



GREAT PUMPKIN! GOOD GRIEF!

So, in my inbox the other day arrived a posting entitled "[Halloween 2009: Tips from a Rabbi on How to Celebrate](#)". It was a pretty good read. Often from certain sectors of Christianity, there's a lot of hand-wringing about whether their kids should participate in this celebration rooted in paganism. In the Rabbi's column, that concern was certainly present, compounded by the Christian associations with the holiday. Many of us remember all the warnings about

glass (or drugs) being inserted into candy. And, today, I saw an article that claimed that the candy makers are hiring witches to curse their halloween-themed candy.

Certainly, a lot of halloween traditions are based on fear. Even the time-honored "trick or treat" plays on the fears of the person who answers the door: "give me a treat, or I'll do something you won't like!" Scary costumes, creepy music, sudden "boo"s add to the ambience. And, certainly some of the fears are justified; as a former "pet" of an all-black cat, we would not let her out on Halloween, for fear of what might happen to her. But fear carried to some of the extremes we see in the news/blogs does little to protect anyone. It does a lot more to foster distrust, misunderstanding and bigotry.

I suggest we spend some time learning about Samhain, the ancient Celtic/Irish/Gaelic festival that is observed on October 31st. And learn a bit about how that became tied to the Christian feasts of All Saints (or All Hallows) Day; "Halloween" is, after all the "Ev'n of All Hallows Day". And how, then, does that begin to relate to "El Dia de los Muertos" (the Day of the Dead in mesoAmerican cultures)? What are the "thin places" that are celebrated at this time of year? What do these have to do with Harvest? There is so much to learn; so much from which to benefit! Why spend so much time in fear?

I'll close with a couple of (edited) suggestions from Rabbi Brad Hirshfield:

- Celebrate difference without becoming divisive. It's ironic that traditional Jews and conservative Christians have done more to promote the awareness of Halloween as a Christian and/or Pagan holiday than anyone else. Make sure that if you do say 'no' to Halloween you do so without teaching your friends and children to be hostile to their neighbors.
- Remember that Halloween is about giving. Use Halloween as a time to teach the importance of giving charity. Whether it's those orange UNICEF boxes or even giving each "Trick or Treat'er" who comes to your door a coin, inviting them to give it to the needy. After all, what could be more traditionally Jewish or Christian than sharing and charity?
- Whatever you do, Halloween is a great opportunity to be reminded that we are all connected to each other, and whether we are out that night or not, we can look out for each other - for all of the kids on our blocks and in our neighborhoods. We can help each other celebrate good times, and contribute to the observance even of holidays not our own. So whatever we do, Halloween provides wonderful opportunities to honor our own religious particularity and the larger communities to which we all belong.

Blessings,

Gary

PS: Have a GREAT HOMECOMING and PARENTS WEEKEND!

