

Ruling on Cartoons and Children books with Images

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[O You who Believe, fear Allah. And let every soul look to what it has sent on for tomorrow. Fear Allah, surely Allah is well-acquainted with what you do. And do not be like those who forgot Allah, so He made them forget their own souls. Such are the rebellious transgressors.]

(Al-Hashr 59:18-19)

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Foreword:

These days, images and cartoon characters are very commonly found in almost all educational books including Islamic studies curriculum. There are also Islamic animated movies in the market.

All this leave many with a question on permissibility of using images and animations in books and movie for educational and religious purposes.

Considering these questions, Dr. Bilal Philips has included the Fatwaa on the use of images for children at the back of 'Eemaan Reading Series' brochure. This booklet is a reproduction of that fatwa for use by greater audience.



It is reported that:

Aaishah R.A. said,

“I used to play with dolls in the presence of the Prophet salallahualahi wa sallam, and my girlfriends used to play along with me. Whenever, Allaah’s Messenger salallahualahi wa sallam would enter, they would hide from him. So he called them to play with me.” [1]

In the classical commentary on Saheeh al-Bukhaare entitled Fat-h al-Baaree, Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalaanee wrote the following:

“This hadeeth is used as evidence for the permissibility of making dolls and toys with human and animal forms for the purpose of girls playing with them. This category has been specifically excluded from the general prohibition against making images.

'Iyaad [2] stated this to be categorically so and related that it was the position of the majority of scholars. He further related that they permitted the selling of toys for girls in order to train them from their youth in their household affairs and in dealing with their children. [3]

Ibn Hibbaan entitled a chapter in his Saheeh : "The Permissibility for Children and Women to Play with Toys" and another: "A Man's Giving Permission to His Wife to Play with Dolls", however, his not limiting the permission to child-wives, is a questionable position.[4]

Aboo Daawood and an-Nasaa'ee collected this hadeeth in another chain from Aaishah R.A. in which she said,

"When Allaah's Messenger (pbuh) arrived after the expedition to Tabuk or Khaybar, the wind raised an end of a curtain which hung in front of my closet, revealing some dolls which belonged to me. He asked me, 'What is this?' I replied: My dolls. He saw among them a horse made of wrapped cloth with wings, and asked, 'What is this I am seeing among them?' I replied: A horse. He asked, 'A horse with wings?' I replied: Have you not heard that Solomon had horses with wings? Allaah's Messenger (pbuh) laughed so heartily that I could see his molar teeth."[5]

This hadeeth is very clear that the meaning of playthings (lu'ab) mentioned in the earlier narration does not refer to humans.

Al-Khattaabee [6] stated that this hadeeth indicates that playing with dolls is not like playing with other images which were warned about. And permission was given to Aaishah R.A. regarding them because she was not mature at the time.

Al-Khattaabee's categorical statement that Aaishah R.A. was not mature at the time is questionable, however, it is a possibility. Aaishah R.A. was close to fourteen or past fourteen at the time of the Battle of Khaybar. As regards the time of the Battle of Tabuk, she had definitely reached maturity by then. Thus, the narrations of this hadeeth which mentioned Khaybar are more likely correct and they agree with al-Khattaabee's opinion, which is more preferable than the contradictions (inherent in those which mention Tabuk)."[7]

The companion Ar-Rubayya bint Muawwath R.A. related that the Prophet (pbuh) sent a messenger to the village of the Ansaar on the morning of the day of 'Aashooraa (10th Muharram) to announce that whoever had already eaten should not eat any more and fast the rest of the day; and whoever was already fasting should complete the fast. She went on to say, "Since then, we used to fast on that day (10th Muharram) and also make the children fast. We would make

toys figures out of wool for them, and if any of them cried for food, he would be given one until it was time to break the fast.”[8]

The Islaamic magazine, al-Usrah, published Saudi Arabia grappled with the issue of figurative illustrations when they decided to launch a magazine especially targeted towards children. They wanted to provide an alternative to what was present in the marketplace, which had little Islaamic content and was introducing some un-Islaamic values to their readers. They noticed that every single magazine for children printed in the Arab world as well as in the west was filled with illustrations of children, animals, etc. The reality is that colorful drawings are something that children are attracted to. If given the choice between reading a text with pictures and a text without them, they will always choose the illustrated text. The editors of al-Usrah thought of trying to address this situation by using drawings of inanimate objects with features added to make them look like live characters, but they decided that technique was too limited to use for the whole magazine.

In researching the Sharee’ah issues related to the drawing of living creatures, they reached the following conclusions:

The basic rule regarding figurative illustrations is that they are haraam.

The reason for the prohibition is that it involves imitation of Allaah’s attributes of Creator and Bestower of Forms, in

addition to the role of images in paving the way for shirk by magnifying the greatness of the illustrated beings, which leads to their being worshipped.

There is an exception to the general prohibition for children's toys, as is specifically indicated in hadeeth texts, due to the fact that the main reason for the prohibition is not present and that there is a tangible benefit, worthy of consideration, in their use.

This exception to the prohibition of image-making is also applicable to whatever represents a tangible benefit, given consideration by the Sharee'ah, or prevents or removes an expected harm, whether in the fields of education, public safety or other areas.

Pictures drawn specially for children enter into the exception, by analogy with children's dolls and toys, on the one hand, and in order to realize the benefits recognized by the Sharee'ah and due to the pressing need for them in contemporary children's stories, on the other hand.

In this regard, Shaykh Naasiruddeen al-Albaanee stated in his book, *Adaab az-Zafaaf*:

“These two hadeeths (the hadeeth of Aaishah R.A.’s dolls and the hadeeth about the sahaabah’s practice of giving their fasting children toy figures to distract them from their

hunger) indicate the permissibility of creating images and of owning them when there is an educational benefit in doing so, one that will help in the cultivation and development of the personality. Whatever else is of benefit to the Muslims and Islam may be included in the same ruling of permissibility of picture making and use, but everything beside that remains under the basic prohibition.” [p. 196]

In the same vein, Shaykh ‘Abdullaah ibn Jibreem (member of the Committee of Leading Scholars, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia) responded to a long, detailed question on image-making put to him by the editors of al-Usrah magazine by saying,

“I have considered what has been mentioned in the question concerning the temptations and deviations to which Muslim youths are being exposed both within and without the lands of the Muslims in the form of films and magazines, which are (so widespread as to be virtually) unavoidable, which have filled the Muslims’ houses and palaces, and which cause Muslim children to imitate what they see and hear and read in them in their speech and actions, the contents of which are frequently evil and corrupt. [After weighing these factors,] I say: When an

alternative exists to engage children and youth which is free, or relatively free, from such corrupt ideas and values, I see it as permissible, because among the basic principles of the Sharee'ah is choosing the lesser of two evils in order to avoid the greater harm. Without any doubt, for Muslim children to be busy in reading Islaamic magazines that include some pictures used to make ideas clearer is less serious than their habitual viewing of movies and picture (magazines) that ruin their morals, pervert their innocence and divert them away from good. That is what is apparent to me, and Allaah knows best."

Shaykh Abdul Azeez al-Qaari' (Imaam of Masjid Qubaa and professor of tafseer and Quranic recitation at the Islamic University of Madeenah) had this to say about image-making in al-Usrah:

"Regarding the hadeeth of Aaishah R.A. that she played with dolls in the presence of the Prophet (pbuh), and, in some versions of the hadeeth, that one of the dolls was in the shape of a winged horse, and that when the Prophet (pbuh) asked her about it, she replied, 'Didn't you hear that [Prophet] Sulayman had a horse with wings?' to which the Prophet (pbuh) responded by laughing; this hadeeth indicates the permissibility of children's figurative toys, owning them and using them, whether they are clearly

representative or not, and whether skillfully or crudely fashioned. There is no basis in the hadeeth for making a distinction. Those who say that Aaishah R.A.'s dolls were not distinctly representative have made an arbitrary judgement not based on any evidence. What do they say about a winged horse?"

The variation in the texts on this subject, from severe threats of punishment to less severe threats and from the prohibition of the use of images to allowing their use, indicates that the law revolves around the consideration of the accompanying benefit and harm. If the law was fixed on prohibition, far be it for the Prophet (pbuh) to allow Aaishah R.A. to play with those dolls and that horse, all of which were three-dimensional images. From that we know that the rule is connected to benefit and harm. If the harm involved is dominant, as in the case of idols and statues worshipped in place of Allaah, or in the case of pictures of important or pious people hung on walls as a sign of respect, which is a major avenue leading to shirk, the rule is prohibition.

On the other hand, if the benefit is clearly dominant, as in the case of children's toys, or images on rugs or pillows, etc., which are put to use without respect, then the rule is permissibility. *Children's magazines, books and stories take the same ruling as children's toys and dolls, since the benefit in toys and dolls is no clearer than that in these other (educational) media.*

Footnotes

Sahih Al Bukhari, vol.8, p 95. no.151 and Sahih Muslim, vol. 4, p.1299, no. 5981. See also Sunan Abu Dawud, vol. 3, p.1373, no. 4913.

Al-Qaadee Iyaad (1084-1149CE) was a Moroccan scholar who was among the leading scholars of hadeeth of his time.

Ibn Hajar stated here that some scholars like Ibn Battaal, held that the hadeeth of Aaishah R.A. was abrogated and that Ibn Abee Zayd related that Maalik disliked that a man purchase dolls for his daughter. Consequently, ad-Daawoodee also concluded that the hadeeth was most likely abrogated. Fat-h al-Baaree, vol. 10, p. 544. Ibn Hajar added here that al-Bayhaqee, after narrating this hadeeth stated that the prohibition against making images is undeniable / unshakeable, therefore this permission to Aaishah R.A. should be considered as having taken place before the prohibition. Ibn al-Jawzee categorically held that this was the correct position. Al-Munthiree stated that if the toys were image-like, the permission to Aaishah R.A. must have been before the prohibition. Otherwise, playthings without images may also be called toys / dolls. Al-Haleemee stated categorically that if the toy has an image like an idol, it is not permissible, otherwise it is permissible. After quoting ad-Daawoodee as saying that al-la'ib bi al-banaat meant playing with "young girls" and that bi here meant ma'a (along with), Ibn at-Teen thoroughly refuted him. [Ibn Hajar went on to

say that] the narration of Ibn ‘Uyaynah related in al-Jaami’ from Hishaam ibn ‘Urwah “... and some young girls used to come and play with them along with me,” and that of Jareer from Hishaam “I used to play with dolls (al-banaat), and they were toys,” collected by Aboo ‘Awaanah and others also refutes ad-Daawoodee. Fat-h al-Baaree, vol. 10, p. 544. Sunan Abu Dawud, vol. 3, p. 1373, no.4914 and authenticated in Saheeh Sunan Abee Daawood, vol. 3, p. 932, no. 4123.

Hamd ibn Muhammad al-Khattaab (931-998 CE) was an Afghani scholar of Fiqh and hadeeth well known for his commentery on Sunan Abee Daawood called Ma’aalim as-Sunan, a commentery on Saheeh al-Bukhaaree, and a hadeeth dictionary called Ghareeb al-Hadith. Fat-h al-Baaree, vol.10. pp. 543-4.

Sahih Al Bukhari, vol.3, pp. 103.4. no. 181.

NOTES



Fatwa by:

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Today there are a number of Islamic illustrated books and animated cartoons on the market for children. Due to the prohibition of image making in Islamic Law, people have differing opinions about how to approach these media.

Animated cartoons are, when referred to the corpus of Islamic Law, a recent development. Therefore, we do not find it being addressed in the classical Islamic legal literature, though we occasionally find what could give us an indication of its ruling.

Before exploring the Islamic ruling for animated cartoons, we must first discuss the ruling for drawing pictures.

With respect to depicting human and animal life, scholars of Islamic Law present a spectrum of opinion, running the gamut from those who view all image-making to be lawful to those who categorically prohibit all drawings of animal life.

The First Opinion:

Some scholars hold the view that image making is essentially lawful. It is permissible to make two-dimensional illustrations as well as three-dimensional statues. The scholars who hold this view argue that the texts that prohibit image making are to be understood in the context of the state the people were in at the advent of Islam. The people had just emerged from the times of ignorance and from idolatry. After people became distanced from the worship of images, the prohibition was no longer necessary. This is why we see in some history books that when the Muslims opened up the lands of the Persians and Romans, they did not interfere with the pictures and statues found there.

The Second Opinion:

Some scholars hold the view that all images are unlawful, make two-dimensional illustrations as well as three-dimensional statues. They base their argument on the apparent meaning of a number of texts. These include the following:

‘A’ishah R.A. relates that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “The people who will be most severely punished on the Day of Resurrection will be those who aspire to create like Allah.” [Sahîh al-Bukhârî (5954) and Sahîh Muslim (2107)]

Ibn ‘Abbâs R.A. relates that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “Every image maker is in the Fire. For each image he made, a being will be fashioned to torment him in Hell.” [Sahîh al-Bukhârî (2225) and Sahîh Muslim (2110) - The wording accords with al-Bukhârî]

Abû Talhah R.A. relates that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “The angels do not enter a house wherein there is a dog or images representing (people or animals).” [Sahîh al-Bukhârî (3225) and Sahîh Muslim (2106)]

The Third Opinion:

Other scholars hold a view that is intermediate between the former two. They argue that only three-dimensional images are prohibited. Those are the images being referred to by hadîth like “Every image maker is in the Fire.” They argue that only the manufacture of three-dimensional images can possibly be described as “aspiring to create like Allah.”

Moreover, statues and not illustrations are the objects that people are most likely to take as objects of worship.

The drawings and illustrations to be found on cloth, on paper, and decorating walls are, therefore, not objectionable.

After considering all of the evidence, the opinion that appears to be the strongest of the three is the last opinion. The reasons why it is the strongest opinion are as follows:

1. The question of a person aspiring to create like Allah is really a question of that person’s intent. It is an action of the heart and it is tantamount to unbelief. A person who acts with such intent is in a state of unbelief, regardless of whether he is making replicas of animals or of inanimate objects like trees, rocks, rivers, or mountains.

This is the reason for the prohibition against the image making in the hadîth. This is the reason why the image makers are being cursed. This is clarified by another hadîth where the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “Allah says: ‘Who does a greater wrong than one who aspires to create as I create – a grain of corn, a seed, or a barleycorn?’” [Sahîh al-Bukhârî (7559) and Sahîh Muslim (2111) – The wording accords with al-Bukhârî]

Therefore, if the reason for the prohibition is that of aspiring to create like Allah creates, then the subject matter is irrelevant. It makes no difference if the image is that of an animal or an inanimate object.

2. The manufacture of statuary is unlawful because this activity is only carried out in order to aggrandize the subject. Such aggrandizement poses a danger of veneration and worship. The same can be said for photographs of prominent people when those photographs are erected high up in prominent places to be honored. In this case, such pictures become most certainly unlawful.

The story of Noah (A.S.) ’s people and how their making of statues in commemoration of their pious forebears led to their idolatry is clear proof of this danger. In our day and age, we see the pictures of many people displayed in public places for the purpose of false veneration.

When we look at the generality of the statement – “Every image maker is in the Fire” –such a general statement cannot literally apply except to a great sin. This sin is that of

willfully and intentionally aspiring to create like Allah. The word “every” that begins this sentence is the strongest word for indicating generality. Since it is then annexed to the indefinite noun “image maker” it linguistically indicates that generality is intended. The sentence is similar in structure to Allah’s words: “Every soul shall taste of death.” [Sûrah Al `Imrân: 185]

When we look at the phrase – “those who aspire to create like Allah” – the term “aspire” here indicates a challenge. It means that these image makers are fashioning images in order to imitate Allah’s creative abilities and to present a challenge to Allah.

We see in another hadîth related by Ibn `Abbâs R.A. that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “Those people who make these images in this world will be punished on Day of Resurrection. They will be commanded to breathe life into what they had created.” [Sahîh al-Bukhârî (5951) and Sahîh Mulsim (2108)]

This specifies for us the meaning of “Every image maker is in the Fire” and the other hadîth mentioned above. All of the hadîth about image making refer to the intent of image maker to aspire to create like Allah.

We find in the texts mention of many other major sins that are certainly worse than the making of images – like adultery, taking usury, and abusing parents – without it being declared that the perpetrators of those sins are consigned to the Fire, like we find in “Every image maker is in the Fire”. This should make it even clearer to us that those

who make images without the intention of aspiring to create like Allah are not included in the generality of the hadîth's meaning. Rather, the hadîth applies to all of those who have the intention of aspiring to create like Allah.

3. If we look at the statements of the Pious Predecessors, we can see that they understood the texts about image making to be merely a severe warning against what is sinful rather than a direct prohibition. For instance, when a man who was a professional image maker came to Ibn `Abbâs R.A. asking him for a ruling, Ibn `Abbâs merely said: "If you have to do so, then make images of trees and of that which has no soul. [Sahîh al-Bukhârî (2225) and Sahîh Muslim (2110)]

Ibn `Abbâs R.A. was neither harsh with him nor did he make any categorical statement. He said nothing more than that. We find that the Pious Predecessors generally made statements about image making that indicated nothing more than pious reserve and avoiding that which can lead to deviance.

4. Many types of images produced today are meant for education and can hardly be dispensed with. One pictorial representation can often suffice for hundreds of words.

We can see that `A'ishah R..A. used to play with dolls, and they were three-dimensional images. Such toys are permitted by the sacred texts. Scholars explain this permissibility by saying that the purpose behind such images is one of instruction and educational play.

The ruling, then, applies to the general cause and not to the particular instance that illustrates this cause. If three-dimensional figures are permitted for children for education and constructive play, then it is even more appropriate that such images be permitted for adults, since adults are required to learn a far greater range of more difficult and critical skills.

In today's world, images - especially two-dimensional images - are indispensable for people to carry out the necessary activities of life. The ruling that such images are permissible is in harmony with the general ease and facility of Islamic Law. Allah says: "Allah wants to make things easy for you, and he does not want things to be difficult for you." [Sûrah al-Baqarah: 185]

From all of this, I hold that the pictures used to make cartoon movies are among the images that are permissible to produce - and Allah knows best. Consequently the sale, purchase, and viewing of cartoons is also permitted as long as all of these activities are engaged in according to the dictates of Islamic Law. The cartoons should have appropriate content and be used in an appropriate manner. They should be free from falsehood and immorality.

Indeed, the production, distribution, and showing of Islamic animated cartoons that accord to Islamic teachings are ways by which a Muslim can seek Allah's reward.

And Allah knows best.

I ask Allah to guide us to what is right.