

## **CHICKENS AND STUNNING**

By Mufti Muhammad Zubair Butt

### **Muslims (and Jews) are exempt from the legal requirement of stunning prior to slaughter.**

The Slaughter of Poultry Act 1967 states:

Subject to the provisions of this section, no bird to which this Act applies shall be slaughtered unless it is slaughtered instantaneously by means of decapitation or dislocation of the neck or some other method approved by the Ministers, or it is, by stunning effected by means of an instrument of a kind approved by them and in proper repair, instantaneously rendered insensible to pain until death supervenes.

The foregoing subsection shall not apply to the slaughter, without the infliction of unnecessary suffering, of a bird

by the Jewish method for the food of Jews anti by a Jew duly licensed for the purpose by the Rabbinical Commission referred to in Schedule 1 to the Slaughter of Animals Act 1958; or by the Muslim method for the food of Muslims by a Muslim. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has confirmed this fact in correspondence dated 5th Oct 1999 in the following words:

*"I confirm that the law permits slaughter by the Jewish or the Islamic methods that is without stunning."*

*The act of **stunning is not permissible within the Islamic parameters.***

**Hakimul Ummah** Molana Ashraf Ali Thaanwi Sahib rahmatullahi alaih issued a Fatwa on 17 Rabi al-Thani 1335 AIL corresponding to January 1917 AD on the issue of stunning prior to slaughter. He has stated it to be a forbidden practice. (See Imdaadul *Fataawaa* vol. 3, p. 605-606.) *He concludes* that if one regards stunning prior to slaughter to be better than the Islamic method, it is akin to Kufr! Mufti Kifaayatullah Sahib rahmatullahi alaih comments on captive bolt stunning as follows: "This practice conflicts with the Sunnah and Islamic teachings. There is the strong possibility of the animal being haraam. That is, if death becomes certain it is futile to cut its throat, and the animal will be haraam" (See Kifaayatul Mufti, vol. 8, p. 277.)

Maulana Mufti Nizaamuddin Sahib rahmatullahi alaih has commented on the issue of stunning with electrical current or by the captive bolt method as follows: "This method is unnatural and more painful which the intellect prohibits. It is for this reason that the Fuqahaa and Ulamaa of the Ummah have considered it forbidden and makrooh to use this method of slaughter without being compelled to do so. They have deemed it to conflict with the spirit of Islam. (See Fataawa Nizaamiyyah, vol. 1, p. 409.)

Maulana Mufti Mahmoodul Hassan Gangohi Sahib rahmatullahi alaih has described the practice of stunning It'ing electrical current to be contradictory to the established Sunnah method and Makroohi Tehrimi (a sinful act). (See Fataawaa Mahmoodiyyah vol. 17, p. 247.)

Molana Mufti Abdurrahim Lajpuri Sahib has described the practice of stunning to control the animal using the captive bolt method as "severely makrooh". (See Fataawa Rahimiyyah, vol. 2, p. 95.)

In the Safar 1410 AH (October 1989) issue of Bayyinaat, p. 28, the practice of stunning chickens using waterbath stunners has been described by Maulana Mufti Muhammad Shafiq 'Arifi Sahib as a cruel and Makrooh (forbidden) practice.

Maulana Mufti Yusuf Ludhyaanwi Sahib has written concerning the stunning of chickens. "This method of slaughter is incorrect. If there had been any relief for the animal in striking the head and Allah had preferred this method, then the Messenger of Allah himself would have taught this method. Those persons who have devised this method are essentially trying to prove themselves cleverer than the Messenger of Allah. If this method is prevalent in Pakistan or any other Muslim country, it should be stopped immediately." See 'Aap ki Masaail aUf un lea Hal', vol 4, p.205.)

Maulana Ahmed Mirpuri comments on the issue of poultry stunning using electrical current as follows: "As far as slaughtering after administering a current is concerned, if the animal remains alive after the shock, we cannot deem it to be haraam because it is a live animal that has been slaughtered. Therefore, this animal will be halaal subject to fulfilling the remaining conditions of slaughter. However, if non-stunned meat is "available it should be afforded preference, because where there is an element of doubt or difference, it is better to exercise caution in any case." (See Fataawa Siraat iMustaqeem, p.498.)

NOTE: In the interest of brevity only *relevant quotes have been given. For full details please refer to the original sources.*

*It can clearly be seen that stunning prior to slaughter is a forbidden practice within the Islamic parameters. Muslim scholars have comprehensively forbidden this inhumane practice deeming it to conflict with the Islamic teaching\_. Many scientific studies pave also*

confirmed that the Islamic method is THE humane method and that stunning causes pain to the animal.

Professor Schultz and Dr. Hazim of the Hanover University, Germany, proved through an experiment using an Electro Encephalograph (BEG) and Electro Cardiogram (BCG) that Islamic Slaughter is THE humane method of slaughter and captive bolt stunning, practiced by the western method, causes severe pain to the animal. The EEG showed severe pain immediately after stunning and the hearts of the animals stunned by C.B.P. stopped beating earlier as compared to those of the animals slaughtered by the Islamic method resulting in the retention of more blood in the meat.

Dr Harold Hillman Mb BSc PhD, former Reader in Physiology, University of Surrey, Director of Unity Laboratory of Applied Neurobiology has refuted the wide spread assumption that the administration of an electric current causes instantaneous unconsciousness, so that animals feel no pain. He states:

*"Electric stimulation of the skin with low voltages and currents causes a tingling sensation, while higher power causes pain and burns, due to action on the sensory nerve endings in the skin. Stimulation of motor nerves or of muscles directly with low voltages and currents causes muscles to contract, while higher powers causes spasm and paralysis. It is an everyday experience that, for example, a patient whose finger is anaesthetised locally to lance a whitlow can still flex it"*

Continuing further on why electrical stunning is not believed to be painful, he states:

*"Firstly, the public, the slaughterers, the farmers, and the butchers, have not understood the division of the nervous system into sensory and motor systems. Secondly, animals and people subject to large currents, being paralyzed, cannot exhibit the obvious signs of pain - evasive and violent movements."*

Professor Syyed QMM Kamoopuri PhD, Dar al-Salaam, states on the issue of stunning:

*"In modern methods, mechanical or electrical techniques are used to produce a stunning effect in order to make the animal paralyzed. They argue that these new techniques are less painful and fearsome comparing to the Islamic slaughtering. But this is not true. The paralyzed animal feels terrible pain and experiences fear but cannot express it because it is motionless. This creates a wrong impression that the animal is not suffering when as a matter of fact it is."*

*In an address to approximately 300 to 400 specialists at the UFAW (Universities Federation Animal Welfare) given by Dr Abdul Majid Katme of the Muslim Doctors' Association. He states:*

*Electrified Water Bath for Poultry Stunning 'The birds are suspended on a shackle (upside down) then the head is intended to come into contact with the water and the passage of an electric shock through the brain'. (FAWC 1982)*

### *Problems and harm with this method*

**A very cruel way to give** the electric shock, especially in this uncomfortable position; Drowning and suffocation resulting in death. It was well-documented that some birds were taken, still alive to the scalding tank (to remove the skin and feathers) (Health et al 1983). 'One-third of the birds are killed in the stunner and one-third are not stunned'. (FAWC 1982). Death from the stunner. 'A substantial number were killed as a result of the shock from the stunner.' (FAWC 1982). In this report, they emphasised, clearly, eight reasons why stunning may not be satisfactory (please see the report for details). Paralysis by failure of stunning.

With regard to pain, apart from the above suffering, the FA we reported' a substantial number may still be sensitive to pain'. I would like to conclude this aspect of pain by quoting from the same poultry report of the FAWC. 'The physiology aspects of the stunning of poultry are not well understood and criteria for establishing insensitivity to pain, suitable for use in working conditions, may well be unreliable.'

**It cannot be guaranteed that the chicken will remain alive after stunning. The variations in sizes of the chickens and their individual resistance capacities mean that a blanket magnitude of current cannot be set. The health of each individual chicken will also influence its endurance capacity. Legislation does not specify any specific magnitude of current. However, if electric current is used it must be sufficient to induce immediate unconsciousness for all chickens and last until they die.**

**In the correspondence from** the MAFF dated 5th October 1999, it is stated:

When birds or animals are stunned, induction of unconsciousness must be immediate and must last until the bird or animal is dead.

The legislation does not specify Maximum or minimum currents to be used during electrical stunning.

This department has commissioned research on electrical stunning; this has confirmed that there is variation in the current received by each bird in constant voltage waterbath stunners. Because the non-statutory recommended currents for each species are intended to stun all birds, they are set at levels, which at 50 Hz (mains frequency), will result in some birds receiving current which is sufficient to cause death by cardiac arrest.

This may be addressed in various ways. Depending on the line speed, it may be possible to identify birds which have been killed in standard 50Hz waterbath stunners as when they leave the stunner they will be limp, whereas stunned birds will be rigid. It may also be possible to identify these birds during post-mortem examination. Either way, this could allow these carcasses to be identified and removed from the line.

Application of current at higher frequencies is not associated with cardiac arrest and many poultry slaughterhouses now use high frequency stunning equipment. Alternatively, constant current stunning equipment may be used to ensure that each bird receives a predetermined current sufficient to stun but not to kill.

It can be seen that constant voltage waterbath stunners are totally unreliable. The MAFF also do not contend categorical identification of birds that have been killed as a result of stunning. Instead, they have used the words: 'it may be possible'. Similarly, they have not asserted that stunning current at higher frequencies will NOT kill the animal. **Instead**, they have used the words 'is not associated with **cardiac arrest**'. **Finally**, the assertion that 'constant current stunning equipment may be used to ensure that each bird receives a predetermined current sufficient to stun but not to kill is very questionable. The individual endurance capacities and state of health of the various sizes of chickens renders it impossible to set a minimum rate, as the minimum magnitude of current required to only stun the healthier and more enduring birds may be enough to kill the less healthier and less enduring chickens. Furthermore, all this is in addition to the fact that stunning is not permissible within the Islamic parameters due to the unnecessary pain it inflicts upon the animal.