

Published on Al-Islam.org (https://www.al-islam.org)

Home > Jurispudence Made Easy > Dialogue on slaughtering and hunting

Dialogue on slaughtering and hunting

This discussion on "slaughter" completely changed my views. The word slaughter sounded cruel and I did no realize that Islamic teachings showed such consideration to animals.

My father said:

- First and foremost, the person who is slaughtering the animal should take every care to lead the animal gently to the slaughter house. He should let the animal take its fill of water before the actual slaughtering. The animal should not be shown the blade with which it is going to be slaughtered. The blade must be very sharp. It must be used very quickly to slaughter the animal to ensure it is not tortured but brought to a quick death. It is advisable that the slaughtered animal is not moved from the place of slaughter until it is dead.

It is makrouh to carry out the slaughtering of an animal in the sight of other animals of the same kind. It is also makrouh for the person who has reared the animal to kill it with his own hands. Among makrouh acts too is skinning the animal while its soul has not yet parted with its body.

To substantiate what he has said, my father quoted the Prophet (s.a.w.) as saying, "Allah, the Most High, has ordained the performance of good deeds in every thing. If you intend to kill an animal, let it be a quick death; if you intend to slaughter an animal, let it be done kindly: sharpen your blade, and put the animal at ease".

- * Yet, father, I do not know how to slaughter animals.
- If you want to do it, you have to sever the four tracts (awdaj), which are found beneath the projection of cartilage at the front of the neck. Those are the oesophagus, the wind pipe, and the two jugular veins.
- * Could you explain more?
- Professional slaughterers say that the proof of cutting those four tracts is that you should see the throat (jawzah) attached to the head of the animal. If not, it can be said slaughtering was not properly carried out.

- * So, this means that when slaughtering the animal, I should start cutting from below the throat.
- Precisely, so that the throat and neck are part of the head and not part of the body.
- * Suppose I made a mistake and realized that I severed the head leaving the throat with the rest of the body, while the animal was not yet dead, can I rectify the situation by cutting below the throat?
- Yes, you may do that.

Slaughtering camels is unique, in that you should let the tool of slaughtering, be it a knife or a spear pierce the upper part of the chest, of the animal, where it meets the neck.

Now that you know how to slaughter animals, you should get to know the conditions that should be fulfilled to ensure that the meat of the slaughtered animal is halal to consume. These are:

- 1. The person who carries out the killing must be Muslim, irrespective whether it is a man, a woman, or a boy capable of rational action. The meat of an animal slaughtered by the unbeliever [and even the people of the book, although they might utter the basmallah] is not halal.
- 2. The tool with which the slaughtering is carried out should be made of iron. If this is not available, you can use any other tool made of any other metal, glass, or sharpened stone that is capable of cutting the four tracts.
- * What about knives made of stainless steel?
- They contain traces of chrome that makes it rather problematic to use in slaughtering animals.
- 3. The animal intended for the slaughter should be set to face the direction of qiblah at the time of slaughtering. This is irrespective of whether it is standing or lying down. If the animal is laid down, its throat and belly should be turned towards qiblah.
- * Suppose, the animal was not made to face the qiblah at the moment of slaughtering, what will the consequences be?
- If it was done deliberately, it will be rendered haraam.
- * And if it was done inadvertently?
- Should this be due to a mistake, forgetfulness, or ignorance of the condition, its meat should be halal to eat.
- 4. The name of Allah must be uttered by the person carrying out the killing, be it at the start of the process or slightly before it, so long as there is continuity.
- * What should I say?

- It suffices to say any of these phrases, "Bismillah, Allahu Akbar, or Al hamdu Lillah".
- * What if the slaughterer forgot to do the utterance?
- The slaughtering shall still be valid.
- * I notice some butchers sever the head of the animal when slaughtering. Is it all right?
- You should advise them [not to do it, because they are bound to sever the spinal cord before it (the animal) is completely dead].
- 5. The blood should spill out. The meat is not halal, if blood is not let out. Nor is it halal, if only a very small quantity of blood disproportionate to the size of the animal is let out. If, however, the scarcity of bleeding was due to a wound received before the killing, there is no harm in that.

These are the conditions that should be met when slaughtering animals. However, if we were not sure that the animal we slaughtered was alive, it is imperative, besides, to monitor the killed animal for any signs of life, such as a movement in the tail, a twinkle in the eye, or a twitch. This is to ensure that it is halal to eat.

- * Earlier on you mentioned that camels should be killed according to a particular way. Are there any special conditions to render their meat halal?
- It is imperative that the butcher satisfies the conditions already discussed. As for the tool of killing, the same conditions apply. Facing the qiblah with the intended kill is necessary. So are the utterance, life, and the letting of blood.
- * What about the babies of pregnant animals that are slaughtered?
- If it was delivered alive, the same rules that apply to the mother apply to the baby. It should be ritually slaughtered according to its kind.
- * What if it was found dead?
- If the animal was slaughtered according to the rules already discussed and the embryo was full-blown, i.e. with hair, wool, or fur covering its body, it is halal to eat. It is not permissible, though, to delay extracting the foetus from its mother's womb. Opening up the mother's abdomen and taking the foetus out is paramount. Any delay that might result in causing the foetus to die, would render its meat haraam to eat.
- * What about a foetus whose mother was pronounced dead before it was slaughtered? Is its meat lawful to eat?
- Meat of such a foetus is haraam to consume.

However, if all the conditions already discussed were met when slaughtering the animal, we can say that such an animal is slaughtered, according to Islamic shari'a law.

Insofar as meat is concerned, animals are of three types:

Some whose meat you can eat, such as sheep, cow, and goat. Meat of the second category cannot be consumed, such as lion, tiger, fox, eagle, and some subterranean animals. Meat of the third category of animals is inherently najis, such as dog and pig.

A sacrifice can be made of any animal whose meat is edible. Once it is sacrificed its meat becomes halal to eat. It cannot be carried out on animals that are najis, which cannot be rendered tahir, such as dog and pig.

- * What about the second category of animals, whose meat cannot be eaten, such as fox, lion, and eagle?
- They can be sacrificed apart from subterranean animals. Once they are killed, their meat and hide are rendered tahir. Their hide, that has been made tahir as a result of ritual slaughter, can be used in any form, including using it as a container for ghee or water.
- * What is the ruling in the matter of the meat or hide of an animal sold by Muslims, especially, when it is not known it was ritually slaughtered?
- You should assume that it was ceremonially slaughtered, unless you have proof to the contrary.

More than that, if the meat came into the hands of a Muslim vendor from an unbeliever, and there was a possibility that the latter slaughtered it, you should also assume it to be halal. That is, unless you are satisfied to the contrary.

However, if you know that the Muslim bought it from an unbeliever without making sure it was ceremonially slaughtered, and there is a possibility that it was, you may assume it is tahir. Yet, you are not permitted to eat the meat. The same ruling applies to all that which is taken directly from an unbeliever.

- * What about Muslims, who follow other schools of figh, who deal in such meat and leather?
- Irrespective of their denominations, all Muslims are treated the same in this case, i.e. you should assume that the animal was ritually slaughtered.
- * Maybe, some Muslim schools of thought do not uphold certain conditions of halal slaughter you mentioned, such as facing the direction of the qiblah when slaughtering the animal, or not saying the utterance. Can I still deem the meat and leather products of such an animal halal?
- As long as the vendor presents it as ceremonially slaughtered, and there is a possibility that it was, you

should assume it is halal. Even if you were absolutely certain that they did not uphold the condition pertaining to the qibla, you can still consider the slaughter halal, provided that, according to the slaughterer's tenets, fulfilling such a condition was not necessary.

- * And what is the ruling on animals killed in fully automated abattoir?
- So long as the conditions of slaughtering are adhered to, it is halal to consume. In that a) the operator who is charged with handling the blade, or pressing the button that operates the blade, should ensure that the animal was positioned in the direction of the qiblah, that b) the utterance was made, and that c) the rest of the conditions were fulfilled, the meat of the animal, slaughtered in this way, is halal.
- * Having covered the slaughtering of animals like sheep and cattle, could you now tell me about fish. Do we have to follow the same procedure?
- Killing fish is different from slaughtering of the animals we have discussed. As long as the fish was still alive when you caught it, irrespective of the way it was caught, it should be deemed ceremonially killed.
- * Suppose a fish jumped out of the water and it was not caught until it perished, would it still be halal to eat?
- It is not halal to eat.
- * What about the condition of uttering, "Bismillah"?
- You are not required to carry out this condition.
- * In this case, even if an unbeliever was the one who caught the fish, can I still eat it?
- Yes, it is permissible to eat.
- * If the fishmonger was Muslim, and I do not know whether he caught the fish while it was still alive, can I deem it halal to consume?
- You should assume that, so long as the fish the Muslim fishmonger sells satisfy the requirements of the shari'a.
- * Should this be the case, if the fishmonger was non-Muslim, and I was not certain whether the fish he sells were caught alive?
- You should assume it was dead. Moreover, even if such fishmonger tells you that it was all right to consume, you should not eat them, unless you were satisfied that the fish were caught while they were alive, irrespective of the method of catching, such as in a net or from a fish farm.
- * Suppose a fisherman caught the fish by installing a net, waiting for the ebb to take place, and when the

net was left high and dry, a number of fish was trapped and found dead. Would it still be deemed halal?

- Yes, you can eat it.
- * What about modern methods of fishing, such as by trawlers, using huge nets extending miles; and the types of net that scoop fish, were many fish are already dead in the net due to either the weight of the catch or other reasons?
- Fish caught in this way can be eaten.
- * Sometimes fish are taken out of water, then they are cut or hit on the head before they are cooked or grilled.
- You are allowed to eat such fish, because it is not conditional that the fish dies unaided.
- * Do I need to wash away the blood that resulted from killing it?
- Fish blood is tahir.
- * This has been the ruling on fish. What about hunting wild animals, such as gazelle, with a rifle?
- There are conditions that should be fulfilled in rendering the kill halal.

Among these are:

- 1. The hunter, including the discerning boy, must be Muslim, as outlined in the conditions of slaughtering already discussed.
- 2. He should be intent on hunting; that is, if he was to shoot and kill an animal by mistake, the kill is not halal to eat. Nor is the use of any part of its carcass.
- 3. Before using the hunting weapon or at the moment of firing, the hunter should utter, "Allahu Akbar", or "Bismillah", or "Alhamdu Lillah".
- 4. The hunter must rush to his kill to slaughter it. Had he found it dead, then it is halal. If, however, there was not enough time to do the slaughtering, it would still be halal. Coversely, if the hunter got to the place where the animal fell, and there was enough time to slaughter it, but did not hasten to kill it until it was dead, it will not be halal.
- 5. In hunting with a rifle, the aim should be to shoot the animal and ensure that the bullet penetrates the body, so much so that the cause of its death be the actual shooting and penetration.
- *. What if the wild animal, whose meat is halal to eat, was hunted and captured by a dog?
- It shall be tahir and its meat is halal, provided the following conditions are met:

- a. The dog should have been trained for hunting and in obeying instructions.
- b. The dog should be sent to carry the task out by its owner, i.e. not of its own accord.
- c. The handler, or owner, of the dog must be Muslim.
- d. When the dog is set forth, the handler must utter the name of Allah, as previously explained.
- e. The cause of death of the captured animal must be due to the wounds inflicted by the hunting dog, and not due to strangulation, or exhausting it through chasing.
- f. The handler, or owner, of the dog must rush to the animal to slaughter it, should there be ample time to do so. If, however, he found it dead or at the brink of death and there was not sufficient time to perform the slaughtering, it is halal. If there was ample time to slaughter it, but he hesitated until it perished, it shall not be halal.
- * If hunting was done by, say, a falcon or a leopard?
- The kill shall not be halal to eat. Only hunting by trained dogs is halal. You should also remember that the place of the bite in the carcass is najis and must be washed. Eating is not permissible before the carcass is washed.
- * What if a falcon captured an animal, and that it was still alive when the owner arrived at the scene to slaughter it?
- It is halal to eat, if it is from that which is permitted to consume, provided that the handler of the bird slaughters the hunted animal according to the conditions outlined earlier on.
- * I have noticed that you sometimes use phrases like, "Meat of animals that are halal to eat", or "That which is not allowed to be eaten". Are there any animals whose meat cannot be eaten at all?
- Yes, here are some of those animals whose meat is halal to eat and others whose meat is not:

Among land animals, that are halal to eat, are: chicken, sheep, cow, camel, horse, mule, gazelle, donkey, antelope, wild cow, and zebra.

It is makrouh, though, not haraam to eat meat of domestic horse, mule, and donkey.

It is haraam to eat meat of carnivorous animals, that have claws, such as lion and fox.

It is haraam to eat the meat of rabbit, elephant, bear, monkey, jerboa, mouse, snake, hedgehog, and crawling animals and insects.

Going back to the classification of animals that can or cannot be eaten, I feel that the subject shall not be complete without discussing marine animals.

You can eat all species of fish, provided that they have scales.

It is haraam, however, to eat dead floating ones.

Among marine animals and amphibians that are haraam to eat are cat fish, tortoise, frog, and lobster.

- * What about prawns?
- They are halal to eat, for scales cover their skin.

Among birds, that are halal to eat, are pigeon of all species, sparrow, swallow, pheasant, nightingale, ostrich, peacock, etc.

[It is haraam to eat meat of crow, of all kinds; so are wasps and other flying insects, apart from locust].

Haraam too is the meat of all birds of prey, i.e. that have talons, such as falcon, hawk, and eagle. So is the meat of any bird that, during flying, glides more than flaps its wings.

- * What if I do not know the way it flies?
- The criterion to be followed in this case is that the bird should be among those birds whose meat is halal to eat. Among the indicators that may identify it as being halal is that it should have one, or more, of three organs a craw, a spur, or a gizzard.
- * I have noticed that some butchers extract certain parts from the carcass and throw them away.
- That is right. The parts of the carcass that are forbidden to eat are:

Blood, dung, reproductive organs, placenta, glands of all kinds, testicles, bone marrow, gall bladder, spleen, bladder, eyes, [and the two nerves extending from the neck alongside the spine to the tail].

Those are the parts of animal carcasses that should be avoided. As for birds, blood and droppings are haraam, [beside those parts of animal carcasses mentioned earlier, if they were present].

* If I may, could you, firstly, tell me whether there are other forbidden things, apart from those we have already discussed? And secondly, are there mustahab acts relating to food and drink?

With a smile, my father said:

Concerning the first part of the question, yes there are things that are haraam to consume, especially two things:

1. It is forbidden to drink alcohol and other intoxicants, including beer. The Holy Qur'an spelt that out unequivocally,

"O you who believe! intoxicants and games of chance and (sacrificing to) stones set up and (dividing by) arrows are only an uncleanness, the Satan's work; shun it therefore that you may be successful". (5/90).

Also, a tradition from Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) has it, "Alcohol is the mother of wickedness and the spearhead of every evil deed ...".

It is forbidden to eat on a table on which intoxicants are served; [rather, sharing such a table is haraam].

2. It is haraam to consume all that which could endanger one's health, and may lead to death, such as taking poison.

As for the second part of your question, mustahab acts pertaining to eating and drinking are numerous; however here are some of them:

- 1. Washing both hands before and after eating, and ensuring that they are dried.
- 2. Uttering the basmalah once you start eating.
- 3. Eating in small morsels.
- 4. Food must be thoroughly chewed.
- 5. Prolonging meal time.
- 6. Starting and concluding the meal with salt.
- 7. Washing fruits and vegetables thoroughly before eating.
- 8. Do not eat while you are still full.
- 9. Do not eat very hot food.
- 10. Do not blow, or exhale, in food or drink.
- 11. Try not to skin fruits that are intended to be eaten with their skin.
- 12. Finish eating what you have started.
- 13. Do not attempt to look people in the face while they are eating.
- 14. The host should start before the guests and finish after they have finished.
- 15. Do not drink water with fatty food.
- 16. Eat from the plate, or place, nearer to you, i.e. not from those placed in front of other people.

- 17. Do not over eat.
- 18. Using the right hand, for those who are not left-handed, in eating.

Source URL:

https://www.al-islam.org/jurispudence-made-easy-sayyid-ali-hussaini-sistani/dialogue-slaughtering-a nd-hunting#comment-0