non-Muslim does not render the meat Haram

As far as the viewpoint of Shaykh Mawlana Ashraf Ali Thanawi (may Allah have mercy on him) is concerned, let us first look at the quote referred to by the questioner as found in his *Behashti Zewar* (Heavenly Ornaments):

Mawlana Thanawi (may Allah have mercy on him) states:

"If meat is being sold by a Hindu [i.e. other than a Muslim, Jew or Christian], who claims to have had the animal slaughtered by a Muslim, it will not be correct (*durust nahi*) to take the meat from him and consume it. However, if, from the time of the Muslim's slaughter, a Muslim remained present continuously observing, or if he had to leave, another Muslim came on his place to observe, then it will be correct [to consume of the meat]." (*Behashti Zewar*, P: 251, in the section of Halal and Haram things)

If we ponder over the above text of Mawlana Thanawi (may Allah have mercy on him) carefully, it will become clear to us that he is talking about a specific situation where a non-Muslim or non-Kitabi (i.e. non-Christian or non-Jew) butcher who slaughters and sells his meat at his shop claims that the meat was slaughtered by a Muslim. In those days in the subcontinent (and even nowadays in many eastern countries), meat would be slaughtered at the butcher's shop and then sold to the customer. As such, logically it would not be permitted for a Muslim to purchase meat from a Hindu or any other non-Muslim (with the exception of a true Jew or Christian),

since the default is that the non-Muslim shop-owner has himself slaughtered the animal.

This is the reason why Shaykh Thanawi (may Allah have mercy on him) subsequently says that if a Muslim was to be present from the time of slaughter till purchase, then it is permitted to consume of the meat. I remember observing in Syria that the customer himself picks out the live chicken and asks the butcher/shop-owner to slaughter it, cut it into pieces and pack it for him. Mawlana Thanawi (may Allah have mercy on him) is saying here that if a customer enters the shop and the non-Muslim butcher/shop-owner presents meat of an animal that was already slaughtered in his absence, then it will not be permitted for the Muslim customer to take the shop-owner's word and consume of the meat.

Moreover, in the recent edition of the Urdu *Behashti Zewar*, the following Arabic text of the great Hanafi Jurist, Imam Ibn Abidin (may Allah have mercy on him) is presented in the footnotes to support Mawlana Thanawi's claim:

Imam Ibn Abidin (may Allah have mercy on him) states:

"If one purchased meat, then subsequently discovered that the seller was a fire-worshiper (majusi) and hence desired to return the meat and the seller claimed that the animal was slaughtered by a Muslim, it will be disliked (makruh) for the Muslim to consume of the meat." (*Radd al-Muhtar ala al-Durr* 5/337)

An equivalent UK example for the above scenario mentioned by Mawlana Thanawi (may Allah have mercy on him) is of a Muslim going to an abattoir/slaughterhouse completely run by non-Muslims. There are no Muslim workers or slaughterers in sight. Surely, it would not be permitted for the Muslim customer to purchase the meat from the abattoir simply because the owner claimed that a Muslim had slaughtered the animal earlier and left. The chances of lying and deception are too many to be overlooked. Thus, Mawlana Thanawi (may Allah have mercy on him) is not saying that in order for the meat to be Halal, it has to be slaughtered by a Muslim, and also handled, transported and sold by a Muslim. He is not asserting that meat handled by a non-Muslim after a valid Islamic slaughter is rendered Haram. Rather, he is merely discussing the element of trust and whether it is permitted for a Muslim to take the word of a non-Muslim butcher or not. As such, the above quote of Mawlana Thanawi (may Allah have mercy on him) does not apply to the situation where a Muslim inspector oversees the fact that the animal is slaughtered by a Muslim in accordance with the rules of Shari'a. Here, the Muslim inspector guarantees that the animal was slaughtered by a Muslim, whilst in the former situation; one is uncertain whether a Muslim had slaughtered the animal or otherwise.

It is apparent, therefore, that the element of doubt mentioned by Mawlana Thanawi (may Allah have mercy on him) will not remain in

a situation where there is certainty that the meat had been slaughtered by a Muslim, and monitored, certified, processed, tagged, labelled, sealed and transported in such a manner that left no room for doubting that the animal may have been slaughtered by a non-Muslim or that the Halal meat may have been mixed up or contaminated with Haram meat.

Therefore, once this doubt is removed, the Halal meat will not be rendered Haram simply because it was handled and transported by a non-Muslim. Had this been the case, everything bar a few products would all become Haram since they are handled and packed by non-Muslims.

Moreover, according to my limited research, no book of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) states that if meat or any other product was to be handled by a non-Muslim, it becomes Haram. On the contrary, we find texts of classical jurists (fuqaha) asserting clearly that the handling of a non-Muslim does not render a Halal product Haram.

One such example is provided below:

The author of the renowned Hanafi Fiqh Manual, *Al-Hidaya* states:

“If one [Muslim] sends his employee or servant who is a fire-worshipper (i.e. non-Muslim, non-Jew and non-Christian) to purchase some meat, and he says that I purchased this meat from a Jew, Christian or Muslim, then it will be permitted for one to consume of the meat. This is due to the fact that a non-Muslim’s word is accepted in transactions (mu’amalat)...” (*Al-Hidaya* 4/453)

In the above text, the meat was purchased and handled by a non-Muslim on behalf of a Muslim, but it did not render the meat as Haram. Rather, the non-Muslim servant’s claim that he had purchased the meat from a Muslim was also considered acceptable, hence the meat was considered as Halal.

As a side note, this scenario must not be confused with that mentioned by Mawlana Thanawi (may Allah have mercy on him). Here, we are accepting the word of a non-Muslim employee or servant who knows how important Halal consumption is for his employer or master, and also there is no conflict of interest. In the scenario mentioned by Mawlana Thanawi in his *Behashti Zewar*, the claim is made by a non-Muslim butcher that the meat was slaughtered by a Muslim; hence the conflict of interest is apparent. Still, if one does not fully trust the non-Muslim employee or slave, then one should avoid consuming the meat.

Nevertheless, the point that is clear from the above text of *Al-Hidaya* is that the handling, packaging and transporting of a non-Muslim does not render the meat Haram, after it is ensured that the animal was slaughtered by a Muslim in accordance with the rules of Shari’a, and that the Halal meat was not mixed up or contaminated with Haram meat.

And Allah knows best

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