

MODULE 1

Class Title: Reality of Halloween

Aim of the Lesson: To understand how following pagan festivals can compromise our religious belief and Muslim identity

Category: Popular Culture

Handout: Reality of Halloween pamphlet

(Greeting to students) Assalam alaikum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh

(Taooz) Aoodhubillahi min AsShaytanir Rajeem

(Tasmiyah) Bismillahir Rahmanir Raheem

(Du'a) Rabbish rahli sadri wa yassirli amri wahlul uqdatum millisani yafqahu qawli

(Surah At Ta-Ha 20: Verse 25-28)

(Slides 1-2)

Today *insha'Allah* we are going to talk about celebrations.

What words or images comes to your head when I say the word “Celebration”?

Students answer: joy, balloons, hearts, fun, parties, birthday, etc.

“Celebration” means ceremony, remembrance, festival, social event, or party. You were describing what you think of in terms of celebrations. You’re absolutely right. Fun and birthdays and somebody said hearts.

Why did you say hearts?

Student: Because people celebrate Valentine’s Day and that reminded me of hearts.

Nobody said Eid, but Eid is also a day of celebration. Do you like to have parties? Who came to the Perceptions Eid party a few weeks back? Who jumped on the trampoline? That’s a celebration. There is no one definition, celebration has all these meanings. It can be a festival, a social event or a remembrance of something... but for me, celebration is party time!

(Slides 3-4)

Do you know that **most** celebrations have roots in religious beliefs?

Can somebody give me an exception? 14th of August! What is 14th of August for us living in Pakistan? Independence Day! Does the celebration of 14th of August have roots in anything religious? No it doesn’t! So that’s why I’m saying most celebrations have roots in religious beliefs, but not all.

Most celebrations, however, do have religious beliefs as their origin.

An important thing about a celebration is that it identifies those who are celebrating it. A celebration tells us who we are. We are what we celebrate. Just like we are what we eat. It defines who we are as a people, as human beings.

Do you know what pagan beliefs or paganism is?

Paganism has been broadly defined as anyone involved in any religious act, practice, or ceremony involving more than one god. Pagan beliefs don't accept the Oneness of Allah (swt) and instead believe in various different gods or "powers." Their celebrations and ways of living reflect that belief which is called "polytheism".

Any celebration that has roots in paganism will be problematic. The fruits of it will also be pagan. They will conflict with the belief and way of life of Islam.

(Slides 5-6)

Now let's talk about Halloween. What date is it today?

Students: 22nd October.

Teacher: When is Halloween celebrated?

Students: 31st October

Teacher: Why do you all know that Halloween is on the 31st of October?

Students answer: It is celebrated in our school, it is a world event.

Does everybody know about Halloween? Is anybody invited to a costume party? We all live in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, and we are all aware of this thing called Halloween!

(Slides 7 – 8)

Do you know what the origin of Halloween is?

Students answer: there was this belief in America that on Halloween ghosts come and scare people and dead people become alive.

Teacher: Night of the living dead or something.

Student: Vampires won't come because of the pumpkins.

Teacher: So they actually believe in vampires as well!

Were you aware of the exact origins of Halloween?

The origins of Halloween date way back to the Celts. Celts are the ancient people of Europe from way back in the Iron age. They celebrated their New Year on 1st November and on 31st October they celebrated this festival called *Samhain*. They believed that ghosts roamed the earth. They also believed that their priests could communicate with the dead and know the future. So on that particular celebration of *Samhain*, the priests built large fires. People burnt crops and animals as sacrifices to their gods. That is why it is called bonfire. Bone + fire=bonfire. The priests wore animal skins and heads as costumes, in order to scare away the ghosts. They used to dress up so that the spirits of the dead would not recognize them. This was also done to imitate supernatural beings, and that's how it's still done today. It's a custom; that is why there is a costume party for this.

(Slides 9 - 11)

You probably know that children take bags or whatever and go “trick or treating” to people's houses on Halloween in America. The reason for that is that the priests would go from house to house on 31st October and demand food to offer to the spirits to calm them. Those who did not give them any food were believed to be cursed. On the other hand, good luck was promised to those who donated generously; hence the phrase “trick or treat”. If you don't give a treat you get tricked. That's what the kids do if they don't get candies or goodies; they say now we are going to play a trick on you.

Bats and black cats are other symbols of Halloween. These animals were also believed to communicate with the dead. And it was believed that black cats can house the souls of witches. A lot of people still believe that black cats are a bad omen.

(Slides 12 – 14)

How did Halloween enter Christianity?

By 800 CE, Christianity came to the Celts. In the 7th century there was a pope whose name was Boniface IV. He declared November 1st as All Saints Day to honor saints and martyrs. The celebration was then called All-Hallows (holy) or All Hallow mass (their religious service) and the night before began to be known as All Hallow Eve or Holly Eve and that is how it eventually came to be known as Halloween.

Christianity was a lot like Chinese food. Has anybody been to China? Have you tasted real Chinese food? Does it taste like Chinese food in Pakistan? It doesn't, does it? Has anybody tasted Chinese food in any other country? Does it taste like the Chinese food in Pakistan? The Chinese are very clever; what they do is that wherever they go, they add a few ingredients to appeal to the local taste. Like we Pakistanis, we like to have a bit of *mirch masala*, we like to have spices and salt in our food, we don't like bland food. Every country has its own food preference and taste. So the Chinese people adjust their foods according to the taste of the local

people and guess what? **Everybody** likes Chinese food! You go in any part of the world and ask what the most popular food is and they'll say "Chinese".

Now pagan festivals are very colorful. They have a lot of drama and action and costumes and parties etc., all aspects of 'fun'. Christianity did what the Chinese do; when it went to pagan lands and wanted to preach their religion, rather than presenting something that was brand new and perhaps may not appeal to the people, they adjusted it a little according to their tastes.

So, they took a pagan festival and adjusted it to Christianity. Unfortunately what happened with that was that all the pagan rituals came into the Christian religion. *Samhain* which was a pagan festival became All Saints Day. They thought that they would not remember the dead or witches or cats but were going to remember saints and martyrs, on the same day as the celebration of *Samhain*.

Remember now, that anything that has pagan roots will have pagan branches and the fruits will be pagan as well... Because if you plant apple seeds what will you get? Mangoes? If you plant apple seeds you will get apples! Simple as that! That's exactly what happened with Halloween as well.

It eventually became "Halloween". And as the years passed, what has Halloween become today? It's just a festival where they sell a lot of candy and a lot of costumes are rented out. And horror movies; have you heard of the number of horror movies that come out at Halloween time? There are costume parties and all sorts of horror fests organized and lots of candy sold for trick or treating and like I said, movies are actually made for Halloween; there is this movie which is called Halloween; I don't know how many parts there are; I, II,III.

(Slides 15 – 16)

Some of you might be wondering; "So what? She's given all this shabang about the background of Halloween, but what difference does that make to me? Why can't I just put on a costume and go to school on 31st October? Or go to a costume party on 31st October? What's the big deal?"

The big deal is this: It is a celebration of magic (the connection with the supernatural) and it is a celebration of evil. That's what it is! Allah (swt) says in the Qur'an very categorically,

"Magic only harms and brings no benefit." (Surah Al-Baqarah 2: Verse 102)

Are you all aware that magic is absolutely prohibited in Islam?

(Slides 17 - 18)

The Prophet (pbuh) said, “Whoever imitates a people is one of them.” [Abu Dawud]

So if you’re going to imitate somebody who is involved in pagan celebrations then you will be identified with that person and not with the Prophet (pbuh). There’s a very serious reason why there is such a fuss about not celebrating pagan festivals.

By celebrating Halloween, we compromise our religious beliefs, because Allah (swt) has categorically prohibited magic; there is no ambiguity about it, magic is prohibited. What is Halloween celebrating? It celebrates everything that is magical, superstitious, supernatural, and everything that is evil. Just by celebrating it, even if you say you don’t believe in that stuff, you will be compromising your belief in a subconscious way by following a festival or celebration that is totally against the commandments of Allah (swt).

(Slides 19 – 20)

Islam came to cleanse all ignorant and superstitious practices. Do you know that when the Prophet (pbuh) started preaching Islam, the pagan Arabs had 360 or so idols in the Ka’bah and used to believe in all sorts of superstitious practices? Islam came to categorically deny and abolish all those practices. Not a single pagan practice was left. Islam doesn’t compromise on that. It is a complete and beautiful way of life and there is no room for any distortion.

Consider this example, if I have a glass of clean water and if you added one drop of gutter water in it, what would happen? Would you drink it? If I added that right in front of your eyes and said, what difference does it make? There’s such little gutter water, the rest is all clean. Would you drink it?

Students: NO!

Teacher: Why not?

Student: Because that one drop made the whole glass dirty.

It is the exact same thing with Islam. One drop of *shirk*, one drop of paganism, one drop of something that is totally prohibited by Allah (SWT), you add that to Islam and it gets polluted. That is why we should not follow rituals and celebrations that are based on paganism.

(Slides 21 – 24)

Yes that is a birthday cake, a Valentine’s Day card and yes that is jingle bells, jingles bells, jingle all the way. By blindly following other people’s celebrations, what we do is that we seriously compromise and harm our religion; we become superstitious and we lose our sense of Muslim identity. We don’t understand what it is to be a Muslim because we are mixing other things inside all of that. We are *gad mad-ing* (mixing up in a haphazard, chaotic way) our identity. You

know the Urdu word *gad mad*? That's a wonderful word because that explains it. We get messed up in our heads. We don't realize where we stand, who we actually are.

Does this tree look green and healthy? But what's wrong with it? This tree is absolutely hollow from inside because it has been eaten by termites. And that is exactly what happens to our faith if we continue to indulge in pagan celebrations; our faith becomes hollow from inside.

Now I'm going to show you some pictures and I won't say anything, but I want you to tell me just by looking at the pictures, what comes to your minds.

(Slides 25 – 35)

(Note: Show Slides one after another, even go back and forth and after showing most ask Hmm ... what is happening here? Mayoona, pooja, diwali, mehndi - is it Muslim or Hindu – who are these people?)

Students answer: A wedding.

Teacher: What kind of wedding?

Students: A Christian wedding.

Teacher: Why did you look at these pictures and think of a Christian wedding?

Students: This kind of dress and the bunch of flowers show that this was a Christian wedding.

Teacher: What else? The cake? The rings? So even if I don't say anything, you all identified these pictures as a Christian wedding.

Now look at these. What do you think?

Students: It is a Buddhist wedding, it is an Indian wedding.

Teacher: what else?

Students: It is a Muslim wedding, a Hindu wedding and a Buddhist wedding?

Teacher: Anybody else? Just look at the pictures and keep on telling me what comes to your mind.

Students: It is a Pakistani wedding a Hindu wedding and a Buddhist wedding too!

Teacher: What is going on over here guys?

This is not even a Hindu wedding! This is a Hindu *pooja* (worship). Look at this, is it a wedding? These are priests, it's a *pooja*. You see that it's a priest, he's praying, worshipping.

Do you see any problem here? Look at these, what are these? These are the *thaalis* (trays) and *diyas* (oil lamps) we use in our *mehendis* and *mayuns* (wedding functions). These are the same *thaalis* and *diyas* that are used in a Hindu *pooja*. Could anyone of you tell the difference? Do you think there is a problem here? Why were you all not unanimous?

When you looked at the white pictures, all of you said immediately white wedding, a Christian wedding. Why did you get so confused when I showed you all these yellow and orange and red pictures?

This is again let's use our Urdu word, a big *gad-mad*! This is very problematic isn't it? Now this is actually a picture taken from a *mehendi* or a *mayun* or whatever, in Pakistan. Does it look very different from a *pooja*? This is a *mayun* and this is a *pooja*. This is God knows either a Muslim or Hindu or Sikh or whatever, I don't know, no idea. There is this custom that the feet of the bride are washed with some sort of thing and when she enters the house she puts her which foot first? Some people in Pakistan do that as well.

(Slides 36 –37)

Do you understand what I'm trying to show you over here? Most celebrations have roots in religious beliefs. If you look at a picture and you can't say for sure whether this person is a Muslim or not then there is a problem here. If you look at an image and you can't identify it with Islam immediately just by looking at it then there is a problem there. If you are getting *gad-mad* between a *mayun* and a *pooja* or a *mehendi* or a Sikh, somebody also said Buddhist, then this is very problematic don't you think? Do you think it's problematic or am I just putting words in your mouths?

(Slides 38-40)

The Prophet (pbuh) said, "Be different from the Jews and Christians." [Bukhari & Muslim].

Saying; "Be different from the Jews and Christians", would also mean "Be different from the Hindus and Sikhs and Jains or atheists or different types of religions around us." Islam has a clear cut identity and that should not be compromised. If we indulge in celebrations that compromise our identities then we should reconsider what we are doing.

Does that mean no fun at all for us, oh dear so are we going to just sit in a corner and do "*Allah Allah*" all the time? Sit and learn the 30th *Para* 24 hours a day?

It certainly doesn't mean that. It means we should think about what we are doing and do the right thing. We can and **must** have fun, why not?

(Slide 41- 42)

When you pick fruit you gather the yummy ripe ones and leave the rotten ones behind, don't you? You just pick the right ones. Similarly, pick the good ingredients from any celebration and leave the rotten ones behind - the ones that have paganism attached to them.

We have Eid parties don't we? So if we have a trampoline at an Eid party has that got anything to do with pagan roots? Has a bouncy castle got anything to do with pagan roots? No. You have a wedding and you have a *duff* (a percussion musical instrument used mostly at weddings) party and there are just ladies and girls, you can sing regular, clean, pleasant songs; is there anything wrong with that? Why isn't there any problem with that?

Student: because it does not compromise our belief

Teacher: Exactly; "leave the rotten ones behind".

(Slides 43- 44)

What is the difference between just any costume party and a Halloween party?

Halloween is on October 31st; a fancy dress party can be any time of the year. Halloween copies the pagan rituals; a fancy dress party is just plain playing around. Halloween is sinister fun which isn't allowed, a fancy dress party is harmless fun.

Why can't you have a fancy dress party any time of the year? Just invite your friends over just for the heck of it, because you feel like dressing up. Call me too, I love to dress up. Then we can dress up real pretty and do each other's makeup; if you want to be a ghost, be a ghost. But why does it have to be on the 31st of October? A costume party is not an issue; the issue is following a pagan celebration.

At a party, do as Muslims do. It's as simple as that. End of story. Whether you are at a party, whether you are at a *shadi* (wedding) hall, whether you are in Makkah, whether you are in Madinah, whether you are in Lego land, whether you are in I don't know, lala-land; wherever you are, you are a Muslim first, before anything else. So have fun, by all means, have a fancy dress party.

(Slide 45)

But what about Mr. Potter? What about our dear old Mr. Potter? Whoever doesn't know about Mr. Potter, raise your hands. What about Mr. Harry Potter? Some of you are thinking, "Where is she going now? First Halloween, now Harry Potter, oh God! My life's coming to an end!"

(Slides 46-50)

Or "Charmed" for that matter. You see when you have a diet of junk food, this is what happens. Do any of you have little brothers or sisters? If they have a cola or chocolate at night do they become hyper? Your mom moans; "Oh my God I gave him a cola at night!" So when you have a

steady diet of junk food this is what happens. You go crazy in the head. That's why you should say no to junk food. Allah (swt) has condemned magic in the Qur'an, categorically.

(Slides 51-52)

The Prophet (pbuh) said, "There are three who will not enter Paradise; One who is addicted to wine, one who breaks ties of relationships and one who believes in magic." [Ahmed].

I'm not telling you anything about Mr. Potter; you think and decide for yourself.

A student asks: How is Harry Potter related to this lecture?

I'll give you a hint, it is related to magic. Let's get one thing clear; Harry Potter is a novel. It's not real magic. But if you have affinity, affection, love for something that is magical, like some people do for Mr. Potter, then that is problematic.

(Du'a for end of a gathering) *Subhana Rabbika Rabbul Izzati 'amma yasifun wa salamun 'alal mursaleen, walhamdulillahi Rabbil 'alameen*

(Parting salutation to students) *Assalam alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh*