

## Halloween: Through Muslim Eyes

By [A. Idris Palmer](#)

Halloween is an annual Western celebration based on Celtic and European pagan doctrines and traditionally applied to the evening of October 31st. It is derived from rituals involving dead spirits and devil worship and symbolizes the beginning of the ancient Druid's New Year, who hold that the dead revisit their homes at that time. In essence, Halloween represents the devil worshipper's New Year. Muslim commemoration of such a day is therefore sinful and haram; as it involves the most evil elements of polytheism and disbelief. Indeed, participation in Halloween is worse than participation in Christmas, Easter or Good Friday, as those innovated days commemorate the birth and supposed death of a Prophet, whereas Halloween is a commemoration of the worshippers of Satan. Thus, participation in it is more sinful than congratulating the Christians for their prostration to the crucifix.

How therefore is the Muslim to understand this issue in the light of the shari'ah? Firstly, the Prophet (saw) said in an authentic narration: "Whosoever resembles a people is from them." This is a general statement prohibiting the Muslims from imitation of the kuffar. Any Muslim, who thereby participates with the non-Muslims in their celebrations, particularly those that involve clear shirk and kufr is asking for the wrath of Allah and misguidance to descend upon him like it has descended upon the non-Muslims. For a proper understanding of this modern American celebration on October 31st, we should retrace the historical development of three early celebrations that have come together to form today's Halloween.



The first of these precursors to Halloween dates back to pre-Christian Ireland and Scotland to a celebration of the Druids or Celtic priests. The Celtic year began on November 1st with a festival of called Samhain. The ancient Druids, believed that on that evening, Samhain, the lord of the dead, called forth hosts of evil spirits. On the eve of Samhain, October 31st, laughing bands of young people disguised themselves in grotesque masks and carved lanterns from turnips and carried them through villages. This harvest festival was also thought of as a festival of the dead. The druids believed it was on that night when the earth comes into closest contact with the spiritual world and consequently ghosts, goblins and witches supposedly destroyed crops, killed farm animals and wreaked havoc on the villagers. According to their belief, while spirits of the dead roamed around, villagers lighted bonfires to either drive them away or to guide the spirits of the dead back to their homes.

Among the ancient Celts, Halloween was the last evening of their year and was regarded as a advantageous time for examining the portents of the future. The Celts also believed that the spirits of the dead revisited their earthly homes on that evening. After the Romans conquered Britain, they added to Halloween,

features of the Roman harvest festival held on November 1 in honor of Pomona, goddess of the fruits of trees.

The second precursor to Halloween dates to the Dark Ages in central Europe. There, the Christian church destroyed many of the temples of various Greek gods and goddesses, such as Diana and Apollo. However, this pagan worship was never completely eradicated and later took

on the form of witchcraft. One of the most important aspects of witchcraft is a number of celebrations each year which are called "Witches' Sabbaths." One of the highest of the Witches' Sabbaths is the High Sabbath or the Black

Sabbath of Witches on October 31st. Today, much of Halloween's folklore such as black cats, broomsticks, cauldrons and spells come from the Black Sabbath.



The third precursor to Halloween dates to the early Roman Catholic Church. The church had appointed specific days to honor each of its saints and basically ran out of days in the year for all their saints to have a day, so they decreed to have one day to remember all the saints, calling it All Saints' Day. In the eighth century, Pope Gregory the 3rd changed All Saints' Day from May 13th to November 1st. In the year 834 Pope Gregory the 4th extended this celebration to the entire Roman Catholic Church. This event was called Allhallowmass, and as one might suppose, there was a celebration on the evening before on October 31st, called 'All Hallow E'en', "all hallow" meaning "all of the hallowed ones." The contraction of hallow and e'en is thus where the word Halloween is derived.

The Celtic tradition of lighting fires on Halloween survived until modern times in Scotland and Wales, while the concept of ghosts and witches is still common to all Halloween observances. Traces of the Roman harvest festival survive in the custom, prevalent in both the United States and in Great Britain, of playing games involving fruit, such as ducking for apples in a tub of water. Of similar origin is the use of hollowed-out pumpkins or jack-o-lanterns, carved to resemble grotesque faces and lit by candles placed inside.

The jack-o-lantern, also known as will-o-the-wisp, fox fire and corpse candle, among other things, was believed to be a wandering soul which could not find refuge in either heaven or hell because of a particularly evil deed committed in its lifetime. The Finns believed that it was the soul of a child buried in the forest. A corpse candle is said to be a small flame moving through the air in the dark and is believed by the superstitious to be an omen of the observers' imminent death. According to ancient folklore, a will-o-the-wisp wanders about swamp areas, enticing victims to follow. These strange fires were also known as "foolish fire," because according to legend, only a fool would follow them. Today's pumpkin face is symbolic of that mocking spirit.



Additionally, the modern custom of giving out sweets to costumed children going door to door begging, "trick or treat" has its origin in the pagan new year's feast in Ireland. In Ireland, it was believed spirits thronged about the houses of the living, they were thus greeted with a banquet. At the end of the feast, villagers disguised themselves as souls of the dead and paraded to the outskirts of their villages in order to lead the spirits away. This believed to avoid any calamities the dead might bring. Another way the villagers tried to appease the dead was to set out bowls of fruit and other treats so the spirits would partake of them and leave them in peace. (A variation of this practice is done today in Mexico's 'Day of the Dead' celebrations, where baked goods are laid out on the graves of loved ones in the belief that the dead spirits will partake of the food). Later, when the belief in ghosts and goblins declined, youths dressed themselves as ghosts and goblins and threatened to play tricks on those who failed to be generous with treats.

The Qur'an is clear in its stance on the practices of the mushrikeen. Allah ta'ala says: "And those who do not witness falsehood, and if they pass by some evil play or evil talk, they pass by it with dignity." [Al-Furqan, 25:72] According to the major Companions and their students such as Mujaahid, Rabi' ibn Anas and Adh-Dhahhak, the word "falsehood" used in above verse refers to "the holidays of the mushrikeen." Others commentators like Muhammad ibn Sireen are more explicit in their explanation, stating that the verse defines "the people of shirk practicing their shirk, and (the verse admonishes us) not to participate with them." Therefore the believers are those referred to in the verse as "not witnessing falsehood."

The esteemed scholar of tafseer, At-Tabari, further explains: "It is not allowed for Muslims to attend their [the disbelievers'] holidays and festivals because they are a type of evil and falsehood. If the people of good mix with the people of evil without putting an end to what they are doing, then they become like those who are pleased and influenced by the evil. And we fear falling into Allah's anger because of their gathering." Thus the resemblance referred to here includes all the aforementioned ways. At-Tabari also states that the believers, "They do not assist the people of idolatry in their idolatry, nor do they associate with them."

It was the Sunnah of the Prophet (saw) to differ from the non-Muslims, particularly in those matters that were specific to non-Muslims. In Sunan Abi Dawud, Anas ibn Malik says that when the Prophet (saw) came to Medinah, there used to be two festivals in which the people engaged in playing sports. So the Prophet (saw) asked, "What are these two days?," they replied, "We used to play sports during these in the jahiliyah (time period before Islam)." The Prophet (saw) then said, "Verily Allah has given you two better days, the Day of Adha and the Day of Fitr."

This not only shows that the Prophet (saw) did not acknowledge the non-Muslim's days, but also demonstrates that Allah has dignified the Muslims with days which are pleasing to Him and superior in merit. Indeed, the glorious

Companions understood this principle and applied its ruling with the fullest extent. For example, Abdullah ibn 'Umar said, "One who settles in the lands of the non-Muslims, celebrates their New Year's Days, and behaves like them until he dies, will be raised with them on the Day of Resurrection."

In conclusion, it is hoped that this brief essay clarifies this issue about the origin of Halloween and the Islamic position on it. It is also hoped that Muslims will put these matters into practice and that Muslim parents, will guide and advise their children accordingly and not allow them to participate in these celebrations. And Allah knows best, and to Him is our return. Ameen.

wa salamu 'alikum wa rahmatullah