



April fool's Day (Islamic View)

By Hadhrat Mufti Taqi Usmani

April fool's - The love of blindly following the west has given currency to several of their customs in our society. One of them is the tradition of celebrating April fool. To play a prank on another, or to poke fun at him by deceiving him with a lie is not only considered acceptable on the first of April, but is also admired as a commendable act and a mark of excellence. He who deceives more people than others, and deceives them with more flair and finesse and with more gall and grace has taken full advantage of the custom of April fool.

He is considered worthy of praise for having done that. This taste of trick playing, which can rightly be called a tasteless fun seeking, has brought on financial and physical harm to many unsuspecting victims. In fact, some have lost their precious lives as a result. They were deliberately given false news about a tragic event involving their near and dear ones; news that some frail and feeble folks could not bear, and succumbed. Based on a lie, a deception, and a desire to laugh at the innocence and ignorance of unsuspecting folks, this custom is obviously quite low on the scale of morality and ethics.

But even the historical basis of it is quite shameful and appalling at least for those who hold the person of Prophet Essa (alaihi salaam) sacred and holy in some way.

How did this tradition begin?

Historians seem to have varying opinions about it. Some say that before the dawn of the seventeenth century, the New Year in France used to begin on the 1st of April instead of the 1st of January.

Romans worshipped a goddess called Venus and used to hold the month of April holy because of its association with the Goddess Venus. The Greeks translated the word Venus as Aphrodite in their language. The month April is so named because of its association with Aphrodite. (Britannica 15th edition page 292 v 8) Some writers have concluded that the 1st of April being the first day of the year according to their calendar, and also being considered holy as a day associated with their idol goddess, was celebrated as a feast of joy.

The light hearted amusement and poking fun at each other was part of that feast, and it gradually progressed into the form of April fool. Some historians say that on that feast of joy people were accustomed to exchanging gifts. Perhaps on one such occasion someone pulled a prank on another in the name of a gift. The practice caught on and gradually became entrenched as their cultural tradition.

Britannica mentions one other reason for this custom. Seasons begin to change on the 25th of March. These changes were interpreted by those folks as pranks and jokes played by Mother Nature upon her helpless subjects. (Ma'aaz Allah) Gods were fooling them, they thought. Therefore people too began the custom of making fools of each other. (Britannica page 496 vol 1) It is still unclear whether people started this tradition with the purpose of emulating nature and its prank seeking power and prowess, or was it their way of visiting revenge upon nature. The famous Larousse Encyclopaedia has narrated a third reason, and declared it more authentic.

According to the traditions narrated by the Christians and the Jews, 1st of April was the day when Hazrat Essa (alaihis Salaam) was made the butt of jokes and the victim of mockery by the Romans and the Jews. The so called Gospels presently found with the Christians provide the details of the incident. The following are the words of Luke: Now the men who were holding Jesus mocked him and beat him; they also blindfolded him and asked him, "Prophesy! Who is it that struck you?" And they spoke many other words against him, reviling him. Luke 22:63-65

The gospels also carry a narration of how Hazrat Masih (alaihis salaam) was also harassed by being bounced around from court to court. He was first charged and tried in the court of the Jewish elders and jurists, the Sanhedrin. But it merely transferred his case to the court of the Roman governor, Pilate, who sent the case back to the Jewish king Herod. Finally from the court of King Herod, he was taken back to the court of the Roman governor, Pilate, for decision. The Larousse Encyclopaedia opines that the very purpose of sending Hazrat Masih (alaihis salaam) from one court to another was to highlight his helplessness, to ridicule and deride him, and to subject him to mental distress.

That incident, they say, took place on the first of April, and the tradition of April fool was in fact started in memory of that very shameless incident. The victim of the custom of April fool, the person who is tricked and fooled is called 'poisson d'avril' in French. In English, it would be 'April Fish'. (Encyclopaedia Britannica page 496 V1) So the person who has been tricked and made a fool of is like the first catch of the season, the first fish that has been netted in the beginning of April, the New Year. In support of its opinion, the Larousse Encyclopaedia claims that the French word 'poisson' translated into English as 'fish' is actually a degenerated form of another similar French word, 'poison' which means to 'cause distress' and to 'inflict torture'.

This tradition, they say, was actually selected to refresh the memory of the incidences of insult and torture which according to the Christian traditions Masih (alaihis salaam) had to endure on the 1st of April. According to another French writer the word is indeed 'poisson' but it is an acronym. It is a composite of the first letters of five other French words that are when arranged sequentially: Essa, Masih, Allah, son and ransom. According to that writer, too, the origin of April fool is an attempt to memorialize the ridicule and distress inflicted upon Hazrat Essa (alaihis salaam). If true (and Larousse Encyclopaedia seems confident that it is, and they have many evidentiary proofs of it) it is more likely that the Jewish community started that custom and gave it currency probably with the intent and object of hurling ridicule upon Hazrat Essa (alaihis salaam).

Yet it is amazing that the custom which the Jews initiated to disparage Hazrat Essa (alaihis salaam) was not only accepted by the Christians with cold calmness, but they also joined in the celebration and helped spread the custom. May be the Christian folks were unaware of the origin of this custom, and may be they began celebrating it without giving it much thought in a vacant absent-minded manner. Yet the approach of the Christians and their mental outlook concerning such matters is rather odd, to say the least.

As a general rule, the cross upon which Hazrat Essa was crucified in their opinion should have acquired a hate-worthy status in their eyes, because it was employed as a means of torturing and ridiculing Hazrat Masih (Alaihis Salam). But amazingly, they declared it sacred and today it is the holiest symbol of the Christian faith. However, one thing emerges as a certainty from the above mentioned details. Regardless of whether the custom is associated with the goddess Venus, or began as a reaction to pranks playing prowess of Nature, or in memory of hurling insults at Hazrat Masih (alaihis salaam), its origin is despicable. It is rooted in idolatry, superstition, or a rude and insolent concept of ridiculing a prophet of God.

According to the Muslims it consists of the following worst sins:

- 1) To lie
- 2) To deceive
- 3) To inflict pain upon others
- 4) To celebrate the memory of an incident the origin of which is idolatry, or superstition, or an insulting and a rude joke against a messenger of God.

Now the Muslims must decide for themselves whether this custom is worth celebrating in the Muslim society? Should it be adopted and given prevalence here? Thank Allah that in our society this custom of April fool is not celebrated much. Yet we still hear about some incidences of people celebrating it. Without thinking or being aware of its origin some people participate in it. If they seriously reflect upon its reality, its origins and its results, then surely, Insha Allah, they will realize the importance of avoiding it. 14 Shawwal 1414 AH 27 March 1994