



## KOSHER SLAUGHTER OF LIVESTOCK IN AUSTRALIA – MYTHS AND FACTS

On June 26, *The Age* ran a front page story by Peter Munro ('Outrage grows on ritual killing') which was backed up by an editorial in similar vein. The story also appeared in the *Sun Herald*. These pieces conflated Kosher slaughter with other forms of ritual slaughter and repeated many of the myths about Kosher slaughter of livestock which have circulated over the years, and some new ones.

**MYTH number 1:** The horrific mistreatment of animals in Indonesia shown by the 4 Corners program on 30 May 2011 is somehow related to Kosher slaughter.

**FACT:** There is no organized Jewish community – and therefore no Kosher slaughter – in Indonesia. The shocking practices revealed by the 4 Corners program would violate the most fundamental principles of Kosher slaughter. All of the animals shown in that program would be unfit for Kosher consumption because of their mistreatment. The Jewish community supports the government's decision in effecting change in Indonesia to the practices revealed by 4 Corners, and any other inhumane treatment of livestock.

**MYTH number 2:** Australian religious slaughter abattoirs are like those in Indonesia.

**FACT:** Australian religious slaughter abattoirs are highly regulated by government and only the best animal welfare practices are endorsed.

**MYTH number 3:** Animals linger in pain after kosher slaughter.

**FACT:** The nature of kosher slaughter in Australia is such that before the animal is able to register pain after its neck is cut the animal is either rendered insensible or is stunned.

**MYTH number 4:** Kosher slaughter of animals is cruel and inhumane.

**FACT:** Kosher slaughter is based on the animal's welfare. A cardinal principle of Kosher slaughter of livestock is that the animal must be sound and healthy in every way, without injury or impairment of any kind, at the moment its neck is cut. This means that Kosher slaughter requires that the animal must not be mistreated before it is slaughtered. The slaughter-man must be well trained and highly skilled. The knife that is used must be long and span the neck of the animal. It must be honed to razor sharpness before each separate use, to ensure a quick, clean, single cut and rapid loss of consciousness by the animal. The knife is carefully checked by a supervisor before each kill to ensure there are no nicks, damage or other signs of imperfection.

**MYTH number 5:** Kosher slaughter involves bleeding an animal to death.

**FACT:** The cause of death with Kosher slaughter is exactly the same as with non-Kosher slaughter – loss of consciousness through lack of oxygen. Whilst Jews are absolutely forbidden to consume any kind of blood, most of the bleed out occurs after the animal is dead or has lost consciousness. In the case of sheep, correctly slaughtered by the Kosher method, this occurs between two and eight seconds after the neck is cut, not twenty seconds.

**MYTH number 6:** Kosher slaughter requires an animal to suffer.

**FACT:** The opposite is true. In Australia, if an animal is in obvious distress, it is pronounced unfit for Kosher consumption by the supervisor, resulting in a financial penalty (loss of income) by the owner of the animal. The whole process of Kosher slaughter as practised in Australia is intended to kill the animal as quickly and painlessly as possible without injuring it beforehand.

**MYTH number 7:** Stunning is a humane way to kill an animal.

**FACT:** Stunning does not necessarily kill the animal. Captive bolt stunning (the most common form of stunning used in Australia) involves delivering a heavy blow to the animal's head – like being struck on the forehead with a steel hammer – before its throat is cut. When done properly the animal is instantly rendered both unconscious and paralyzed. Sometimes the stunning is botched and the animal undergoes unnecessary suffering. Jewish law does not permit pre-stunning and requires that the animal must not be injured or mistreated in any way before it is slaughtered. At the moment its neck is cut, it must be whole, healthy, uninjured and unimpaired.

**MYTH number 8:** Kosher slaughter is alien to the Australian way of life and our humane values.

**FACT:** Kosher slaughter has been occurring in Australia since the mid-nineteenth century in accordance with Australian laws and has nothing to do with the horrific scenes shown in the 4Corners program. Like all animal slaughter in Australia Kosher slaughter is subject to strict government regulation and inspection. Kosher meat is processed in Australia by Australians and meets the high standards we all expect in this country.

**MYTH number 9:** Maybe Kosher slaughter was once the most humane way to kill livestock but it has been rendered obsolete and unnecessary by modern scientific methods.

**FACT:** The techniques of Kosher slaughter, properly conducted, have been endorsed by Professor Temple Grandin, who was interviewed in the 4 Corners program. She is arguably the world's foremost authority on the humane treatment of livestock. (She is not Jewish). In the April 2010 edition of *Meat and Poultry* magazine (at page 82) Professor Grandin comments favourably about the humaneness of Kosher slaughter.

**MYTH number 10:** Scientific tests conducted in New Zealand (the Massey study) prove that animals killed by Kosher slaughter suffer more than animals which are stunned before their necks are cut, or immediately afterwards.

**FACT:** Some of the flaws and short-comings of the Massey study are discussed by Professor Grandin in the aforementioned article. Briefly, the conditions of the experiments conducted in the study did not replicate those of Kosher slaughter, especially as regards the knife's size, sharpness, and smoothness, and the training and skill of the slaughter-man. The Massey study extrapolated information from calves to cows to sheep and even poultry, even though the physiology of each is fundamentally distinct. Whatever the scientific studies show, no one can truthfully claim that Kosher slaughter is not a humane method of slaughter, as Professor Grandin acknowledges. There is no absolutely ideal and totally painless method for slaughtering an animal, and therefore a variety of acceptable methods, which seek to affect the kill as quickly and painlessly as possible, can all coexist.

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# Getting religious with slaughter



When religious slaughter is being evaluated from an animal-welfare standpoint, the variable of the restraint method must be separated from the variable of slaughter without stunning. Many plants have replaced cruel shackling and hoisting of conscious animals with restraint equipment that holds the animal in a

comfortable, upright position. This has greatly improved welfare.

For religious slaughter it is important to use a knife that is long enough to fully span the neck; keep the tip of the knife outside the neck during the cut; use a very sharp knife; and hold the wound open during the cut.

ment artifact) that would distort the EEG patterns.

In these experiments, they used a knife that was 24.5 cm (9.65 in.) long on calves weighing between 240 lbs. and 375 lbs. The EEG reading showed that the calves were feeling pain during the cut. Unfortunately, the methods section of the paper did not contain sufficient detail to determine if the wound was held open during the cut. In properly done kosher slaughter, the wound is held open during the cut. The knife used in this study was much shorter than the special kosher knife, but it was similar to many of the knives used for halal slaughter. Another possible variable is the sharpening method. The knife used in the New Zealand study was sharpened on a mechanical knife-sharpening device and a kosher knife is sharpened on a whetstone.

This study definitely shows that cutting the throat of a calf with a relatively short machine-sharpened knife causes pain. It is very clear that many of the knives that people are using for halal slaughter need to be improved. I recently visited a plant where the knife was so dull that it was like trying to cut meat with a butter knife. At this time, I wish to make two recommendations. First, repeat the New Zealand experiment during actual kosher slaughter with the special long knife. Secondly, I can't emphasize enough that some of the knives that are currently being used for halal slaughter are not acceptable. ■

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I have observed that cattle held in an upright restraint device had almost no reaction to correctly done kosher slaughter that was performed with a special long knife. The cattle reacted much more vigorously when I invaded their flight zone and waved my hands in their faces. The cut with the special knife appeared to not cause pain. I have observed slaughter without stunning done with a short knife that caused violent struggling. From my observations,

## **N.Z. research**

T.J. Gibson and his colleagues at the Institute of Veterinary, Animal and Biomedical Sciences at Massey Univ. in New Zealand published the results of their research in the *New Zealand Veterinary Journal*. They reported that slaughter without stunning causes pain. They used a new EEG (brain wave) method that can determine when an animal is feeling pain. In these experiments, lightly anesthetized calves were cut. The reason for anesthetizing the calves was to prevent movements (move-