

On the subject of Halal meat.

By Dr. M Naseem

“Forbidden to you is meat of dead animals and blood and the flesh of swine and that on which any name other than God’s has been invoked, and the animal that has been strangled or beaten to death or killed by fall or gored to death or savaged by a beast of prey save that which you may have slaughtered while it is still alive and (forbidden to you is) all that has been slaughtered on idolatrous altars. 5:3

This is a defining paragraph in the Qur’an which lays down the rules as well as the guidelines which determine what is permissible or not for a Muslim in the context of meat available for consumption.

As regards divine commands it needs to be said that these come from an infinite wisdom that spans the whole width of time and so their understanding at any point in time will depend on the stage of development of human knowledge at that time and can not be taken as the last word on the subject.

Zabiah and Zakat – the words used in this paragraph are technical definitions which ensure that the blood vessels in the neck are cut through but nerve passages are left intact. This allows that all blood flows out of the body through contractions of heart and muscles.

Zakat is a similar concept with the added dimension that the body becomes cold. This happens when all muscular contraction ceases and body becomes relaxed.

According to these directions there are two requirements that need to be fulfilled before the flesh of an animal becomes permissible for consumption. These are (a) that the name of God must be taken at the point of taking an animal’s life and (b) that the technique employed must be Zabiah. The passage further details situations that

would make an animal’s meat unacceptable.

The two requirements referred to earlier have their separate significance and are discussed as follows.

The name of God.

This is invoked as a matter of principle which maintains that all life including animals is sacred and can not be taken except by leave of God – the law giver – and in the manner permitted by Him.

Zabiah and Zakat:

These as stated earlier are technical definitions and envisage details which signify a purpose that the process is meant to serve

For understanding the significance of these stipulations the theological reasoning is not enough, we need to turn to our knowledge of physiology. If we look at the examples given in this paragraph which make a meat unlawful, then these are all where death occurs by what in physiology would be described as nervous shock. The one that is permitted denotes a death that follows a haemorrhagic shock. What distinguishes the former from the latter is the fact that at any given time blood in the body flows through only one fifth of the total blood vessels. The rest four fifth remain closed and in reserve to allow circulation to continue in case a blockage occurs in any particular vessel. In nervous shock this mechanism is suspended and all the blood vessels open up at the same time with the result that all available blood instead of being in circulation is dispersed throughout the body which consequently dies because of lack of oxygen. Circulation of blood through heart, lungs and blood vessels ensures supply of oxygen to the tissues and thus maintains life.

In haemorrhagic shock the death occurs through sudden, massive loss of blood out of the body. Death occurs by deprivation of oxygen but in this case blood that is forbidden to a Muslim is allowed to pass out of the body to its maximum. This occurs because the nervous system is kept intact which insures that four-fifth of the blood vessels which are normally closed, remain closed and blood easily flows out of the functioning vessels. As the muscles are deprived of oxygen these contract as a result of the stimuli received from that autonomous nervous system.. The contractions incidentally also help in squeezing blood out of the body tissues. Maximum blood loss is thus ensured but the muscular contraction which a layman may take as suffering by the animal, are nothing of the sort. The sudden loss of blood results in cutting off supply of blood to the brain and the animal becomes incapable of feeling any pain or emotion. Physiologically this is the most painless way to take an animal's life. The practice of stunning introduced in the belief that it saves the animal from suffering is scientifically incorrect and results in a nervous shock which for the reasons stated does not meet the requirements of the Quranic law. In the recent past a concept of minimal stunning has been introduced in the belief that (a) it would

remove the suffering of the animal and (b) it would allow the blood to flow out as the animal is still "alive". Both notions are infact incorrect. Suffering has to be determined by scientific experiments measuring the changes in the brain in reaction to the stimulus of minimal stunning. The experiment carried out in Holland proved that minimal stunning increases pain rather than the opposite.

Muslims representatives in the U.K have offered to carry out similar experiment in this country to settle the argument – at no cost to the government – but unfortunately this offer has not been taken up. As regards the flow of blood, even a minimal stunning will result in opening of the closed blood vessels and will result in flow of blood into the tissues and affect the quantity expelled out of the body.

The view taken by a minority of the Muslim scholars that as the animal is "alive" after minimal stunning, so the slaughter would be acceptable is an error of judgement. The Qur'an – in the absence of any qualification – uses a word as it is commonly understood and not as a technical definition. An animal may be brain dead but technically alive and so it does not mean that its physiological functions are normal. All scholars in the past while allowing hunting or shooting with arrows and guns laid a condition that a hunter must not aim at the head of the animal. This stipulation makes it clear that to preserve the nervous system intact was the reason for this condition. Minimal stunning is aimed at the nervous system and so it can not be argued that it does not affect the physiological function.

In conclusion, I would therefore say that both practices of stunning and minimal stunning are unacceptable. The Muslims have an obligation to raise the question with their suppliers of meat. The consumers have great power in a market economy. By simply raising their concerns they would effect a change in the thinking of those who supply meat to Muslims.

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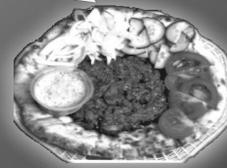
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Safar – Second month of the Islamic calendar

Meaning:

This word means "whistling of the wind". When this name was assigned to this month, it was probably a windy time of the year. Generally most of the Islamic months were named according to weather conditions at the time. However, since they are based on the moon, the months shift about 11 days every year. So, the seasons do not necessarily correspond to the name of the month anymore.

Misconception:

This time of the year was considered to be cursed as many catastrophes and calamities took place. However, this belief has been proven to be false and totally without foundation (absurd).

This can also be confirmed by the following hadeeth. Hadhrat Jaabir (R.A.) has said that, "I have heard the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) saying, the descending of illness and evil superstition befalling in the month of Safar is untrue." (Muslim)

Historical Events:

- The Battle of Abwaa took place on 12th of Safar in the year 2 A.H.
- The Battle of Khaibar took place in the year 7 A.H.
- Hadhrat Ali (R A) married our blessed Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) daughter Hadhrat Fatima (R.A.) in the latter days of Safar 2 A.H.
- Khubaib Ibn Adey (R.A.) was martyred in Safar in the year 4 A.H. in Makkah.
- Zaid Ibn Dathina (RA) was martyred in this month in the year 4 A.H. in Makkah.

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