85108 - Is It Haram to Accept Christmas Gifts?

the question

My neighbour is an American Christian, and she and her family brought me a gift when it was Christmas. I could not refuse the gift, lest she be offended.

Can I accept this gift, as the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) accepted gifts from non-Muslims?

Summary of answer

There is nothing wrong with accepting a gift from a non-Muslim on Christmas and that is not regarded as participating in it or approving of it, rather it should be accepted as an act of kindness with the aim of softening his heart and calling him to Islam.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Is it permissible to accept gifts from non-Muslims?

The basic principle is that it is permissible to accept gifts from non-Muslims , so as to soften their hearts and make Islam attractive to them. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) accepted gifts from some of the non-Muslims, such as the gift of al-Muqawqis etc.

Al-Bukhari gave a chapter in his Sahih the title of: Accepting gifts from the mushrikin. He (may Allah have mercy on him) said: Abu Hurayrah (may Allah have mercy on him) said, narrating from the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him): “Ibrahim (peace be upon him) migrated with Sarah and entered a city in which there was a king or a tyrant, and he said: ‘Give her Hajar (as a gift).’”

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was given as a gift a (roast) sheep in which there was poison. Abu Humayd said: The king of Aylah gave the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) a white mule and a cloak, and wrote to him. And he mentioned the story of the Jewish woman and her gift of a poisoned sheep to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).

Is it permissible for a Muslim to give gifts to non-Muslims?

It is permissible for a Muslim to give gifts to non-Muslims and mushriks, with the aim of softening their hearts towards Islam , especially if they are relatives or neighbours.

`Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) gave a hullah (suit) to his mushrik brother in Makkah, as was narrated by al-Bukhari (2619).

Is it haram to give gifts on Christmas?

But it is not permissible to give a non-Muslim a gift on the day of one of his festivals , because that is regarded as approving of or participating in celebration of the false festival.

If the gift is something that will help in celebrating the festival , such as food, candles and the like, then it is even more haram, and some of the scholars are of the view that this is disbelief.

Al-Zayla'i said in Tabyin al-Haqaiq (6/228):

"Giving gifts on the occasion of Nayruz and Mahrjan [two non-Islamic Persian festivals] is not permissible, i.e., giving gifts on these two days is haram, and is in fact disbelief. Abu Hafs and Kabir (may Allah have mercy on him) said: If a man were to worship Allah for fifty years, then on the day of Nayruz he were to give an egg as a gift to one of the mushrikin, intending thereby to venerate that day, he would have committed disbelief and his good deeds would be cancelled out. The author of al-Jami' al-Asghar said: If he gives a gift to another Muslim on the day of Nayruz, not intending thereby to venerate that day, but it is the habit of some people to give gifts on that day, then this is not regarded as disbelief. But he should not do it on that particular day; he should do it

before or after, so that he will not be imitating those people. The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Whoever imitates a people is one of them.” It says in al-Jami’ al-Asghar: A man bought something on the day of Nayruz which he did not buy before that. If he intended thereby to venerate that day as the mushrikun venerate it, then he has committed disbelief, but if he wanted to eat or drink or enjoy himself, then he has not committed disbelief.”

It says in al-Taj wa’l-Iklil (a Maliki book – 4/319): “Ibn al-Qasim regarded it as makruh to give a gift to a Christian on the occasion of his festival, or to give palm leaves to a Jew on his festivals.”

It says in al-Iqna', which is a Hanbali book: "It is haram to attend the festivals of the Jews and Christians and to sell them things or give them gifts on the occasion of their festivals.”

Moreover it is not permissible for a Muslim to give a gift to another Muslim because of this festival, as stated above when quoting the Hanafi view.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said: “Whoever gives a gift to the Muslims during these festivals unlike what he usually does at other times, his gift should not be accepted, especially if the gift is something that helps in imitating them, such as giving candles etc at Christmas, or giving eggs, milk and lambs on Maundy Thursday which comes at the end of their fast (i.e., the end of Lent). Similarly, no gift should be given to a Muslim at the time of these festivals because of the festival, especially if it is something that helps in imitating them, as we have mentioned.” (Iqtida al-Sirat al-Mustaqim (1/227)

Is it haram to accept Christmas gifts?

With regard to accepting a gift from a non-Muslim on the day of his festival, there is nothing wrong with that, and that is not regarded as participating in it or approving of it, rather it should be accepted as an act of kindness, with the aim of softening his heart and calling him to Islam.

Allah has permitted kindness and fair treatment towards the non-Muslim who is not fighting the Muslims, as He says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Allah does not forbid you to deal justly and kindly with those who fought not against you on account of religion nor drove you out of your homes. Verily, Allah loves those who deal with equity.” [Al-Mumtahanah 60:8]

But kindness and fair treatment does not mean friendship and love, because it is not permitted to take a non-Muslim as a friend or love him. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“You (O Muhammad) will not find any people who believe in Allah and the Last Day, making friendship with those who oppose Allah and His Messenger (Muhammad), even though they were their fathers or their sons or their brothers or their kindred (people). For such He has written Faith in their hearts, and strengthened them with Ruh (proofs, light and true guidance) from Himself. And He will admit them to Gardens (Paradise) under which rivers flow, to dwell therein (forever). Allah is pleased with them, and they with Him. They are the party of Allah. Verily, it is the party of Allah that will be the successful.” [Al-Mujadilah 58:22]

“O you who believe! Take not My enemies and your enemies (i.e. disbelievers and polytheists) as friends, showing affection towards them, while they have disbelieved in what has come to you of the truth.” [Al-Mumtahanah 60:1]

“O you who believe! Take not as (your) Bitanah (advisors, consultants, protectors, helpers, friends) those outside your religion (pagans, Jews, Christians, and hypocrites) since they will not fail to do their best to corrupt you. They desire to harm you severely. Hatred has already appeared from their mouths, but what their breasts conceal is far worse. Indeed We have made plain to you the Ayat (proofs, evidences, verses) if you understand.” [Aal 'Imran 3:118]

“And incline not toward those who do wrong, lest the Fire should touch you, and you have no protectors other than Allah, nor you would then be helped.” [Hud 12:113]

“O you who believe! Take not the Jews and the Christians as Awliya (friends, protectors, helpers), they are but Awliya of each other. And if any amongst you takes them (as Awliya), then surely, he is one of them. Verily, Allah guides not those people who are the Zalimun (polytheists and wrongdoers and unjust).” [Al-Maidah 5:51]

There is other evidence which indicates that it is haram to take a non-Muslim as a friend or love him.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

“As for accepting a gift from them on the day of their festival, we have quoted above that ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib was brought a gift on the occasion of Nayruz and he accepted it.

Ibn Abi Shaybah narrated that a woman asked `Aishah: We have some wet nurses from among the Magians, and they have a festival on which they bring us gifts. She said: As for what is slaughtered for that day, do not eat it, but eat from their vegetables.

It was narrated from Abu Barzah that he had some Magian neighbours who used to bring him gifts on the occasion of Nayruz and Mahrjan, and he used to say to his family: Whatever is of fruits, eat it, and whatever is otherwise, reject it.

All of this indicates that the festival does not make it forbidden to accept their gifts, rather the ruling is the same whether it is their festival or not, because that does not involve helping them with the symbols of their disbelief.

Then he pointed out that meat slaughtered by a kitabi (Jew or Christian) is halal except that which is slaughtered for their festivals, which it is not permissible to eat. He said (may Allah have mercy on him): It is only permissible to eat of the food of the people of the Book, during their festivals that which has not been slaughtered for the festival, whether it is bought or received as a gift. As for meat slaughtered by the Magians, the ruling on that is well known, and it is haram according to all. As for that which is slaughtered by the people of the Book for their festivals and that which they slaughter as an act of worship to draw close to anything other than Allah, as the Muslims offer sacrifices as an act of worship to draw closer to Allah, namely as that which they sacrifice to the Messiah, two views have been narrated from Ahmad concerning that, the most well known of which in his texts is that it is not permissible to eat it even if the name of something other than Allah has not been mentioned over it. The prohibition on that was narrated from ‘Aishah and ‘Abd-Allah ibn ‘Umar …” (Iqtida’ al-Sirat al-Mustaqim, 1/251)

Conclusion, it is permissible for you to accept the gift from your Christian neighbour on the day of their festival, subject to the following conditions:

- This gift should not be meat that has been slaughtered for the festival.
- It should not be something that may be used to help in imitating them on the day of their festival, such as candles, eggs, palm leaves etc.
- You should explain to your children the belief in al-wala wa'l-bara (loyalty and friendship vs. disavowal and enmity), lest a love of this festival or a fondness for the giver be instilled in their hearts.
- The gift should be accepted with the aim of softening her heart and calling her to Islam, not with friendship and love.

If the gift is something that it is not permissible to accept, then the refusal to accept it should be accompanied by an explanation of why it is being refused, such as saying, "We only refused your gift because it is meat that was slaughtered for the festival, and it is not permissible for us to eat it, or these things are only accepted by those who are taking part in the celebrations, and we do not celebrate this festival, because it is not part of our Religion, and it involves beliefs that we do not believe in" and so on, which is a starting point for calling them to Islam and explaining the danger of the disbelief that they follow.

The Muslim should be proud of his Religion and apply its rulings, and he should not give them up out of shyness or to impress anyone, for Allah is more deserving of us feeling shy before Him.

For more, please see these answers: 145950 and 106668 ,

And Allah knows best.