

Halloween's Demonic

Origins

*H*alloween began as a religious

festival dedicated to Samhain, the Lord of Death in some ancient European belief systems. Various sources relate that on October 31st Samhain would dispatch spirits to attack and harass humans. As time passed, in those parts of the world celebrating this festival, this day and its night became increasingly darker, characterized by belief in wandering ghosts, goblins, zombies, vampires, black cats, bats, demons and other symbols of the occult and underworld. The day also gradually took on significance for Devil worshippers, some of whom came to believe that October 31st was a day the Devil's help could be invoked for divinations (seeking knowledge of future events) concerning marriages, health issues, financial decisions, etc.



The first objective of the Divine Law (Maqasid al-Shari'ah) is the preservation of monotheism and the worship of Allah. Pursuant to this objective, idolatry in all of its manifestations has been forbidden in Islam, as well as actions and practices described by our scholars as constituting disbelief or those that are seen as leading to disbelief. Belief in a God of Death, Samhain, who has the power to act independently in creation, is idolatry and disbelief with Muslims, and therefore Haram, or forbidden.

Similarly, to invoke the Devil for any purpose, is also idolatry and disbelief. Allah mentions in the Qur'an, "They call on none other than the rebellious Satan, Allah has cursed him (4:116-117)." To specifically invoke Satan for purposes of divination is an even more egregious form of disbelief. Our Prophet, peace be upon him, has mentioned in this regard, "Whoever affirms the truthfulness of a sorcerer, an

astrologer or a fortune-teller has rejected faith in what has been revealed to Muhammad.” Again, this rejection of faith is compounded when the one allegedly informing of the future is Satan.

Satan’s role in Halloween rituals and symbolism is also found in the tradition of the Jack o’ lantern. The candle in the Jack o’ lantern, symbolizes Irish Jack trapped in Purgatory between Heaven and Hell. The origin of the light in the Jack o’ lantern, now usually represented by a candle, began as a burning coal thrown by Satan to Jack after he was turned away from the gates of Hell. Jack placed the glowing coal into a turnip, which would become a pumpkin in North America, and used it as a lamp to illuminate his path as he wandered through the earth, trapped between Heaven and Hell. After Jack’s passing, for some, the candle came to represent the Jack himself. In any case, to adorn the interior or exterior of our homes with such a symbol is something forbidden in Islam, because it involves use of religious symbolism which has no relation to proper Muslim teachings.

An alternative explanation of the significance of the Jack o’ lantern, that it is used to ward off the evil spirits that abound on Halloween, is also idolatrous to Muslims, as it is attributing to the creation powers that are reserved by God. Namely, the Jack o’ lantern warding off evil. We affirm as one of the foundations of our creed that it is Allah, Almighty God, who is the sole source of all benefit or harm, not anyone or anything in the creation. Almighty God mentions in the Qur’an, “If Allah tests you with something you deem harmful there is no one who can relieve you from it except He... (6:17).”

I mention this to say that a religious celebration infused with various layers of idolatry and Satanic influences is clearly forbidden in Islam. To reiterate, Halloween, in its original conception, practice and symbolism is forbidden in Islam. That being the case, it becomes incumbent on those advocating Muslim participation in the practices of Halloween to demonstrate, with evidence (Dalil), that the day and night are free of the idolatrous and Satanic influences that evolved around it.

If it can be shown that such influences continue to be present, then the ruling of those practices and the symbolism surrounding them being forbidden (Haram) stands. This line of reasoning is consistent with a legal concept known as the continuity of the original ruling (Istishab al-Asl). Again, if it can be shown that Halloween continues to involve idolatrous beliefs or practices which clearly constitute disbelief by the standards of Islam, then the original ruling of such practices being Haram or impermissible to partake in, stands.

We know that Halloween continues to be a religious holiday celebrated by those whose beliefs are antithetical to those of Muslims. Samhain, the festival which gave birth to Halloween, is currently celebrated October 31st each year by Wiccans and Satanists, and is the highest of all their holidays. A witch has been quoted in USA Today as saying, "Christians don't realize it, but they're celebrating our holiday with us. ... We like it." The symbols of darkness, evil and idolatry, as we Muslims understand them: ghosts, goblins, witches, demons, vampires, etc. continue to be associated with this day by those groups who celebrate it in ways consistent with its ancient origin. Hence, the original ruling concerning it, as mentioned above, stands.

As for the argument that one's intention (niyya) is the determinant of whether Halloween is lawful or unlawful, this is baseless. Specifically, a good intention cannot render an unlawful action, lawful. Our scholars have captured this concept in the following expression, an-niyyatu'l hasana la tubarriru al-Haram. Hence, a good intention, such as the desire that our children not feel out of place on this day among their peers who may not be Muslim, cannot justify involvement in practices and with symbolism that are forbidden in our religion.

Something unlawful can only be rendered temporarily lawful by absolute necessity and not by one's whims or intentions. Hence, the legal maxim, "Absolute necessity renders the unlawful temporarily lawful (al-Darura tabihu'l Mahdhurat)." For example, if one is threatened with starvation and the only food available is pork, it is temporarily permissible to eat the pork, something normally forbidden, in order to

sustain one's life. Once the absolute necessity justifying the consumption of pork passes, it is no longer permissible. No one can claim that celebrating Halloween is an absolute necessity, which could, in their view, justify it being lawful. Furthermore, no one could claim that it is a need (Hajah), or beneath that, in terms of legal justification, an embellishment (Tahsiniyya).

Some claim that Halloween is an American custom and custom is a legal consideration (al-'Ada Muhakkamah). This maxim has no relevance here. Custom is only a legal consideration when it does not contradict or conflict with established rulings or principles of Islam. This is clearly not the case with Halloween, which conflicts with many Islamic rulings and principles, as we have shown. Therefore, one cannot claim its permissibility based on custom.

A related idea is that the symbols of Halloween, some of which we have mentioned above, and all of which have been incorporated into the costumes commonly worn on the day and night of October 31st, no longer have any religious or idolatrous significance. Contrary to this claim, as we have mentioned above, these symbols continue to be part of active religious ceremonies undertaken as part of extant Wicca and Satanist rituals. This renders those symbols and the practices and costumes associated with them off limits for Muslims.

There is another legal principle that becomes relevant here, namely, "Being pleased with disbelief is itself disbelief (Al-Rida bi'l Kufr, Kufr)." In this area of legal thinking the crux of the ruling of disbelief is something that is intangible, namely, pleasure. This intangible quality is found in the concept, "Business is predicated on mutual pleasure (Taradin) between the contracting parties." In areas such as this, the intangible quality has to have a tangible manifestation in order for the ruling to be meaningful. In the case of business, mutual pleasure is expressed by an offer and acceptance (Ijab wa qabul). Contemporarily, this is accomplished through offering money and accepting a receipt, signing a contract, a handshake or other tangible actions largely defined by custom.

Pleasure with disbelief is likewise expressed through tangible manifestations. In the case of Halloween, such actions as wearing costumes representing skeletons (dead spirits returning to life), witches, zombies, sorcerers, vampires or fairies, placing Jack o' lanterns on one's doorsteps, choosing October 31st for "Halaloween" parties, trick or treating and other actions can all be interpreted as expressions of pleasure with Kufr. That being the case, even if a Muslim disagrees with Halloween or "Halaloween" being Haram, it is something he or she should avoid out of fear of involvement in practices or accepting symbolism that can be viewed as expressions of pleasure with disbelief.

Were we to accept for the sake of argument that Halloween is an innocent, commercialized holiday (which opens an entirely different can of worms) an insightful scholar would still likely find it something to be forbidden, based on the concept of blocking lawful means to unlawful ends (Sadd al-Dhara'ia). This idea holds that if something that is lawful in and of itself will likely become a mean to something unlawful, then that otherwise lawful mean becomes unlawful.

In our society, which is becoming increasingly un-Godly, occult practices and symbolism are systematically becoming normalized as part of the socio-cultural landscape. Seemingly innocent and innocuous manifestations of Satanism and the occult are becoming recruitment tools into darker and more dangerous beliefs and practices. In my estimation, which is shared by many others, Halloween, as it is commonly practiced and understood, is one of those seemingly innocent and innocuous manifestations of the nefarious forces that are subtly leading many Muslims, as well as others, to engage in practices which would have been unthinkable a generation ago. Any door with the potential to lead to those dark spaces must be slammed shut.

Saying this is not to deny that there are many aspects of the cultural life of our society that Muslims should and actually do proudly embrace. However, in my view,

Halloween must not be one of them. Furthermore, a “Halal” Halloween, or Halaloween, will not protect our children from Halloween’s pervasive influence. As George Lakoff explains in his seminal book, “Don’t Think of an Elephant,” if you tell a person to refuse to think of an elephant, the first thing he or she will do is to think of an elephant. If everything in our schools, mass media, theaters (it is not coincidental many of our darkest horror films are centered around Halloween) stores and billboards are bombarding us, and more significantly, our children, with images and messages filled with the traditional symbols of Halloween, having our children engage in a Halal version will not stop them from thinking about the “real thing,” especially when the “real thing” is so pervasive in our culture.”

We need to be honest with our children and tell them unambiguously that we are Muslims and there are some things we do not believe in or practice because they are antithetical to our religious teachings. The Jehovah’s Witness, Hasidic Jews, the Amish and others do so with great force and clarity. Tawhid, or upholding Divine Oneness, lies at the core of our religion. If it is compromised our religion will soon follow. We must assiduously guard our faith, especially during these perilous times.

In conclusion, neither this nor the original Halloween post are meant, as some have implied, to be dismissive of the position or opinions of others. Nor are they meant to be offensive. I am only trying to warn my Muslim brothers and sisters of a great danger that is creeping up on our community. I believe in open discussion and freedom of opinion, but I do have strong positions on many issues. That does not necessarily make me right, nor does it make someone holding an opposing position wrong. This is how I see this particular issue, as unambiguously Haram, at many different levels, however, I respect the position of those who may see it differently. I also do not wish for anyone to take my position on the issue of Halloween as a blanket condemnation of all western holidays. Each one has to be considered on a case-by-case basis, as each is unique and distinct. May Allah guide us all to what He loves and to His good pleasure.

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