



Boo!

Judaism and Halloween

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What's the Issue?

כְּמַעֲשֵׂה אֶרֶץ-מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁבְּתֶם-בָּהּ לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ
וְכַמַּעֲשֵׂה אֶרֶץ-כְּנָעַן אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מֵבִיא אֶתְכֶם שָׁמָּה לֹא
תַעֲשׂוּ וּבַחֲקֵיהֶם לֹא תֵלְכוּ:

You shall not copy the practices of the land of Egypt where you dwelt, or of the land of Canaan to which I am taking you; nor shall you follow their laws.

(Leviticus 18:3)

Origins

- Samhain (Sauin) – an ancient Celtic day to mark the end of summer and the harvest season and the change to the darker part of the year
- Merging of the living and the spirits of the dead
- Disguises to trick the dead
- Bonfires (think big jack-o-lanterns)
- Souling (poor asking for soul cakes to pray for the souls of the dead)

Development

- In the 8th century the Catholic Church made November 1st All Saints Day and the evening before All Hallows Eve (Hallow Ev'n = Halloween)
- Some argue that the November rituals are Germanic rather than Celtic
- In the mid-19th century Irish immigrants brought customs of Halloween to America (Great Famine of 1845-1849)
- Souling became trick-or-treating and the spooky aspects were transformed into something communal and family-friendly

Significance of Origins

- Halloween has pagan and Christian origins – how important is it where a custom originates, how it develops, and how we interpret the customs today?
- Given that Christianity adopted and transformed the meaning of pagan rituals to satisfy the appetites and customs of the people, ought we do the same thing?

Jewish Versions of Halloween

- Sukkot
 - Decorations
 - Autumn and harvest, seasons blending into each other
- Purim
 - Mishloach Manot
 - Sweets
 - Costumes
- Halloween
 - Suck it up and do it?
 - Adopt and adapt

The Big Idea

- Halloween is but one example of the balancing act of being modern and Jewish at the same time. It is a more difficult choice for progressive Jews than for Orthodox Jews.
- It's at least worth a conversation!
- Boo.