

Prohibition of Making Pictures in Islam

One should realize that the prohibition of picture making is EXTREMELY SEVERE. It is counted among the enormities, and there are strict warnings against doing it.

Imam Bukhari and Imam Muslim relate that a man came to Syedna Abdulla Ibn Abbas (Allah be well pleased with them both) and said, "My livelihood comes solely from my hands, and I make these pictures. Can you give me a legal opinion about them?" Ibn Abbas told him, "Come closer," and the man did. "Closer," he said, and the man did, until he put his hand on the man's head and said: "Shall I tell you what I heard from the Messenger of Allah, Prophet Muhammed (Allah bless him and give him peace)? I heard the Messenger of Allah say, "Every maker of pictures will go into the fire, where a beast will be set upon him to torment him in hell for each picture he made. So if you must, draw trees and things without animate life in them."

Imam Tirmidhi relates that the Holy Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "On the Day of Judgment, a part of hell fire will come forth with two eyes with which to see, two ears with which to hear, and a tongue with which to speak, saying, 'I have been ordered to deal with three: he who holds that there is another god besides Allah, with every arrogant tyrant, and with makers of pictures."

Further, Imam Bukhari, Imam Tirmidhi, and Imam Nasa'i relate the prophetic hadeeth from Ibn Abbas, "Whoever makes a picture, Allah will torture him with it on the Day of Judgment until he can breathe life into it, and he will never be able to do so."

The reason for the prohibition of pictorial representation is that it imitates the creative act of Allah, the Supreme, as is indicated by the hadeeth related by Imam Bukhari and Imam Muslim that Syedah A'isha (Allah be well pleased with her) said, "The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) returned from a trip, and I had draped a cloth with a picture on it over a small closet. When he saw it, he ripped it down, his face reddened, and he said, "A'isha, the people most severely tortured by Allah on the Day of Judgment will be those who try to imitate what Allah has created."

The foregoing ahadeeth show that producing representation is prohibited under any circumstances. Similarly just as making a picture is unlawful, so too is procuring one, because of the warning that pertains to the users, for pictures are only made to be used.

The determining factor in the prohibition of procuring images is the purposes for which they are procured. For example, someone who buys cookies with the shape of animals is not doing wrong if his purpose is to eat, though the maker of them is doing wrong. And similarly with books containing pictures, if the buyer intends obtaining the text, then the presence of pictures is the fault of the printer, not the buyer. The same holds for photographs required for official documents: the authorities are responsible for the sin, not the individual forced to comply.