

Should Karaites do holidays, which are not in the Tanakh?

By

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Just this past week was Halloween. In the US it is a multi-million dollar holiday for candy makers and costume makers. But is this a harmless secular holiday or is the past and present celebrations something that Karaites should avoid. We are going to start Halloween and also look at the other big Holidays that are celebrated in the US.

For the origin of Halloween to be known, we must be the ancient Celtic celebrations and the Catholic literature. We are going to look into this holiday and see what it meant then and what it means today. We will also look at the Tanakh and see if this holiday is something we as Karaites should do today.

The Celtic origins of Halloween. The Holiday which was celebrated the evening before November 1st and was called Samhain (pronounced Sow-in). This was a distinct celebration which involved a spiritual practice by the ancient druids.

“Samhain marks one of the two great doorways of the Celtic year, for the Celts divided the year into two seasons: the light and the dark, at Beltane on May 1st and Samhain on November 1st. Some believe that Samhain was the more important festival, marking the beginning of a whole new cycle, just as the Celtic day began at night. For it was understood that in dark silence comes whisperings of new beginnings, the stirring of the seed below the ground. Whereas Beltane welcomes in the summer with joyous celebrations at dawn, the most magically potent time of this festival is November Eve, the night of October 31st, known today of course, as Halloween. “ (<http://www.chalicecentre.net/samhain.htm>)

As you can see this was a night in which was a spiritual focus. From another website devoted to neopagan practices we see that many of the symbols of this day were used in the ancient times also.

“Kevin Danaher, in his remarkable book *The Year in Ireland*, has a long discussion of the traditional Irish celebrations of this festival. In one section on “Hallow-E’en Guisers,” he says:

A familiar sight in Dublin city on and about October 31 is that of small groups of children, arrayed in grotesque garments and with faces masked or painted, accosting the passers-by or knocking on house doors with the request: “Help the Hallow E’en party! Any apples or nuts?” in the expectation of being given small presents; this, incidentally, is all the more remarkable as it is the only folk custom of the kind which has survived in the metropolis.

A couple of generations ago, in parts of Dublin and in other areas of Ireland, the groups would have consisted of young men and grown boys, who often travelled considerable distances in their quest, with consequently greater reward. The proceeds were usually expended on a “Hallow E’en party,” with music, dancing, feasting and so on, at some chosen house, and not merely consumed on the spot as with the children nowadays...

Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge, ii, 370, states that in parts of Count Waterford, Hallow E’en is called oidhche na h-aimléise, “The night of mischief or con.” It was a custom in the county — it survives still in places — for the “boys” to assemble in gangs, and, headed by a few horn-blowers who were always selected for their strength of lungs, to visit all the farmers’ houses in the district and levy a sort of blackmail, good humouredly asked for, and as cheerfully given. They afterward met at some rendezvous, and in merry revelry celebrated the festival of Samhain in their own way. When the distant winding of the horns was heard, the bean a’ tigh [woman of the house] prepared for their reception, and got ready the money or builín (white bread) to be handed to them through the half-opened door. Whoever heard the wild scurry of their rush through a farm-yard to the kitchen-door — there was always a race amongst them to get possession of the latch — will not question the propriety of the word aimiléis [mischief] applied to their proceedings. The leader of the band chaunted a sort of recitative in Gaelic, intoning it with a strong nasal twang to conceal his identity, in which the good-wife was called upon to do honour to Samhain... “ (<http://www.neopagan.net/Halloween-Origins.html>)”

So you can see that part of the celebration of the Samhain was the taking a kind of blackmail or extortion, which has been more innocently made, as giving candy Halloween. So how did this holiday Samhain become known as Halloween?

Halloween's origins date back to the ancient Celtic festival of Samhain (pronounced sow-in).

The Celts, who lived 2,000 years ago in the area that is now Ireland, the United Kingdom, and northern France, celebrated their new year on November 1. This day marked the end of summer and the harvest and the beginning of the dark, cold winter, a time of year that was often associated with human death. Celts believed that on the night before the new year, the boundary between the worlds of the living and the dead became blurred. On the night of October 31, they celebrated Samhain, when it was believed that the ghosts of the dead returned to earth. In addition to causing trouble and damaging crops, Celts thought that the presence of the otherworldly spirits made it easier for the Druids, or Celtic priests, to make predictions about the future. For a people entirely dependent on the volatile natural world, these prophecies were an important source of comfort and direction during the long, dark winter.

To commemorate the event, Druids built huge sacred bonfires, where the people gathered to burn crops and animals as sacrifices to the Celtic deities.

During the celebration, the Celts wore costumes, typically consisting of animal heads and skins, and attempted to tell each other's fortunes. When the celebration was over, they re-lit their hearth fires, which they had extinguished earlier that evening, from the sacred bonfire to help protect them during the coming winter.

By A.D. 43, Romans had conquered the majority of Celtic territory. In the course of the four hundred years that they ruled the Celtic lands, two festivals of Roman origin were combined with the traditional Celtic celebration of Samhain.

The first was Feralia, a day in late October when the Romans traditionally commemorated the passing of the dead. The second was a day to honor Pomona, the Roman goddess of fruit and trees. The symbol of Pomona is the apple and the incorporation of this celebration into Samhain probably explains the tradition of "bobbing" for apples that is practiced today on Halloween.

By the 800s, the influence of Christianity had spread into Celtic lands. In the seventh century, Pope Boniface IV designated November 1 All Saints' Day, a time to honor saints and martyrs. It is widely believed today that the pope was attempting to replace the Celtic festival of the dead with a related, but church-sanctioned holiday. The celebration was also called All-hallows or All-hallowmas (from Middle English Alholowmesse meaning All Saints' Day) and the night before it, the night of Samhain, began to be called All-hallows Eve and, eventually, Halloween. Even later, in A.D. 1000, the church would make November 2 All Souls' Day, a day to honor the dead. It was celebrated similarly to Samhain, with big bonfires, parades, and dressing up in costumes as saints, angels, and devils. Together, the three celebrations, the eve of All Saints', All Saints', and All Souls', were called Hallowmas.

http://www.history.com/minisite.do?content_type=Minisite_Generic&content_type_id=713&display_order=1&mini_id=1076

So you can see from this account that this holiday Samhain was changed to Hallows eve. Which eventually was called Halloween. Many of the practices were carried over from the ancient practice but isn't this just a harmless secular holiday today? After all it all in fun and it for the kids obviously.

What does the Tanakh tell us about the keeping the practices of other nations.

Devarim 18:9-15

9 When you enter the land that Yehovah Eloheykha is giving you, you shall not learn to imitate the abhorrent practices of those nations. **10** Let no one be found

among you who consigns his son or daughter to the fire, or who is an augur, a soothsayer, a diviner, a sorcerer, (qosem qesamim [diving diviners] ga'onen [observing times] umenaches [and from enchanter] umekhashef [and from sorcerer]) **11** one who casts spells (vechover chaver [and charmer of charm]), or one who consults ghosts or familiar spirits (veshoel ov [and asking familiar spirits]), (ve yiddoni [and wizard]) or one who inquires of the dead. (vedoresh el hametim [and seeking of the dead ones]) **12** For anyone who does such things is abhorrent to Yehovah, and it is because of these abhorrent things that Yehovah Eloheykha is dispossessing them before you. **13** You must be wholehearted with Yehovah Eloheykha. **14** Those nations that you are about to dispossess do indeed resort to soothsayers and augurs; to you, however, Yehovah Eloheykha has not assigned the like.

15 Yehovah Eloheykha will raise up for you a prophet from among your own people, like myself; him you shall heed.

Here we see that there were practices of the people we were not to copy. What was the main purpose of Samhain, to commune with the dead? Inquiring of the Dead is something we are told not to do. How did they do that?

“In the old days, extensive preparations were made for the sharing of a communal feast that included the dearly departed as guests of honor. To enable them to come and go freely, all doors and windows were left unlatched; a special cake was made exclusively for their consumption, and a certain amount of other food was set aside just for them. This had to be left untouched by any mortal hand for the duration of the ritual period. Eating the food of the dead was considered to be a major sacrilege and it condemned the perpetrator to becoming a hungry spirit after death, forever banned from sharing in the Samhain feast.

Beyond the great feast, the dead would also need to be entertained. Customs vary from one Celtic nation to another, but in general, while the young people played games associated with the rituals of Samhain, the elders reviewed all of the events of the past year for the benefit of those who had passed on. This was believed to encourage the dead to continue to take an interest in the affairs of the living.

As at all turning points in the Celtic year, ancient lore tells us that the Gods draw near to earth at Samhain. In ancient Ireland, people extinguished their hearth fires and then gathered at the ritual center of their tribe to honor the gods with gifts and sacrifices. There, they waited for the Druids to light the new fire of the year. Then, personal prayers in the form of objects symbolizing the wishes of supplicants were cast into the blaze. At the end of the ceremonies, each member of the tribe took back to his or her home hearth a brand ignited from the new fire.

Samhain fires have continued to light up the countryside down the centuries. In some areas, ashes from these bonfires were sprinkled on surrounding fields as a form of protection. The added bonus, of course, was that the ashes improved the soil. (<http://www.irishcultureandcustoms.com/ACalend/Samhain.html>)”

This fire they would light would also include sacrifices. These fire were often referred to as bone fires, which is where it is believed that bonfire is derived from.

“Samhain began at sundown on October 31 and extended into the following day. According to the Celtic pagan religion, known as Druidism, the spirits of those who had died in the preceding year roamed the earth on Samhain evening. The Celts sought to ward off these spirits with offerings of food and drink. The Celts also built bonfires at sacred hilltop sites and performed rituals, often involving human and animal sacrifices, to honor Druid deities.

By the end of the 1st century ad, the Roman Empire had conquered most of the Celtic lands (see Rome, History of). In the process of incorporating the Celts into their empire, the Romans adapted and absorbed some Celtic traditions as part of their own pagan and Catholic religious observances. In Britain, Romans blended local Samhain customs with their own pagan harvest festival honoring Pomona, goddess of fruit trees. Some scholars have suggested that the game of bobbing for apples derives from this Roman association of the holiday with fruit.”
(http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761572079/Halloween.html#p8)

So we can see that this is a day in which was practiced divination (future telling), communicating with the dead, and providing for their needs (food brought). This food for the dead was eventually changed over to the giving to groups of boys collecting food or money on that day and that is where we get the children with candy. In a real sense, it is a form of extortion that links back to give me a treat or I will trick you.

“Trick-or-treating, is an activity for children on or around Halloween in which they proceed from house to house in costumes, asking for treats such as candy with the question, "Trick or treat?" The "trick" part of "trick or treat" is a threat to play a trick on the homeowner or his property if no treat is given. Trick-or-treating is one of the main traditions of Halloween. It has become socially expected that if one lives in a neighborhood with children one should purchase treats in preparation for trick-or-treaters. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trick-or-treating>)

So what does the Tanakh say about this type of behavior.

Vayiqra 19:13

13 You shall not defraud your fellow. You shall not commit robbery. The wages of a laborer shall not remain with you until morning.

Here we see that one is not to commit robbery. What is it to commit robbery?

Yehezqel 18:12

- 12 has wronged the poor and the needy, has taken by robbery, has not returned a pledge, has raised his eyes to the fetishes, has committed abomination,
- 16 he has not wronged anyone; he has not seized a pledge or taken anything by robbery; he has given his bread to the hungry and clothed the naked;

Yehezqel 33:15

- 14 if the wicked man restores a pledge, makes good what he has taken by robbery, follows the laws of life, and does not commit iniquity—he shall live, he shall not die.

Vayiqra 5:21-24

- 21 When a person sins and commits a trespass against Yehovah by dealing deceitfully with his fellow in the matter of a deposit or a pledge, or through robbery, or by defrauding his fellow, 22 or by finding something lost and lying about it; if he swears falsely regarding any one of the various things that one may do and sin thereby—23 when one has thus sinned and, realizing his guilt, would restore that which he got through robbery or fraud, or the deposit that was entrusted to him, or the lost thing that he found, 24 or anything else about which he swore falsely, he shall repay the principal amount and add a fifth part to it. He shall pay it to its owner when he realizes his guilt.

Robbery is when one takes something that isn't theirs. In this case we have a socialized form of robbery, which is seen as acceptable today by all in society. We have taken something clearly wrong and made it something that seems right to everyone.

So should a Karaite keep Halloween today? Without even looking at the pagan origins to the day and its practices, I find that the practices of the day are actually built around superstition (protection by wear costumes), and extortion (taking a candy at the choice of a treat or a trick). Which to me shows that this is truly a anti-Tanakh observance.

So lets look at the next coming up. Veterans Day.

In 1918, on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day in the eleventh month, the world rejoiced and celebrated. After four years of bitter war, an armistice was signed. The "war to end all wars" was over.

November 11, 1919 was set aside as Armistice Day in the United States, to remember the sacrifices that men and women made during World War I in order to ensure a lasting peace. On Armistice Day, soldiers who survived the war marched in a parade through their home towns. Politicians and veteran officers gave speeches and held ceremonies of thanks for the peace they had won.

Congress voted Armistice Day a federal holiday in 1938, 20 years after the war ended. But Americans realized that the previous war would not be the last one. World War II began the following year and nations great and small again participated in a bloody struggle. After the Second World War, Armistice Day continued to be observed on November 11.

In 1953 townspeople in Emporia, Kansas called the holiday Veterans' Day in gratitude to the veterans in their town. Soon after, Congress passed a bill introduced by a Kansas congressman renaming the federal holiday to Veterans' Day. 1971 President Nixon declared it a federal holiday on the second Monday in November. (<http://homeschooling.about.com/cs/unitssubjhol/a/veteransday.htm>)

The origin of Veterans Day is a modern observance which we honor both the living and remember the fallen veterans. There is no practice in this that goes against Tanakh. We are told that in death the righteous kings of Yisrael were honored in their death. Soldiers die and those who survive are not being worshipped but expressed gratitude of their service.

Divrei Hayamin Bet 32:33

33 Hezekiah slept with his fathers, and was buried on the upper part of the tombs of the sons of David. When he died, all the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem accorded him much honor. Manasseh, his son, succeeded him.

Divrei HaYamin

13 Asa slept with his fathers. He died in the forty-first year of his reign
14 and was buried in the grave that he had made for himself in the City of David. He was laid in his resting-place, which was filled with spices of all kinds, expertly blended; a very great fire was made in his honor.

The next Holiday after that is Thanksgiving. Many people look at thanksgiving and say. This is a day to give thanks to God and was a remembrance of the feast of the Pilgrims. But is it that simple.

First Thanksgiving we celebrate today is built on many things not just one event.

The First Thanksgiving Proclamation, June 20, 1676

Date: June 20, 1676
By: Governing council of Charlestown, Massachusetts

The Holy God having by a long and Continual Series of his Afflictive dispensations in and by the present War with the Heathen Natives of this land, written and brought to pass bitter things against his own Covenant people in this

wilderness, yet so that we evidently discern that in the midst of his judgments he hath remembered mercy, having remembered his Footstool in the day of his sore displeasure against us for our sins, with many singular Intimations of his Fatherly Compassion, and regard; reserving many of our Towns from Desolation Threatened, and attempted by the Enemy, and giving us especially of late with many of our Confederates many signal Advantages against them, without such Disadvantage to ourselves as formerly we have been sensible of, if it be the Lord's mercy that we are not consumed, It certainly bespeaks our positive Thankfulness, when our Enemies are in any measure disappointed or destroyed; and fearing the Lord should take notice under so many Intimations of his returning mercy, we should be found an Insensible people, as not standing before Him with Thanksgiving, as well as lading him with our Complaints in the time of pressing Afflictions:

The Council has thought meet to appoint and set apart the 29th day of this instant June, as a day of Solemn Thanksgiving and praise to God for such his Goodness and Favour, many Particulars of which mercy might be Instanced, but we doubt not those who are sensible of God's Afflictions, have been as diligent to espy him returning to us; and that the Lord may behold us as a People offering Praise and thereby glorifying Him; the Council doth commend it to the Respective Ministers, Elders and people of this Jurisdiction; Solemnly and seriously to keep the same Beseeching that being persuaded by the mercies of God we may all, even this whole people offer up our bodies and souls as a living and acceptable Service unto God by Jesus Christ.

<http://www.thanksgivingworld.com/thanksgiving-proclamations/first-thanksgiving-proclamation.html>

The first Congress of the states of confederation proclaimed a day of Thanksgiving in which Jesus is invoked. Mind you this was not the same date as the final agreed upon date. You will find that many proclamations we made both for Feasting and Fasting for thanksgiving as well as many dates.

“1777 Thanksgiving Proclamation

Thanksgiving Proclamation 1777 by the Continental Congress, which was the first ever National Thanksgiving Proclamation:

IN CONGRESS

November 1, 1777

FORASMUCH as it is the indispensable Duty of all Men to adore the superintending Providence of Almighty God; to acknowledge with Gratitude their Obligation to him for Benefits received, and to implore such farther Blessings as they stand in Need of: And it having pleased him in his abundant Mercy, not only to continue to us the innumerable Bounties of his common

Providence; but also to smile upon us in the Prosecution of a just and necessary War, for the Defense and Establishment of our unalienable Rights and Liberties; particularly in that he hath been pleased, in so great a Measure, to prosper the Means used for the Support of our Troops, and to crown our Arms with most signal success:

It is therefore recommended to the legislative or executive Powers of these UNITED STATES to set apart THURSDAY, the eighteenth Day of December next, for SOLEMN THANKSGIVING and PRAISE: That at one Time and with one Voice, the good People may express the grateful Feelings of their Hearts, and consecrate themselves to the Service of their Divine Benefactor; and that, together with their sincere Acknowledgments and Offerings, they may join the penitent Confession of their manifold Sins, whereby they had forfeited every Favor; and their humble and earnest Supplication that it may please GOD through the Merits of JESUS CHRIST, mercifully to forgive and blot them out of Remembrance; That it may please him graciously to afford his Blessing on the Governments of these States respectively, and prosper the public Council of the whole: To inspire our Commanders, both by Land and Sea, and all under them, with that Wisdom and Fortitude which may render them fit Instruments, under the Providence of Almighty GOD, to secure for these United States, the greatest of all human Blessings, INDEPENDENCE and PEACE: That it may please him, to prosper the Trade and Manufactures of the People, and the Labor of the Husbandman, that our Land may yield its Increase: To take Schools and Seminaries of Education, so necessary for cultivating the Principles of true Liberty, Virtue and Piety, under his nurturing Hand; and to prosper the Means of Religion, for the promotion and enlargement of that Kingdom, which consisteth "in Righteousness, Peace and Joy in the Holy Ghost."

And it is further recommended, That servile Labor, and such Recreation, as, though at other Times innocent, may be unbecoming the Purpose of this Appointment, be omitted on so solemn an Occasion.

<http://pilgrimhall.org/GivingThanks3c.htm> “

In the following proclamation President Lincoln who proclaimed the date that would later become the date of a national holiday did so after consulting with a new England poet “Prompted by Sarah Josepha Hale,[15] in the fall, Lincoln issued the first Federally mandated Thanksgiving day to be kept on the last Thursday in November. Reflecting on the successes of the past year, ...

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abraham_Lincoln_and_religion

In the article on President Lincoln it does not reveal whether he was a Deist or a Christian. Yet there does appear certain Christian undertones to many of his speeches. It is more of a guess by many what he was.

”Abraham Lincoln's Thanksgiving Proclamation

The year that is drawing towards its close, has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added, which are of so extraordinary a nature that they cannot fail to penetrate and soften even the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever watchful providence of Almighty God. In the midst of a civil war of unequalled magnitude and severity, which has sometimes seemed to foreign States to invite and to provoke their aggression, peace has been preserved with all nations, order has been maintained, the laws have been respected and obeyed, and harmony has prevailed everywhere except in the theatre of military conflict; while that theatre has been greatly contracted by the advancing armies and navies of the Union. Needful diversions of wealth and of strength from the fields of peaceful industry to the national defense have not arrested the plough, the shuttle, or the ship; the axe had enlarged the borders of our settlements, and the mines, as well of iron and coal as of the precious metals, have yielded even more abundantly than heretofore. Population has steadily increased, notwithstanding the waste that has been made in the camp, the siege and the battle-field; and the country, rejoicing in the consciousness of augmented strength and vigor, is permitted to expect continuance of years with large increase of freedom. No human counsel hath devised nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy. It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently and gratefully acknowledged as with one heart and voice by the whole American People. I do therefore invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next, as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens. And I recommend to them that while offering up the ascriptions justly due to Him for such singular deliverances and blessings, they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to his tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged, and fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty Hand to heal the wounds of the nation and to restore it as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purposes to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquility and Union.

The harvest home festival is often linked with thank giving but since the Puritans were ones who shunned idolatry it would not make sense for their celebration to be a practice brought from England.

At the level of the church body, the Puritans believed that the worship in the church ought to be strictly regulated by what is commanded in the Bible (known as the regulative principle of worship). The Puritans condemned as idolatry many

worship practices regardless of the practices' antiquity or widespread adoption among Christians, which their opponents defended with tradition. Like some of Reformed churches on the European continent, Puritan reforms were typified by a minimum of ritual and decoration and by an unambiguous emphasis on preaching. Like the early church fathers, they eliminated the use of musical instruments in their worship services, for various theological and practical reasons. Outside of church, however, Puritans were quite fond of music and encouraged it in certain ways.

Another important distinction was the Puritan approach to church-state relations. They opposed the Anglican idea of the supremacy of the monarch in the church (Erastianism), and, following Calvin, they argued that the only head of the Church in heaven or earth is Christ (not the Pope or the monarch). However, they believed that secular governors are accountable to God (not through the church, but alongside it) to protect and reward virtue, including "true religion", and to punish wrongdoers — a policy that is best described as non-interference rather than separation of church and state. The separating Congregationalists, a segment of the Puritan movement more radical than the Anglican Puritans, believed the Divine Right of Kings was heresy, a belief that became more pronounced during the reign of Charles I of England.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Puritan>

Since some have suggested that it was the celebration of the native americans that was their harvest festival only need to look at the quote from the Leaders of the Pilgrims (Puritans) to see that indeed they invited the indians not the other way around. So the idea of a thanksgiving was undoubtedly pulled from christian understanding of the Bible. As we have seen that several proclamations have references to a redeemer, or Jesus in their writings. My contention would be that Thanksgiving is not a pagan festival but if following the pilgrims and the proclamations by many leaders it was a christian holiday that is uniquely for the United States.

So should Karaites celebrate a holiday which has links to christainity? I don't believe they should.

In the next Part we will examine the next set of Holidays. Christmas, New Years, honoring the birthday of an important dead person (Martin Luther King, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln).
