

The Polemic of Bon Odori

News:

Some weeks ago, there was a hot issue concerning the Bon Odori Festival, a festival of Japanese origin that was held at the National Sports Complex. Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Religious Affairs), Datuk Idris Ahmad, advised Muslims not to participate in the festival because it contains elements of another religion. The Mufti of the State of Penang also added that such festivals are feared to lead to shirk. Bon Odori is an event that has been practiced in Japan for hundreds of years, which is historically linked to the Buddhists' belief in the spirits of their ancestors.

Comment:

The Bon Odori Festival has been celebrated in Malaysia for a long time and has never become an issue until this year when the Selangor Islamic Religious Department (JAIS) issued an official statement that the Bon Odori Festival is allowed in Selangor and Muslims are not barred from attending it. Since then, the topic had become a polemic and a hot topic of conversation among virtual citizens. Although the event had passed, similar polemic will most certainly resurface considering the seemingly unclear and inconsistent views concerning such issues in Malaysia. Some Muslims who attended and took part in the event insist that the Bon Odori Festival is just a dancing and singing celebration devoid of any spiritual elements. As Muslims, we have to understand the reality of such event and refer back to the Quran and Sunnah in order to clearly understand the issue and decide on a clear *hukm*. Although the event only involves dancing and singing, it is most definitely not in unison with the culture of Islam. This lifestyle of seeking pleasure or rejoicing without regard concerning halal and haram is something that is very contrary to Islam. Islam teaches its believers that the purpose of a Muslim's life is to worship Allah and seek His pleasure, by abandoning all prohibitions and futile deeds. Further, Islam clearly forbids its believers to resemble the kuffar in their actions (*tasyabbuh bil kuffar*) in terms of deeds, words, manner of dress, lifestyle and so on. Rasulullah (saw) ordered the Companions (ra) to differentiate themselves from the kuffar. He said in a lengthy hadith: «... وَمَنْ تَشَبَهَ بِقَوْمٍ فَهُوَ مِنْهُمْ» “... **And whoever resembles a people, then he is of them**” [HR Ahmad].

In reality, the Bon Odori Festival is clearly a pagan feast, which has been a Japanese tradition for generations. Thus, the action of a Muslim who participates in this festival in any manner is clearly committing *tasyabbuh bil kuffar* which is forbidden by the Prophet (saw)! If the religious authorities feel that such a party is not against Islam, they should indicate the evidences from al-Quran and as-Sunnah that Muslims are allowed to attend or participate in such an event rather than continuously confusing the Ummah with dodgy opinions! This is a clear example of how secularism brings about damage and catastrophe to Muslims. In this corrupt democratic system all forms of wickedness and disobedience can take place openly. Under the Khilafah (Caliphate), Shariah, by default, closes all doors of disobedience and wickedness.

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