

101404 - Ruling on celebrating Nowruz (Persian New Year)

the question

May Allah bless you all; this is a brilliant website. I was wondering whether celebrating Nowruz (also spelled Nawrooz; Persian New Year) is haraam or not, because as a Persian I celebrate it. On Nowruz we also set up a table for food and put a Qur'an on that table. Is celebrating Nowruz haraam or not?

Detailed answer

Firstly:

Nowruz is a Farsi word meaning “new day”.

It is one of the festivals of the Persians, and is regarded as the most important of their festivals. It is said that the first one to celebrate it was Jamsheed, who was one of the ancient Persian kings.

Nowruz is the first day of the Persian year, and the festival continues for five days after that.

The Copts of Egypt also celebrate Nowruz, which is the first day of their year. In Egypt it is known as Shamm en-Naseem (the Smelling of the Zephyr).

Adh-Dhahabi (may Allah have mercy on him) said in his essay Tashabbuh al-Khasees bi Ahl al-Khamees (p. 46):

With regard to Nowruz, the people of Egypt go to extremes in their observance and celebration of it. It is the first day of the Coptic year, which they take as a festival, in which the Muslims imitate them.

End quote from Majallat al-Jaami'ah al-Islamiyyah (issue no. 103-104)

Secondly:

The Muslims do not have any festivals which they celebrate except Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha. Anything other than that is an innovated festival and it is not permissible to celebrate it.

Abu Dawood (1134) and an-Nasaa'i (1556) narrated that Anas (may Allah be pleased with him) said: When the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) came to Madinah, they had two days on which they would play. He said: "What are these two days?" They said: We used to play on these days during the Jaahiliyyah. The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "Verily Allah has replaced them for you with something better than them: the day of (Eid) al-Adha and the day of (Eid) al-Fitr." Classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in as-Silsilah as-Saheehah (2021).

Included under the heading of innovated festivals are: Nowruz, Mother's Day, birthdays, national independence days, and so on. If the festival was originally a festival of the disbelievers, such as Nowruz, then the matter is more serious.

Nowruz is a jaahili (ignorant) festival. It was celebrated by the Persians before Islam, and it is also celebrated by the Christians. This means that the prohibition on celebrating it is more emphasised, because of what that involves of imitating them.

Adh-Dhahabi said in his essay at-Tamassuk bi's-Sunan wa't-Tahdheer min al-Bida':

With regard to imitating ahl adh-dhimma [non-Muslims living under Muslim rule] in celebrating Christmas, Maundy Thursday and Nowruz, that is a reprehensible bid'ah (innovation).

Therefore if the Muslim celebrates it as a religious observance, this is an act of ignorance, and he is to be rebuked and taught. If he does it out of love for ahl adh-dhimma and expressing joy, then this is also blameworthy. If he does it because it is a tradition and he does it for fun, to please and console his children, this is subject to further discussion. Actions are but by intentions, and one who is ignorant is excused, but matters should be explained to him in a kind and gentle manner. And Allah knows best.

End quote from Majallat al-Jaami'ah al-Islamiyyah (issue no. 103-104).

Maundy Thursday is a Christian festival, also known as Holy and Great Thursday [it is the Thursday before Easter].

In al-Mawsoo‘ah al-Fiqhiyyah (12/7) it says:

Imitating the disbelievers on their festivals: It is not permissible to imitate the disbelievers on their festivals, because of what it says in the hadith: “Whoever imitates a people is one of them.” What that means is that the Muslims should avoid resembling the disbelievers in anything that is unique to them. ...

It was narrated from ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) that he said: Whoever passes through the land of the non-Arabs and celebrates their Nowruz and Mahrajaan (Mehrgan), and imitates them until he dies in that state, will be gathered with them on the Day of Resurrection. Moreover, festivals comes under the heading of laws, teachings and rituals concerning which Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, said (interpretation of the meaning): “And for every nation We have appointed religious ceremonies” [al-Hajj 22:34] – such as the direction to be faced when praying, prayer and fasting. So there is no difference between their participation in the festival and their participation in any other religious ceremony or practice. Going along with them in the entire festival is going along with them in disbelief, and going along with them in some minor aspects of it is going along with them in some branches of disbelief. In fact festivals are among the most unique features by which religions are distinguished and are among the most apparent of ceremonies and rituals; therefore going along with them in these matters is going along with them in the most unique and most apparent rituals of disbelief.

Qaadi Khan said: On the day of Nowruz, if a man buys something that he does not buy on any other day, if his intention in doing so is to venerate that day as the disbelievers do, then it constitutes disbelief. But if he does that by way of extravagance and having fun, and not out of veneration for that day, then it does not constitute disbelief.

If someone gives a gift to someone else on the Day of Nowruz and he does not do so out of veneration for the day – rather he only does that because it is the custom of the people – then

that does not constitute disbelief. But he should not do on that day things that he would not do before or after that day, and he should avoid imitating the disbelievers.

Ibn al-Qaasim (who was a Maaliki) disapproved of giving a gift to a Christian on the occasion of his festival, and regarded it as coming under the heading of venerating his festival and helping him in his disbelief.

Just as it is not permissible to imitate the disbelievers in their festivals, one should not help a Muslim who is imitating them to do that; rather he should be told not to do that. If someone invites people to a meal or a gathering on the occasion of their festivals, contrary to his usual habit, his invitation should not be accepted. If a Muslim gives a gift on the occasion of these festivals, contrary to his habit at other times apart from this festival, his gift should not be accepted, especially if the gift is something that would help one to imitate them, such as giving candles and the like at Christmas time.

It is essential to punish those who imitate the disbelievers in their festivals. End quote.

Shaykh Ibn Jibreen (may Allah preserve him) said:

It is not permissible to celebrate innovated festivals such as the Christmas of the Christians, or Nowruz (Persian New Year) or Mahrajaan (Persian festival), or festivals that have been innovated by Muslims such as the Prophet's birthday in Rabee' al-Awwal or the Israa' in Rajab and so on. It is not permissible to eat from that food which the Christians or Mushrikeen prepare on the occasion of their festivals. It is also not permissible to accept their invitations to join them in their celebrations of those festivals, because this encourages them and is tantamount to approving of their bid'ah, which gives the wrong idea to ignorant people and makes them think that there is nothing wrong with that. And Allah knows best.

End quote from al-Lu'lu' al-Makeen min Fataawa Ibn Jibreen

Conclusion: it is not permissible for the Muslims to celebrate Nowruz or to mark this occasion by holding celebrations, making special foods or giving gifts.

And Allah knows best.