71170 - Is Drawing Cartoons Prohibited in Islam?

the question

What is the ruling on animated cartoons that are shown to children? Do they come under the heading of images that are forbidden in Islam?

Summary of answer

It is well known that Islam has forbidden image-making, drawing and sculpting every animate being that Allah has created; there are stern warnings issued to those who do that. It is permissible to have dolls and toys for girls to play with. This is an exception to the prohibition of images.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Is image-making allowed in Islam?

It is well known that Islam has forbidden image-making, drawing and sculpting every animate being that Allah has created; there are stern warnings issued to those who do that.

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “The most severely punished of the people on the Day of Resurrection will be the image-makers.” (Narrated by Al-Bukhari, 5950 and Muslim, 2109)

Are dolls and toys prohibited in Islam?

Islam makes an exception from this prohibition in the case of images with which children play.

It was narrated that `A’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) said: The Messenger of Allah (peace

and blessings of Allah be upon him) came back from the campaign to Tabuk or Khaybar, and in her alcove there was a curtain. The breeze came and lifted the edge of the curtain, uncovering the “daughters” of `A’ishah, i.e., her dolls. He said: “What is this, O `A’ishah?” She said: “My daughters.” And among them he saw a horse with two wings of cloth. He said: “What is this that I see among them?” She said: “A horse.” He said: “What is this on it?” She said: “Two wings.” He said: “A horse with wings?” She said: “Have you not heard that Sulayman had horses with wings?” She said: "He smiled so broadly that I could see his eye teeth.” (Narrated by Abu Dawud, 4932; classed as authentic by Al-`Iraqi in Takhrij Al-Ihya’, 2/344 and by Al-Albani in Sahih Abu Dawud)

Al-Hafidh ibn Hajr said in Fat-h Al-Bari (10/527):

This Hadith is taken as evidence that it is permissible to have dolls and toys for girls to play with. This is an exception to the prohibition of images. This was stated by `Iyad, and it was narrated from the majority that they allowed the sale of toys and dolls so that girls might learn from a young age how to take care of their houses and their children. (End quote)

Is drawing cartoons prohibited in Islam?

Shaykh Ibn `Uthaymin (may Allah have mercy on him) was asked: What is the ruling on cartoons that appear on TV?

He replied:

With regard to the cartoons which you say appear on TV, if they are in the form of humans, then the ruling on watching them depends on whether they come under the same ruling as realistic human images or not? It is most likely that they do not come under that ruling.

If they are not in the form of humans, then there is nothing wrong with watching them, so long as they are not accompanied by anything prohibited such as music and so on, and they do not distract from obligatory duties." (End quote from Majmu` Al-Fatawa, 2/question 333)

Impact of Cartoons on Children’s Education

The issue of animated drawings and cartoons is one of the most serious educational issues, because of the immense effect that these films have on children’s developing characters, and because they have become a primary educational tool in many countries nowadays.

At this stage, the heart and mind of the child is like a blank page; nothing crosses it but it leaves an imprint.

Ibn Al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said in Tuhfat Al-Mawdud (240):

One thing that the child desperately needs is for care to be taken with regard to his morals and attitude, for he will grow up with whatever the one who is raising him accustoms him to when he is small, and when he grows older it becomes difficult for him to change what he has got used to; these attitudes and characteristics that have become deeply ingrained in him, even if he tries to suppress them, they will always surface and expose him. (End quote)

Positive Aspects of Cartoons

These are some of the positive effects of children watching these programs:

- They give children a great deal of educational information in an easy and enjoyable manner. Some cartoons focus on particular geographical areas, and others focus on scientific matters, such as the parts of the human body, which gives the child advanced knowledge at an early age.
- They develop the child’s imagination and nourish his abilities, and they develop the imagination in a way which helps the mind to grow and prepare it to be innovative and teach the child new ways of thinking and behaving.
- They teach classical Arabic which children usually do not hear at home or even at school. It is well known that teaching the child correct language is one of the aims of education.

Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said in Iqtida’ As-Sirat Al-Mustaqim (1/207):

It should be noted that becoming accustomed to the language has a powerful effect on one's thinking, attitude and religious commitment, and also has the effect of seeking to follow the example of the early generations of this Ummah, the Companions and Successors of the Companions (Tabi`un). Seeking to follow their example increases reasoning, religious commitment and good attitude. Moreover, the Arabic language is part of this religion, and learning it is obligatory and essential. End quote.

- They meet some psychological needs and have a beneficial effect, such as compassion, love, honouring one’s parents, competition, striving for success and meeting challenges and many other positive attitudes that can be instilled via cartoons.

Negative Aspects of Cartoons

There are also some negative effects that come from watching these programs:

- The negative consequences of watching TV in general, of which there are many such as: damage to the eyes, getting used to laziness and inactivity, getting used to passive reception and not participating. It also stunts natural development of knowledge, because knowledge is acquired by learning and researching, but television replaces seeking with mere receiving. Watching TV also weakens the bonds of love between family members, when they let watching shows keep them from speaking to one another.

Ibn Al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said, discussing the parent’s responsibilities in raising the child in Tuhfat Al-Mawlud (241):

He should avoid letting him become lazy and inactive, and should teach him the opposite. He should not let him rest for more than he needs to refresh his body and soul for more work, for laziness and inactivity bring bad consequences and will end in regret, but hard work brings good consequences, either in this world or in the Hereafter or in both. End quote.

- They present beliefs and ideas that are contrary to Islam, as some movies include mixing and display of charms (Tabarruj) that are prohibited. Some cartoons, such as Tom & Jerry, give

distorted ideas about the Hereafter, Paradise and Hell, and the Reckoning. Some cartoons include distortions of the stories of the Prophets and Messengers, and some poke fun at Islam and Muslims, whilst others (such as Pokemon) include the beliefs of eastern and idolatrous religions. And there are many other examples. Even if a film does not outwardly go against Islam, it still carries notions of western culture that are alien to our society and religion.

Dr. Wahbah Az-Zuhayli (may Allah have mercy on him) said in Qadiyat Al-Ahdath (6):

With regard to children's programs and some adults' programs, they propagate the spirit of western culture and promote western traditions, and they attract people to western-style parties and clubs.

One of the effects of this culture is the adoption of imaginary examples instead of following the example of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), his companions, the scholars and the Mujahidun. So children start to imitate Superman, Batman and Spiderman and other imaginary characters who do not exist, and they lose out in following the real example, as they get confused by so many imaginary examples who have no faith. (Wasa'il Al-I`lam wal-Atfal: Wijhat nadhar Islamiyyah by Abul-Hasan Sadiq and the article entitled Athar Ar-Rusum Al-Mutaharrikah `ala Al-Atfal by Nizar Muhammad `Uthman)

The Islamic Stance on Cartoons: a Balanced Approach

After stating the positive and negative aspects, the Islamic attitude should be clear in sha Allah. The more negative points there are, the closer the ruling is to stating that it is prohibited, and the more it is able to avoid the negative aspects, the closer it is to being permissible. This tells us that it is essential to establish companies that will produce Islamic cartoons by means of which all positive virtues may be instilled and all harmful and evil aspects can be avoided.

And Allah knows best.