160134 - Ruling on branding animals on the face

the question

We put a brand mark on the face of camels, but now they told us that this is not allowed. Is putting the brand mark on an animal’s face not permitted? If this is the case, I want to know the definition of the camel’s face: is it the entire head or just part of it? We need to know this information, and I hope that you can clarify.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

It is soundly narrated from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) that he forbade branding animals on the face. It was narrated that Jaabir (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) forbade striking on the face or branding on the face. Narrated by Muslim, 2116.

In fact, the Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) cursed those who do that. The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) passed by a donkey that had been branded on the face, and he said: “May Allah curse the one who branded him.” Narrated by Muslim, 2117.

An-Nawawi (may Allah have mercy on him) said: As for branding on the face, it is prohibited according to scholarly consensus because of the hadith…

A number of our scholars said that it is disliked (makruh). Among our companions, al-Baghawi said that it is not permissible, indicating that it is prohibited. This is the view that is most likely to be correct, because the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) cursed the one who did that, and the curse indicates that it is prohibited.

End quote from *Sharh an-Nawawi `ala Muslim*, 14/323.

Shaykh Ibn Baz (may Allah have mercy on him) was asked about a tribe whose custom is to brand animals on the face; is it permissible for them to do that?

He replied:

Branding on the face is not permissible, because the Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) forbade that and cursed the one who does it. So it is not permissible to brand any animal on the face, whether camels, cattle, sheep or humans. It is not permissible, even if it is part of the traditions, and the tradition must be changed in obedience to the Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him); you have no right to go against the Sunnah for the sake of the tradition of your fathers and grandfathers…

End quote from *Fatawa Nur `ala ad-Darb*.

The definition of the face is as the scholars of the Arabic language said: the face (wajh) is the front of a thing.

End quote from *al-Muhit fil-Lughah*, 1/314; *Kitab al-`Ayn*, 4/66.

Al-Qurtubi said:

In Arabic, the word *wajh* (face) comes from the word *muwajahah* (facing); it refers to the part of the body that contains faculties and has length and width. In terms of length, it goes from the top of the forehead to the bottom of the jaw, and in terms of width, it goes from one ear to the other.

End quote from *al-Jami` li Ahkam al-Qur`an*, 6/83.

This is the definition of the face in humans.

With regard to other creatures, the face of any animal is what you see when it is facing you, and it contains the well-known faculties such as two eyes, a nose, and what is above the eyes until the beginning of the head starts, and what is between the ears.

Hence al-Qurtubi also said: The Arabs do not call anything a face except what you see when

someone faces you.

End quote from *al-Jami` li Ahkam al-Qur'an*, 6/84.

As for branding anywhere except on the face, the jurists stated that it is permissible to brand animals on the ears and elsewhere on the animal's body.

An-Nawawi (may Allah have mercy on him) said: As for branding anywhere other than the face on creatures other than humans, it is permissible, and there is no difference of opinion among us regarding that. End quote.

There are reports in the Sunnah which indicate that the Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) branded animals on the ears. It was narrated that Anas (may Allah be pleased with him) said: We went to the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) in a camel-pen and he was branding sheep. He [the narrator] said: I think he said: On their ears. Narrated by Muslim, 2119.

So you must refrain from branding animals on the face, but you may brand them on any suitable place other than the face, whilst paying attention to the Islamic principle of being kind and gentle in all things.

And Allah knows best.