

## **STUNNING**

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In the Name of Allah, Most Compassionate, Most Merciful,

Stunning the animal before it is actually slaughtered is a common practice in many western countries. It is claimed to be more comforting and causing less pain to the animal.

Pre-slaughter stunning was originally introduced to protect abattoir personnel, rather than the animals themselves. The idea was to immobilize the animal to facilitate killing procedures. However, the principle of stunning has now evolved to encompass the idea that animals should be rendered unconscious before they are slaughtered.

There are many methods used for stunning animals, just to mention a few:

### **The Captive Bolt Pistol**

This stunning method is widely used for all farmed animals. There are two types of captive bolt pistol: penetrative and non-penetrative. Penetrative stunners drive a bolt into the skull and cause unconsciousness both through physical brain damage and the concussive blow to the skull. The bolt on a non-penetrative stunner is 'mushroom-headed' and impacts on the brain without entering the skull. Unconsciousness is caused by the concussive blow. After the animal is unconscious, it is slaughtered.

The bolt is described as 'captive' because it flies out of the barrel but remains attached to the pistol. The pistol is placed on the centre of the animal's forehead and is either trigger-fired or fires automatically on contact with the animal's head.

### **Pitching**

Pitching is carried out in the majority of cattle slaughterhouses. The practice involves inserting a wire or rod through the hole in the head made by the captive bolt. The rod is slid up and down to destroy the lower part of the brain and the spinal cord.

### **Electric head-only stunning (electric shock or current)**

Electric head-only stunning with tongs is used to stun cattle, calves, sheep, goats, rabbits and ostriches. The operator places a pair of electric tongs on either side of the animal's head and passes an electric current through the brain - supposedly causing a temporary loss of consciousness.

### **Waterbath stunning**

The electric waterbath is widely used to stun chickens, turkeys, ducks and geese. Birds are shackled upside down on a moving conveyor which carries them to an electrified waterbath into which their heads are supposed to be immersed. The shackles contact a bar which is connected to earth. The strength of the electrical current has risen in recent years - with the aim of ensuring that birds suffer a cardiac arrest and die when they enter the waterbath.

### **Gas stunning**

An animal is stunned by exposing them to a mixture of carbon dioxide and air. This gas causes the animal to lose its consciousness, after which it is slaughtered.

From an Islamic perspective, two main questions arise here:

Is using the method of stunning permissible?

Will the animal be considered lawful (Halal) if it was slaughtered according to the rulings of Shariah after being stunned?

As far as the answer to the first question is concerned, this depends on whether stunning the animal reduces the pain or causes more unnecessary pain.

The Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him & give him peace) said:

*"Verily Allah has prescribed proficiency in all things. Thus, if you kill (an animal), kill well; and if you slaughter, slaughter well. Let each one of you sharpen his blade and let him spare suffering to the animal he slaughters" (Sahih Muslim).*

Some of the methods used to stun animals are indeed very painful and as a result have been banned in many countries, like the method of pitching, for example. Therefore, such methods will indeed be impermissible according to Shariah.

As far as the other methods of stunning are concerned, although experts claim that they minimize the suffering of the animal, but this can not be said for certain. An electric current or a bolt pistol does cause pain to the animal, whereas gas stunning may cause severe breathing difficulties.

However, if it is ascertained that the claim of the experts is correct in that stunning does minimize the suffering of the animal, and also the animal does not die prior to the actual slaughtering, then it would be permissible to use the method of stunning, otherwise impermissible.

The second question is: what is the ruling regarding an animal that was stunned prior to being slaughtered? The answer to this depends on whether stunning causes the animal to die. Animal experts claim that it does not cause the animal to die; rather it only causes it to lose its consciousness, thus not feel the pain of the slaughter.

This, however, can not be said for certain, as many a time the animal does perish as a direct result of the stun. Especially with chicken, it is very likely that the animal dies as a result of the electric shock. Some experts are of the view that the stunned animal remains alive only for a few minutes, after which it dies.

As a result, no such ruling can be given for certain. However, there is no doubt in the fact that if the animal was to die prior to the actual Islamic slaughter taking place or there is a fear of it dying, then it would be unlawful (Haram) to consume its meat.

As the act of stunning renders the animal doubtful, one must avoid consuming the meat of animals that are stunned. It is known that the Jews abstain from consuming stunned animals, thus a Muslim should be more precautious in what he eats. However, if it is determined in a particular animal that it did not die prior to being slaughtered, then it would be Halal. This of course, is very difficult to determine whilst buying from meat shops, thus one should avoid it totally.

If you are forced to stun the animal by law, then it must be determined that the animal is still alive at the time of actual slaughter. This must be assured with each animal especially chickens, for they may die by the stun due to them being weak.

And Allah Knows Best