

## Non-Muslim Holidays Handout

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*(Prepared by Mohamed Baianonie, Imam at the Islamic Center of Raleigh, NC, October, 29, 2010)*

It seems that every week of the year we are confronted with lots of celebrations, and we are not really sure what is okay to take part in and what is best avoided. The general rule for Muslims is that we should not take part in any *non-Muslim religious holidays* simply because holidays are an act of worship, even if the people who celebrate those holidays don't view them as religious rituals.

### **Can We Take Part In Any Non-Islamic Religious Holidays?**

In America, we have several religious holidays for example: Easter, Christmas, Halloween, Hanukah, etc. As Muslims, we should not participate in any of the festivities related to these holidays in any way, for example, on Easter day<sup>[1]</sup>, we should not go Easter egg hunting or give out Easter egg baskets full of treats and gifts, or celebrate in any way that Christians do for Easter. However, egg hunts and giving out gift baskets, is okay, *any other day of the year*.

Similarly, during the Christmas<sup>[2]</sup> season, we must avoid decorating our surroundings with Christmas decorations (i.e., Santa Claus, Wreaths, Christmas Trees, Stockings, lights, etc) and avoid participating in traditional Christmas activities and rituals—stocking stuffing, placing gifts under the tree, Christmas Day feast, etc. If a friend were to give you a Christmas present, it is permissible to accept that gift because rejecting the gift may hurt their feelings since they were attempting to show kindness to you; we know this from an instance when the companion of the prophet, Ali (RA) had accepted a gift from a fire worshiper on a day of their *Eid* [holiday]. Also, the prophet's wife, A'ishah (RA) held the opinion that it is permissible to accept a gift from a non-Muslim on a day of their *Eid*.<sup>[3]</sup> But in the future, it would be best to explain to your friend that you are Muslim and do not celebrate Christmas. It is not okay for us to give out Christmas gifts, but that does not mean that you cannot give a friend a gift on other days of the year and for other occasions. And the same rules apply for Hanukkah,<sup>[4]</sup> a religious holiday observed by Jews. During the days of Hanukkah, we must not put up Hanukkah decorations

such as the Star of David, light up a Menorah or take part in any of the rituals of this Jewish holiday.

Many may not know that Halloween[5] actually is a religious holiday and therefore, we mustn't take part in the activities of it. While Halloween originates from ancient Pagan and Christian beliefs, most who celebrate don't believe they are taking part in a religious ritual. What this means for us as Muslims is that we mustn't dress up in Halloween costumes during this Halloween season, decorate our surroundings with Halloween decorations (pumpkins, witches, goblins), go trick-or-treating, attend Halloween parties, and other similar gatherings. Sometimes teachers or even employers may ask us to dress up in Halloween costumes, but it would be best to explain to them that you do not celebrate Halloween as a Muslim, and that wearing a costume is a ritual of a holiday that you do not celebrate.

Also, many people around the world take part in Valentine's Day and St. Patrick's Day, but we must avoid celebrating on these holidays, because these also originate from non-Muslim religious beliefs. This does not mean you cannot shower your loved ones with gifts and flowers, instead, it just means you can do so on a different day.

### **Can We Take Part in Non-Religious Holidays?**

We also have non-religious holidays such as Independence Day, New Year's Day, Thanksgiving[6], etc. On these occasions, it is permissible for us to participate in the celebrations. For example, on the fourth of July, it is permissible to participate in picnics, barbecues, and the fireworks show at night. Similarly, on Thanksgiving Day, it is permissible to host a feast or attend one if you are invited, and it is permissible to eat turkey or any other food and drink that is permissible for Muslims to have on that day or any day of the year.

Mother's Day and Father's Day are also special days of the year that many dedicate to honor their parents. And while it is fine to honor your parents on that day, this should not be the single day of the year that we recognize our parents. The rights of our parents are most important after Allaah's rights. Allaah (S.W.T) declared these important duties in the *Qur'aan* in many verses. For example, Allaah (S.W.T.) says in the *Qur'aan* what may be interpreted as, “**Submit to Allaah and join none with Him in worship, and do good to parents.**” [*surat An-Nisa*, (Verse 36)]

The prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) also stressed these rights even more in his many authentic *ahadeeth*. In one of those *ahadeeth*, a man came to the prophet (S.A.W.) and asked, “O Messenger of Allaah, which person of all the people is most entitled to kind treatment and good companionship from me?” He answered, “*Your mother.*” The man asked, “And then?” He (S.A.W.) said, “*Your mother.*” and after her? He said, “*Your mother.*” and after her? The prophet (S.A.W.) said, “*Your father.*” [Reported by Imaams Bukhaari and Muslim]

Kwanzaa is another non-religious holiday that is celebrated in America and is centered on African culture. Cultural celebrations are permitted, yet we must be careful about excluding or rejecting others because of superficial reasons such as race, nationality, ethnicity, gender, etc. Allaah (S.W.T.) does not judge one by their skin color, But by their deeds and actions.

As Muslims, Allaah (S.W.T.) has decreed two holidays for us, and they are *Eid Al-Fitr* and *Eid Al-Adha*. On our holidays, we are rewarded by Allaah (S.W.T.) for celebrating. We should make our holidays the most festive and joyful days of the year. Celebrating holidays are a form of worship, and therefore, we should reap the rewards of celebrating on the days Allaah (S.W.T.) has decreed and avoid celebrating on holidays that go against the teachings of Islaam.

Allaah knows best, and may He keep us on the straight path always. “*Aameen*”

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[1] <http://www.history.com/topics/history-of-easter>

[2] <http://www.history.com/topics/christmas>

[3] *Iqtidaa'u As-Siratil Mustaqeem* Imam Ibn-Taymiyyah, (p. 250)

[4] <http://www.history.com/topics/hanukkah>

[5] <http://www.history.com/topics/halloween>

[6] <http://www.history.com/topics/thanksgiving/page2>

