

Qaradawi's fatwa on Music (Musical instruments) and Singing

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In Allah's name, His mercy is infinite and eternal! Hoping on the Single God, the Possessor of true knowledge and wisdom, I pray to Him for strength and skills to express a humble judgement that would correspond to the truth of God's Word, and not to the temporal knowledge of this age.

The whole issue of singing is controversial, whether it is with musical accompaniment or not. Some issues succeeded to gain the Muslim scholars' agreement, while others failed. All scholars have unanimous view on the prohibition of all forms of singing and music that incites debauchery, indecency, or sin. As for musical instruments, given the weakness of the evidence indicating that they are forbidden, the rule to be applied here is the one states that all things are originally deemed permissible as long as there is no Shari..ah text that prohibits them.

Singing is no more than melodious words; if these are good, singing is considered good; but if they are bad, such singing is deemed bad. Talk that contains forbidden content is prohibited. What if that talk is accompanied with rhythm and melody?

In the subject of musical instruments, scholars disagree on the matter. Some of them permit all sorts of singing, be it accompanied with musical instruments or not, and even consider it recommended. A second group of scholars permit singing only when is not accompanied with a musical instrument. A third group declare it to be prohibited whether it be accompanied with a musical instrument or not; they even consider it as a major sin. In supporting their view, they cite the hadith narrated by Imam Al-Bukhari on the authority of Abu Malik or Abu ..Amir Al-Ash..ari (doubt from the sub-narrator) that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said, 'From among my followers there will be some people who will consider illegal sexual intercourse, the wearing of silk (clothes), the drinking of alcoholic drinks and the use of musical instruments, as lawful.' Although this hadith is in Sahih Al-Bukhari, its chain of transmission is not connected to Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessing! s be upon him) and this invalidates its authenticity. Ibn Hazm rejects it for that very reason. Moreover, the sub-narrator, Hisham Ibn ..Ammar is declared 'weak' by many scholars of the Science of Hadith Methodology.

Besides, this hadith does not clearly prohibit the use of musical instruments, for the phrase 'consider as lawful,' according to Ibn Al-..Arabi, has two distinct meanings:

First: Such people think all these (the things mentioned) are lawful.

Second: They exceed the proper limits that should be observed in using these instruments. If the first meaning is intended, such people would be thus disbelievers.

In fact, the hadith in hand dispraises the manners of a group of people who indulge themselves in luxuries, drinking alcohol and listening to music. Therefore, Ibn Majah

narrates this hadith from Abu Malik Al-Ash'ari in the following wording: "From among my followers there will be some people who will drink wine, giving it other names while they listen to musical instruments and the singing of female singers; Allah the Almighty will make the earth swallow them and will turn them into monkeys and pigs." (Reported by Ibn Hibban in his Sahih)

Conclusion on Permissibility of Musical Instruments

In the light of the above, it is clear that the religious texts that stand as a basis for those who maintain that singing is haram are either ambiguous or inauthentic. None of the hadiths attributed to Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) is valid as evidence on the judgment of prohibition. Moreover, all these hadiths are declared 'weak' by the followers of Ibn Hazm, Malik, Ibn Hanbal, and Ash-Shafi'i.

In his book, Al-Ahkam, Al-Qadi Abu Bakr Ibn Al-Arabi says, "None of the hadiths maintaining that singing is prohibited are considered authentic (by the scholars of the Science of Hadith Methodology)." The same view is maintained by Al-Ghazali and Ibn An-Nahwi in Al-Umdah. Ibn Tahir says, "Not even a single letter from all these Hadiths was proved to be authentic."

Ibn Hazm says, "All the hadiths narrated in this respect were invented and falsified."

Proofs of Those Who Maintain that Singing is Halal:

First: The Textual Proofs:

They base their argument on some authentic hadiths of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him). One of these hadiths is the following:

..A'ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) narrated: "Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him, came to my house while two girls were singing beside me the songs of Bu'ath (a story about the pre-Islamic war between the two tribes of the Ansar, the Khazraj and the Awus). The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) laid down and turned his face to the other side. Then Abu Bakr came and spoke to me harshly saying, 'Musical instruments of Satan near the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him)?' Thereupon, Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him) turned his face towards him and said, 'Leave them.' When Abu Bakr became inattentive, I signaled to those girls to go out and they left." (Reported by Al-Bukhari)

This indicates that these two girls were not so young as claimed by some scholars. If they were, Abu Bakr would not have been angry with them in such manner. In addition, in this hadith, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) wanted to teach the Jews that Islam has room for merriment and that he himself was sent with a moderate and flexible legislation. There is also another important lesson to learn

here. It draws our attention to the fact that one needs to introduce Islam to others in a good fashion, along with displaying its moderateness and magnanimity.

Moreover, we can also cite as corroborating this Allah's words that read, "But when they spy some merchandise or pastime they break away to it and leave thee standing. Say: That which Allah hath is better than pastime and than merchandise, and Allah is the best of providers." (Al-Jumu..ah: 11)

In this verse, Allah Almighty joins pastime with merchandise. He does not dispraise any of them, He just only rebuked the Companions who left Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) alone giving the khutbah (Friday Sermon), when they all rushed to attend to the caravan and beating of the drums celebrating its arrival.

Second: In Respect of Islam's Spirit and Basics:

It is a fact that Allah had prohibited for the Children of Israel some of the good things of this worldly life as a punishment for their misdeeds.

He says, "Because of the wrongdoing of the Jews, We forbade them good things which were (before) made lawful unto them, and because of their much hindering from Allah's way. And of their taking usury when they were forbidden it, and of their devouring people's wealth by false pretences. We have prepared for those of them who disbelieve a painful doom." (An-Nisa': 160-161)

Before sending Prophet Muhammad, He Almighty referred to him in the earlier scriptures as, "Those who follow the Messenger, the Prophet who can neither read nor write, whom they will find described in the Torah and the Gospel (which are) with them. He will enjoin on them that which is right and forbid them that which is wrong. He will make lawful for them all good things and prohibit for them only the foul." (Al-A..raf: 157)

Thus, Islam left nothing good or sound but declared it to be halal (lawful). This is a sign of mercy to this Ummah (nation or community), moving along the line of its comprehensive and eternal message. Allah Almighty says, "They ask you (O Muhammad) what is made lawful for them. Say: (all) good things are made lawful for you." (Al-Ma'idah: 4)

If we are to delve deeply into this matter, we will find that love for singing and melodic voices are almost a human instinct. We can observe an infant lying in his cradle soothed and sleeping by the sound of a lullaby. Mothers and nannies are always in the habit of singing for babies and children. Moreover, birds and animals respond to nice voices and rhythmic melodies.

Thereupon, if singing is thus a human instinct, it is not for Islam to defy humankind's instincts. Islam came to refine and promote the human instinct. Ibn

Taymyiah says, "Prophets were sent to polish and discipline man's instinct and not to change or modify it." This is pursuant to the hadith that reads, "When Allah's Messenger came to Madinah, he found them (i.e., the people of Madinah) celebrating two days. He said, 'What are these days?' They replied, 'We used to rejoice in these days during the pre-Islamic era.' He (peace and blessings be upon him) said, 'Verily, Allah Almighty has given you two alternative days which are much better: these are Al-Adha and Al-Fitr days (..Eids).'" (Reported by Ahmad, Abu Dawud and An-Nasa'i)

Moreover, if singing is to be considered rejoicing and play, these are not haram; this is in pursuant to the famous idea that man needs some time to relax a bit and rejoice. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said to Hanzalah who thought himself to be a hypocrite for his attendance to his wife and children and the change that affected him when he was apart from Allah's Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), "O Hanzalah! Part of your time should be devoted (to the worldly affairs) and part of time (should be devoted to prayer and meditation)." (Reported by Muslim)

..Ali Ibn Abu Talib says, "Amuse yourselves for some time, for if hearts are exposed to too much strain, they turn blind."

Abu Ad-Darda' said, "I refresh myself with some amusement in order to make myself stronger on the path of right."

Imam Al-Ghazali answered someone who asked him: "Isn't singing some kind of play and rejoice?" He said, "Yes. But, all that exists in this present life is mere play and rejoice. All that takes place between a husband and his wife is play, except sexual intercourse that is the direct cause of reproducing children. This has been reported from Allah's Messenger and his honorable Companions."

In fact, leisure time is refreshing to the heart and alleviates its tensions at the same time. Excessive strain and efforts render the heart bored and blind. Amusing the self refreshes and renews its strength and vigor. One who continuously works hard at something should take a break for a while in order to restore and regain his energy and firm will lest he totally collapses in future. When one takes a break, he thus restores his strength and vigor. Only Prophets can stand absolute seriousness. Having leisure time is a form of treatment for diseases of the self, weariness and boredom. But, leisure should not be excessive. This will go against the whole issue of rejoicing hearts to make them able to go on.

One who is familiar with and experienced in the nature of the human heart and self knows for certain that recreation and relaxation are necessary treatments for one's well-being.

These proofs on the permissibility of singing are extracted from the texts and rules of Islam, and these are sufficient to clarify the issue.

In addition to this, the people of Madinah, who were very pious and God-fearing, the Zahiriyyah, who were very literal regarding the textual proofs, and the Sufis, who were very strict and rigid, were all quoted to have declared the permissibility of singing.

Imam Ash-Shawkani says in his book "Nayl Al-Awtar", "The people of Madinah and those who agreed with them from among the Zahiriyyah and the Sufis maintain that singing is permissible, even when it is accompanied by a musical instrument such as the lute or the flute. Abu Mansur Al-Bughdadi Ash-Shafi'i narrate that ..Abdullah Ibn Ja..far saw nothing wrong in singing, and he, himself, used to compose the music for his own slaves who used to sing these melodies in his presence. This took place during the time of Commander of the Faithful, ..Ali Ibn Abi Talib. Abu Ja..far Al-Bughdadi narrates the same after Al-Qadi Shurayh, Sa..id Ibn Al-Musaiyb, ..Ata' Ibn Abu Rabah, Az-Zuhri and Ash-Shi..bi."

Ar-Ruwaiyani narrates on the authority of Al-Qaffal that Malik Ibn Anas maintained that singing with musical instruments is permissible. Also, Abu Mansur Al-Furani quotes Malik as maintaining that playing the flute is permissible.

Abu Al-Fadl Ibn Tahir narrates, "The people of Madinah never disputed over the permissibility of playing the lute."

Ibn An-Nahwi narrates in his "Al-..Umdah": "Ibn Tahir said, "The people of Madinah showed consensus over this (issue). Also, all the Zahiriyyah maintained the same."

Al-Mawardi attributes the permissibility of playing the lute to some of the Shafi'i followers and students. This has been narrated also by Abu Al-Fadl Ibn Tahir after Abu Ishaq Ash-Shirazi; and it is narrated by Al-Isnawi after Ar-Ruwaiyani and Al-Mawardi. Again, this is narrated by Al-Adfuwi after Sheikh ..Izz Ad-Deen Ibn ..Abd As-Salam. It is also narrated after Abu Bakr Ibn Al-..Arabi.

All these scholars consider singing that is accompanied by musical instruments permissible, but as for singing that is not accompanied by musical instruments, Al-Adfuwi says, "In some of his jurisprudence-related books, Al-Ghazali narrates the consensus of the scholars on its permissibility." Also, Ibn Tahir narrates the consensus of the Prophet's Companions and those who succeeded them on this very topic. Ibn An-Nahwi states in Al-..Umdah that singing and listening was deemed permissible by a group of the Companions and the Followers.

Conditions and Terms:

There are some conditions and terms that should be observed regarding listening to singing, as follows:

1. Not all sorts of singing are permissible. Rather, the permissible song should comply with the Islamic teachings and ethics. Therefore, the songs praising the tyrants and corrupt rulers disagree with Islamic teachings. In fact, Islam stands against transgressors and their allies, and those who show indifference to their transgression. So, the same goes for those songs that imply giving praises to such attitude!

2. Also, the way the song is performed weighs so much. The theme of the song may be good, but the performance of the singer – through intending excitement and arousing others' lusts and desires along with trying to seduce them – may move it to the area of prohibition, suspicion or even detest. The Glorious Qur'an addresses the wives of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) saying, "O you wives of the Prophet! You are not like any other women. If you keep your duty (to Allah), then be not soft of speech, lest he in whose heart is a disease aspire (to you), but utter customary speech." (Al-Ahzab: 32) So, one has to show caution to music when there is softness of speech accompanied with rhyme, melody, and special effects!

3. Singing should not be accompanied with something that is prohibited such as alcohol, nakedness, mixing of men with women that is common in pubs and nightclubs, etc.

4. Islam has declared excessiveness as prohibited in everything. The same goes for excessiveness in leisure and recreation even though these things are permissible ! This indicates that the emptiness of the mind and heart has to be observed and tackled during man's short-term life. One should know that Allah Almighty will ask every one about his life and his youth in particular.

There are some things in which one is to be his own judge and Mufti. If there is some kind of singing that arouses his own lust or desire, and takes him away from the real life, he should avoid it then and block that very gate from which the winds of trial and seduction may come and erase his religion, morals and heart. If he does this, he will live in peace and tranquility.

Warning against playing with the word "haram"

To conclude, we address the respectful scholars who tackle the word "haram" easily and set it free in their writings and fatwas that they should observe that Allah is watching over them in all that they say or do. They should also know that this word "haram" is very dangerous. It means that Allah's Punishment is due on a certain act or saying, and should not be based upon guessing, whims, weak Hadiths, not even through an old book. It has to be supported by a clear, well-established text or valid consensus. If these last two are not found, then we revert the given act or saying to the original rule: "permissibility governing things". We do have a good example to follow from one of our earlier pious scholars. Imam Malik (may Allah be pleased with him) who said: "It was not the habit of those who preceded us, the early pious

Muslims, who set good example for the following generations, to say, 'This is halal, and this is haram. But, they would say, 'I hate such-and-such, and ma! intain such-and-such, but as for halal and haram, this is what may be called inventing lies concerning Allah. Did not you hear Allah's Statement that reads, 'Say: Have you considered what provision Allah has sent down for you, how you have made of it lawful and unlawful? Say: Has Allah permitted you, or do you invent a lie concerning Allah?' (Yunus: 59) For, the halal is what Allah and His Messenger made lawful, and the haram is what Allah and His Messenger made unlawful.

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