

# **The Politics of Religious Slaughter -- How Science Can be Misused**

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# The Topic

**Jewish and Muslim religious slaughter requires the slaughter man to use of a razor sharp knife to cut the throat to rapidly make the animal unconscious.**

**What are the animal well-being implications of this process?**

**What criteria should be used to determine animal well being during slaughter?**

**Do the different types of measurements all give the same results? What if they do not? (E.g., electrophysiology, chemical, and behavioral.)**

# **The Five Methods of Slaughter**

**Use of a penetrating stunner going through the skull to cause unconsciousness**

**A non-penetrating stunner to crack the skull to cause unconsciousness**

**Use of gases to cause unconsciousness**

**Use of an electrical current to the head to cause unconsciousness**

**Use of a sharp knife to cut the neck to cause unconsciousness**

**Question: Why can more than one technique be used on the same animal? Shouldn't one be best?**

# The Challenge

**Religious slaughter is**

**Slower**

**Requires more skill and more attention to detail**

**Needs specialized equipment**

**The benefits are:**

**Killed by a person with religious training who cares about the kill**

**May actually be less painful when done right (endorphin hypothesis) [Part of the issue in all systems is the number of kills done improperly!]**

# The Current Landscape

**NZ: Ban on religious slaughter being held until legal action occurs – no date set (Shechita is happening!)**

**EU: Attempting to force punitive labeling for religious slaughter, but ignoring other slaughter methods**

**Australia/Indonesia: Attempt by Australia to force stunning of Australian cattle on Muslim Indonesia**

**Holland: Lower house passes a bill banning un-stunned slaughter, unless it can be proven equal to current slaughter – failed in the upper house**

# More Updates

**French minister suggests religious communities need to modernize!**

**Former head of British Veterinary Association attacks religious slaughter**

**Consumer studies show that as Muslim consumers learn what is happening, more of them actually want to see their meat slaughtered using the Prophetic Method of Slaughter (EBLEX in the UK and ASIDCOM in France). Religious conference in the UK to focus on Prophetic Method of Slaughter! Formation of the UK Muslim Commission.**

# What is Going On?

- Increased interest in animal well-being**
- Activist groups stronger (e.g., HSUS, PETA)**
  - Europe ahead of the US in banning things**
- Part of Western Self-Indulgence (e.g., organic, local, natural, farmer's markets, CSAs)**
- Lack of contact with food supply and the Internet well used to publicize breakdowns**
- Pets more prevalent and more pampered, food animals viewed as pets! (Are vets part of the problem?)**
- Main stream paying attention to animal well-being (e.g., FMI/NCCR, Whole Foods)**

# Religious Slaughter in the Mix

**Religious slaughter when done right is possibly better than regular slaughter**

**Religion of science says “stunning must be better”**

**But religious slaughter done poorly is simply a photo-op for animal activists as is any poorly done slaughter**

**E.g. Postville (kosher): Now operating properly**

**Latin America (kosher): Limited progress, some proper equipment being put in**

**Indonesia (halal)/Turkey**

**Note: Hunting is un-stunned slaughter!**

# Major Lapses in Science Ethics

**How was religious slaughter done: “I don’t know”**

**Pick a bad system, study it, and generalize to all religious slaughter (and don’t describe it!)**

**Do non-religious unstunned slaughter and call it equivalent to religious slaughter only in the discussion**

**Ignore issues like the sharpness of knife, number of nicks, and the overall handling of the animal**

**Only report the worst cases, E.g., maximum time to unconsciousness! Or average out the good, e.g., Britain and Bangladesh in the same data set!**

# My Thoughts

- 1. The animal welfare of religious slaughter needs to be improved consistent with and respectful of all religious rules. The religious community needs to take on this responsibility with help from the scientific community that has their best interests in mind.**
- 2. Real science and not agenda science that manipulates the data is needed to actually evaluate all slaughter systems.**

**Unless the best religious slaughter systems available are studied when they are working properly, the science simply points out problems with the system studied and cannot be generalized to religious slaughter. Such studies do help with identifying specific improvements that need to be made to THAT system.**

**There must be standardized methods and terminology for evaluating and reporting all slaughter methods. Ironically this has not been done! Most papers are impossible to figure out the details of the slaughter.**

# Time to Collapse

**A good system needs to get the animal both unconscious properly and quickly. In a good system Temple has observed that the average for cattle (the slowest) is 17 sec and the longest time was 33 sec. Behavioral observations should also suggest that the animal is not struggling during this period but gently expiring! A good death is not an issue of time! Can we more formally document this concept/process?**

**There is a need to agree to stun any animal that is not collapsed after an agreed upon time or if it is visibly stressed even if the animal becomes unacceptable for kosher or halal.**

**At least one “Temple Grandin approved plant” is using this standard and routinely getting over 95% of the cattle to collapse in that time (about 30 sec). [Can they do better?]**

**Has anyone done any scientific studies in these model plants (beyond Temple) to collect key baseline data as to where we are with the best religious slaughter to use as a goal for other plants?**

# Vocalization – AMI

**Cattle vocalization percentages should be 5% or less of the cattle in the crowd pen, lead up chute and restraint device. A slightly higher vocalization percentage (5% vs 3%) is acceptable for religious slaughter because the animal must be held longer in the restraint device compared to conventional slaughter. A 5% or less vocalization score can be reasonably achieved.... Animals must be completely insensible before any other slaughter procedure is performed (e.g.,**

## **AMI - IV**

**shackling, hoisting, cutting, etc.) If the animal does not become insensible, it should be stunned with a captive bolt gun or other apparatus and designated as non-Kosher [non-Glatt] or non-Halal if required by the religious authorities.**

**Has any of the research on religious slaughter other than Dr. Grandin's reported the "vocalization rate" at the time of the study in the facility as a way to evaluate the facility? (Does not work with sheep.)**

# Critical Analysis of Religious Slaughter

**The impact of the actual religious slaughter needs to be separated from a number of extremely important issues that are not “religious requirements” but which confound the research results, e.g., the people, the facility, the equipment, and the non-slaughter stress of the animals need to be optimized before looking at the impact of the religious slaughter procedure.**

# Quality of the Current Research Reports

**I would suggest that almost all of the literature studies to date do not meet the standard of sufficient information so that the experiment can be repeated or the data cleanly interpreted.**

**The most recent work reported in the NZ  
Veterinary Journal has many serious limitations  
and reflects work that set out to support an  
agenda.**

**Dr. Grandin has put a disclaimer on her site, more  
limited than my comments, but basically  
criticizing this work. It is the “proof” being  
widely quoted for unstunned slaughter being  
inhumane!**

**The knife used is rather short -- only 10 inches and the actual slaughter and the "pen" are poorly described. The special equipment is not shown. Details about the neck cut – how many strokes and where on the neck are not given. The head holder also doesn't seem to be doing the job right – too much movement? The training of the slaughter man is not given.**

**If the papers are about un-stunned slaughter in general, which includes many on-farm slaughters unrelated to religious slaughter, why is only religious slaughter mentioned so frequently in the discussion and conclusions?**

**Who sharpens a knife with a knife sharpener? Do they have any idea of how sharp the knife is and whether it has any nicks?**

**Why is the heart rate so high for the first paper and much lower in the other two papers? It suggests that these animals were more stressed - - why should that be the case if the animals were not conscious? This is often observed for the convulsions after slaughter regardless of method. It also seems that the normal "sticking" of the animal after non-penetrating slaughter was never done and would be an important control.**

**They actually admit in one of the papers that the halothane might have an effect on something they see -- my physiology is not good enough to follow all those arguments but that does raise the question of whether that interferes with appropriate data collection.**

**The papers are VERY sloppy about how the words unconsciousness, insensibility, and undoubted insensibility are used. The papers never actually establish an unconsciousness point, where it is accepted that the animal would not feel pain. According to the EU and common vocabulary, when the animal drops, it is unconscious and doesn't feel pain. Words like suffering are also thrown in to add a little drama. And what exactly is psychological shock? And a lot of "wishy-washy" words, like "probably, likely, possibly" that leave one uncomfortable with the strong conclusions being stated by the authors publicly.**

# Neck Tension

**The exact tension on the neck is critical to get a cut that is clean – if it is not taut enough you get sloppy cutting and if it is too taut you may get tearing ahead of the cut. Thus, this needs to be clearly specified in terms of the head position as per Temple Grandin's work with head holders. Recently, she has been moving to consider slightly less tension on the neck.**

**Can we develop a method to measure this tension and its impact?**

# **Some Further Research Needs**

**An understanding of the process by which “endorphins” (opiates) function in animals at the time of slaughter.**

**A way to measure the sharpness of a knife quantitatively needs to be developed to determine how sharp a knife needs to be for it to be used successfully? The absence of nicks probably can be determined using a microscope.**

**Detailed animal physiology, biochemical, and behavior measurements on a system where during religious slaughter animals are losing the ability to support themselves in 30 seconds or less (preferably 20 sec or less).**

**How do we measure unconsciousness on every animal at the time of slaughter? (Help needed!)**

# **How Your Meat Was Prepared**

## **A Modest Proposal: Truth in Labeling**

**By Smashing the Animal over the Head to Crack  
its Skull**

**By Smashing Through the Skull**

**By Electrocuting the Animal**

**By Using a Gas Chamber**

**Traditionally Hand Slaughtered with Respect for  
the Animal**

**Dream: That some day all animals will be slaughter religiously as the best form of slaughter.**

**Might we even get pigs slaughtered that way by non-Jews, non-Muslims who have the same high level of training?**

**(Pig anatomy might actually not work that well with religious slaughter. And, of course, religious slaughter is too slow for modern slaughter needs.)**

# Conclusion

**It is my personal belief that in the future good science will show that the most humane slaughter *may* well be religious slaughter. All research on the issue of religious slaughter (as opposed to evaluating a particular situation) needs to be done on a system that is operating properly and provides the best possible condition for slaughter – only then can the potential of religious slaughter be properly compared to other forms of slaughter by both the religious community and the scientific community.**

# Questions and Comments

For copies of this presentation or further discussion, contact me at [jmr9@cornell.edu](mailto:jmr9@cornell.edu)

There is a comprehensive paper at [www.ift.org](http://www.ift.org) on kosher and halal rules; please go to publications: Comprehensive Reviews, volume 2 issue 3 or give me a business card.

For talks on kosher/halal and on animal welfare (JMR) and animal welfare (TG), go to [www.cybertower.cornell.edu](http://www.cybertower.cornell.edu) and log in.

For a 2 credit distance learning course on kosher/halal go to the Kansas State University distance learning program in food science