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out for their  
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## POSITION PAPER

### **Tweede Kamer/Dutch Parliament: Round-table discussion about compulsory stunning of all animals prior to the slaughter process**

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Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to first thank you for inviting me to such an important meeting regarding the fate of animals.

I am Asalet Sancakdaroglu. I grew up in north eastern Turkey and I am Muslim. Had I not started inspecting slaughterhouses for Eyes on Animals, I would never have questioned what Halal *really* means in regards to animal slaughter. I would have continued thinking that Halal-labelled meat was good and slaughter conditions were likely the best possible, just as my parents told me and their parents told them. Life would have gone on.

When I am in slaughterhouses in Turkey, and witness animal fear, panic and pain, I know there must be a better way. I am in favour of stunning, I feel strongly that Islam not only accepts it but demands it, but I believe to achieve this we need to invest a whole lot more time and resources into educating Muslim consumers.

For the past 7 years I have been visiting and trying to improve slaughterhouses throughout Turkey. Additionally I have been analyzing the Koran, the Hadith (the statement of our Prophet Mohammed) as well as meeting with over 100 Religious authorities throughout the country to discuss this topic. I want to state from the start that what I will talk about today is all based on the written documents which every Muslim accepts as authoritative.

I am not a veterinarian, I am not an Imam, but I have done my research on both sides and I work in the field.

There are two obstacles we need to overcome in order to finally move forward on this issue.

1. The first great obstacle is that many Muslims have incorrect information or ideas about stunning. They often think that stunning animals during slaughter is not Halal because the stunning itself sometimes kills the animal. In the Koran it is written that the eating of dead animals is not allowed. I will explain later how this has been falsely interpreted in the context of slaughter.

2. The second great obstacle is that some Muslims are concerned that the process of stunning animals causes more pain than cutting their throats and, additionally, that after stunning them, no blood will flow out of the body.

As long as we are unable to overcome these two false misconceptions, and continue to spread these myths from one generation to the next, I do not believe we will be able to progress on this issue.

I want us to break free from this cycle of myths so that we can move forward .

In my research I wanted to find out the following: was stunning of animals during the slaughter process really forbidden by the Muslim religion, and if so, where is that stated and based on what grounds?

I wanted to learn the science behind stunning and check that the application of stunning coincided with the essence of the Muslim Religious rules.

First let's cover obstacle 1:

If an animal is stunned during slaughter does that make the meat not Halal ? Let's begin by understanding what is meant by the word Halal in the Koran.

In verse 5 Al Maidah 4 the definition of Halal is given. Halal means, 'good thing'. Period. The purpose of defining things as being Halal or not was to help people make the right decisions, to protect the people from disease, death, sadness. All other definitions that you may have heard of are interpretations by regular people, and not from the Koran.

Yusuf El Kardavi's, one of the important Imams in the Islamic world quotes a Hadith from Allah's Prophet: The question that was asked was "people offer us meat and we do not know if the animal was slaughtered while the name of Allah was spoken". Allah's prophet responded with the following, "This is not so important. You can speak the name of Allah and you can still eat it."

Here we see that Muslims may eat meat even when they do not know by whom and how the animal was slaughtered . The essence here is that as long as the meat is good = Halal (in this case meaning "healthy, not rotting") it is still OK to eat. This is what Mohammed said.

One cannot find the word "stunning or stunner" in the Koran, also not in the Bible or Torah, because at that time stunning devices didn't exist. But the fact that it was not mentioned in the Koran does not mean we should claim that stunning animals is not Halal. In fact, there are many new technologies not mentioned in the Koran which we eagerly use and consider "good"/ Halal. What is important is that the *essence* of the lessons we are taught in our Religious scripts is used to determine if new, modern things, not mentioned in the Koran, are Halal or not.

For example, many Muslims carry a Miswak in their pocket. A miswak is a wooden twig that Mohammed used as a means to clean his teeth. Nowadays we use electrical toothbrushes, and that is okay. The point here is not that we need to be loyal to the miswak, but to the importance of brushing your teeth. In the time of the miswak, it was a knife that was used as the tool to slaughter animals. But, just like

the electrical toothbrush, we now also have new tools available to make the slaughter process better, namely a stunner. The stunner is a modern tool that helps ease slaughter and stop the sensation of pain when the animals is restrained and bled out.

When Muslims today go to the dentist, they receive an aesthetic to reduce the pain, but in Mohammed's time anesthetics were not yet available. But anesthetics are a good thing because they reduce our pain in our modern times, and thus we accept it and use it without protest.

In Mohammed's time, people including himself travelled by camel, but now we do with cars and planes, and this is not shunned.

When new things develop, we make use of them to improve and ease our lives. But when it comes to animals, these new inventions, such as a captive bolt pistol to stun animals before cutting their throats, are immediately considered not Halal. This is not fair. Why do humans benefit from new inventions like anesthetics and cars and planes, but animals cannot benefit from new developments? The *essence* of my religion, like most other religions, is to spread good and reduce pain.

Many Muslims are also hesitant about accepting stunning because sometimes, around 1%, the stunning process kills the animal.

In the Koran eating a dead animal is not Halal. (Verses Al Maide Nr 3 and El Enam Nr 145). What is the essence of this rule ? Does that mean that meat from a stunned animal is not Halal? When we want to slaughter an animal, the whole purpose is to kill it so we can eat it.

What is the difference between death by stunner or death by knife during slaughter?

To understand what the Koran means exactly by "dead animal", I researched everything written in *tefsirs* about it.

Diyanet, the greatest authority on Islam in Turkey wrote in their own Tefsir Commentary of the Koran the following:

A dead animal is the body of an animal that has died of natural causes and carries the risk of harmful germs within. Every other Islamic commentator on the Koran has confirmed this, that a dead animal should be interpreted as an animal that died on its own terms and poses a risk to health.

Tefsir from Mister Ibn Kesir, another important Imam from the year 1300, defines a dead animal as an animal that died without being slaughtered or without having been hunted by man.

Thus when I stun an animal just before cutting its throat and it dies from the stun, I know that it did not die on account of a disease, and its meat remains good/healthy (ie Halal). Like Diyanet, we see in Ibn Kesir's commentary that there is no problem eating the meat of an animal that died during stunning immediately before having its throat cut. Using a captive bolt pistol is part of the slaughtering process and there are well-trained veterinarians on location who ensure the quality of the meat. The essence of the rule here, is to not eat old dead meat where you don't know how the animal died, because you could get sick.

Unfortunately Diyanet published a FATWAA on their homepage stating that an animal can be stunned but only if the slaughterer can prove that the animal didn't die from the stunning. This has halted all progress in the use of stunners in Turkey. I continue to see conscious animals suffer intensely there while being restrained and bled out while fully sensitive to pain and aware. Who wants to take the extra responsibility and has the time to prove that each and every animal they slaughter in their plant didn't die during stunning, right before their throats were cut ? Which slaughterhouse is going to take the risk that they may have to throw away kilos and kilos of meat ? That is why most plants continue to refuse stunners.

Now to the second obstacle. Many Muslim consumers are concerned that stunning animals hurts them. Sadly, this misconception has been spread and ingrained into the minds of Muslim consumers by the Halal certifying companies. Halal certifiers spread the message that stunning causes great pain as a way to market their own logo and earn lots of money from it.

The consequence and sad reality is that Muslim consumers, who genuinely want to do good for animals, are causing harm unintentionally. Stunning an animal effectively via electricity or a captive bolt pistol, for example, renders the animals immediately insensitive to pain. Way faster than the time it takes for the message of pain to be carried from the nerve-endings to the brain. The animal does not feel it.

I have worked with several slaughterhouses in Turkey whereby the manager and veterinarian have been convinced that stunning helps reduce the suffering of the animals, but still we cannot install a stunner at their plant because they will lose all their customers. The average Muslim in Turkey thinks stunning is a big tabou.

Many Muslims think that cutting the throat of a fully conscious animal does not cause pain (often claimed to be the same sensation as a paper cut) but the scientists say the complete opposite. After all, it is not a thin layer of skin being cut, but the entire throat area (deep tissue, arteries, trachea, esophagus...).

I would like to cite the famous Galileo "God has written two books: the book of nature and the book of scripture and these two books do not, because they cannot, contradict.

For this reason the claims of the natural sciences must be the same as those of the sacred writings. All believers will affirm this is so. If science has demonstrated that an animal can feel pain, then the sacred writings will confirm and accommodate this. The sacred writings should thus never be interpreted in such a way that causing pain is acceptable, because that would go against the goodness of God.

Ladies and gentlemen, in conclusion, no passage from the Koran or any statement from the prophet Mohammed forbids stunning. The essence of Halal meat is meat that is healthy and poses no risk of sickness.

We must now confront the question: if the Koran and the interpretations of the prophet are manifestly clear, stunning can and should be considered Halal, why

do contemporary religious institutions continue interpreting and handling this issue in such old traditional ways ? Why don't they listen to the science of today and the essence of the Koran's messages ?

There are three answers to this:

1. They do not take the time to analyze or improve the content of old fatwas (legal rulings). They do not want to take any responsibility and simply copy *fatwas* that were written a century ago. A century ago when the technology for stunning did not even exist !
2. They do not want to lose their work position. Until now they have always relied on the old *fatwas*. It is with great difficulty to admit and say, "Sorry people, we have been doing it wrong."
3. Business aspect: If they continue to use these old *fatwas* then they can further guarantee their own economic activity. These Religious institutions are involved in the "Halal" meat industry and profit from the meat trade. It is OK that they can be involved in the meat industry but please do so with the latest technologies such that animals do not suffer as much.

I have written an article on this issue which Muslims should most certainly read. I have brought it with me today in Turkish, German, English and Arabic. It addresses all the points and reservations Muslims have regarding stunning and provides scientific and religious answers to these questions. Please come to me afterwards if you would like a copy.

I hope it will be distributed widely and reveal these unacknowledged points within the Islamic world. This would be better for every Muslim and also for the animals.

Many thanks for your attention.

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