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Music, singing & dancing

Introduction

The residents of non-Muslim countries, as well those in some Muslim countries, are used to be bombarded by music, songs, and rhythms of dancers, be they indoors or outdoors. A question arises in their minds: is it permissible for us to listen to this tune or that song? Is it permissible for us to dance? I shall answer these two questions and others like them in the following rules.

General Rules

537. **Music** is an art that has spread far and wide during these days. Some varieties of this art are permissible while others are forbidden; therefore, it is permissible to listen to the first while it is forbidden to listen to the latter.

538. Music that is permissible is the music that does not entail entertainment in gatherings held for that purpose. Forbidden music is the music that is suitable for entertainment and amusement gatherings.

539. The expression “the music or the song that is suitable for entertainment and amusement gatherings” does not mean that the music or the song’s tune amuses the heart or changes the mental state because there is nothing wrong in it. The expression actually means that the person listening to the music or the song’s tune —especially if he is an expert in these matters— can distinguish that this tune is used in the entertainment and amusement gatherings or that it is similar to the tunes used therein. (See the question–answer section below.)

540. It is permissible to visit places where *halal* music is being played, and it is permissible to listen to it as long as it is *halal*.

541. It is permissible to visit public places where music is being played, even if it is suitable for entertainment and amusement gatherings, provided that one does not intentionally listen to it: for example, passengers on course, waiting areas for visitors, public parks, restaurants and cafes, etc

—even if the music played there is suitable for entertainment and amusement gatherings— because there is no problem in hearing forbidden tunes without intending to listen to it.

542. It is permissible for adults as well as children to learn the art of *halal* music in music schools or other places as long as their visits to such places do not have any negative effect on their proper upbringing.

543. **Singing (*al-ghina'*)** is *haram*: doing it, listening to it, or living of it. By “singing — *al-ghina'*,” I mean an amusing statement expressed in the tunes that are suitable for those who provide entertainment and amusement.

544. It is not permissible to recite the Holy Qur'an, supplications (*du'as*), and words of praise in tunes that are commensurate to entertainment and amusement gatherings.

Based on obligatory precaution, one must refrain from reciting other non-amusing statements, in poetry or prose, in that tune. (See the question-answer section below.)

545. The prohibition of intentionally listening and giving ear to *haram* songs and music has been mentioned in the holy tradition. The Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.) said, “And the person with the [sin of] singing (*al-ghina'*) will be raised [on the day of resurrection] blind, deaf and dumb. The person with [the sin of] adultery, of wood-wind, and of drum will also be raised in the same way.”¹

He also said, “Whoever listens to the entertainment (song and music), lead will be melted inside his ear on the day of judgment.”² He also said, “Singing and music are enchantment for adultery.”³ That is, it is a stepping stone or a way that leads to adultery.

546. It is permissible for a woman to **dance** in front of her husband to please and arouse him. But it is not permissible for her to dance in front of other men; based on obligatory precaution, she must not dance in front of other women also. (See the question-answer section below.)

547. It is permissible to **applaud** in a marriage ceremony, religious gatherings, seminars, and other functions. This is equally permissible for women and men.

Questions and Answers

548. **Question:** Many questions are asked concerning permissible and forbidden music.

Is it correct to say that the music that arouses sexual, lustful urges and promotes unstable and degrading behaviour is the forbidden one?

And is it correct to say that the music that soothes the nerves or causes relaxation, the music that forms the background of a scene in a movie to increase the effect of the scene on the viewers, the music that is used for physical exercise during workouts, the music that dramatizes a particular scene by its tune, or

the one that arouses the zeal [in soldiers] is the permissible one?

Answer: Forbidden music is the music that is suitable for entertainment and amusement gatherings, even if it does not arouse sexual temptations.

Permissible music is the music that is not suitable for such gatherings, even if it does not soothe the nerves like the martial music and that played at funerals.

549. **Question:** Just as many questions are asked about *halal* and *haram* music, many questions are asked about *halal* and *haram* songs.

Is it correct to say that haram songs are those that arouse sexual, lustful urges and promote unstable and degrading behaviour?

Is it correct to say that songs that do not arouse lustful desires, but elevate the souls and thoughts to lofty levels like religious songs of praise dedicated to the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) and the Imams (a.s.), or the songs that lift the spirits and morale [of the fighters] and the like are *halal* songs?

Answer: All songs (*al-ghina'*) are *haram*. Based on the definition that we accept, *al-ghina'* is the entertaining expression by way of tunes that are common to those who provide entertainment and amusement.

In this prohibition, we should include the recitation of the Holy Qur'an, supplications (*du'as*), and songs of praise of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) uttered to the accompaniment of those tunes [that are used by the entertainers]. The prohibition of reciting other non-entertaining expressions —like songs intended to lift the morale [of fighters]— is based on compulsory precaution.

However, the tune that cannot be described as such is not *haram* by itself.

560. **Question:** Is it permissible to listen to religious songs in praise of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) that are accompanied with music?

Answer: Songs (*al-ghina'*) are *haram* absolutely. However, singing praise [of the Prophet or the Ahlul Bayt] that is sung with a good tune but is not in *ghina'* form is without problem.

As for the music, it would be allowed, if it is not suitable for entertainment and amusement gatherings.

561. **Question:** Is it permissible to soothe the senses by listening to the reciter of the Qur'an who recites in a vibrant, quavering tone?

Answer: If the tune used in its recitation is not *ghina'*, there is no problem in listening to it.

562. **Question:** Some of the reciters, singers or chanters adopt the tunes of sinful people [i.e., haram entertainers] and then sing or chant with their tunes poems in praise of the Prophet (s.a.w.) and his

family—the result is that the context is different from that of the sinful people, yet the tune is suitable to theirs. Is it forbidden to sing in this way? Is it forbidden to listen [in this case]?

Answer: Yes, based on obligatory precaution it is forbidden.

563. Question: Is it permissible for women to sing in the a wedding party in whatever tune, even if it is suitable for the gatherings of sinful people? Is it permissible for them to use musical instruments while singing that night? Is it permissible for them to sing, wearing henna [on the bride's hand and feet], or on the eve of the seventh night [after the marriage]? Or is the permission restricted to the marriage eve?

Answer: Based on compulsory precaution, they should refrain from it, even on the marriage eve, let alone other occasions. As for the issue of music, its rules have already been mentioned earlier.

564. Question: Is it permissible to listen to revolutionary songs accompanied by sounds of piano, lute, drum, wind-pipe, and electronic piano?

Answer: If the music accompanying it is that which is suitable for entertainment and amusement gatherings, it is not permissible to listen to it.

565. Question: What is the meaning of the phrase: “common among sinful people”?

Answer: This expression is not mentioned in our fatwas (religious edicts). What we have mentioned in defining *al-ghina'* is “the tunes that are common for those who provide entertainment and amusement;” whose meaning is clear.

566. Question: A non-practicing Muslim has recently become more committed [to Islam]. Is it permissible for him to softly hum what he remembers from the past songs by himself or in front of his friends?

Answer: If it falls in the category of *al-ghina'*, then it is not allowed.

567. Question: There are certain songs in foreign languages that the teachers of linguistics recommend listening to in order to expedite the learning process of that language. Is it permissible to listen to such songs for that purpose?

Answer: If it falls within the category of *al-ghina'* as explained earlier, it is not allowed.

567. Question: Musical instruments are of different kinds. Sometimes they are used in musical gatherings and sometimes for soothing the soul. Is it then permissible to buy these instruments, manufacture them, deal in them, or play them to soothe the soul or listen to the ir sounds when someone else is playing them?

Answer: It is not permissible to deal in the instruments of *haram* entertainment: neither selling nor buying, just as it is not permissible to manufacture them and accept remuneration for making them.

“An instrument of *haram* entertainment” means that its physical shape—that gives its value and eventually the purpose for acquiring it— is not suitable except for use in *haram* entertainment.

568. Question: Is it permissible to manufacture, sell, or buy musical instruments that are made for children’s play? And is it permissible for adults to use them?

Answer: If the music that is suitable for entertainment and amusement gatherings comes out of it, then it is neither permissible to deal in, nor are adults allowed to use them.

569. Question: In government schools of the United Kingdom and may be some other countries also, students have to take part in dance classes to the sound of special musical tunes that synchronize the movements of the students while they are dancing.

(a) Is it permissible to attend such classes?

(b) Is it obligatory on the parents to prevent their children from attending such classes if the young boy or girl is inclined towards attending them?

Answer: (a) It is not permitted, if it has any negative effect —which is quite common— on their religious upbringing. Rather, it is not permitted at all, as a matter of obligatory precaution.

(b) Yes, it is obligatory. Also please refer to the answer to question no. 563 below.

570. Question: Is it permissible to learn dancing?

Answer: It is not allowed at all, as a matter of obligatory precaution.

571. Question: Is it permissible to organize dance parties where each husband dances only with his own wife to the sound of soothing musical tunes, wearing dresses that are not indecent?

Answer: It is not allowed.

572. Question: Is it permissible for women to dance in front of other women or for men to dance in front of other men in a gender-wise segregated gathering with or without music?

Answer: Dancing of women in front of women or dancing of men in front of men is problematic, as a matter of obligatory precaution, one must refrain from it. The rules governing music have already been discussed earlier.

573. Question: Is it permissible for a wife to dance for her husband with music or without music?

Answer: It is allowed as long as dancing is not accompanied with *haram* music.

574. Question: Some schools in the West make it obligatory that their male and female students learn dancing. This dancing is neither accompanied by the common song, nor is it for entertainment; it is part

of the educational curriculum. So, is it *haram* for the parents to allow their sons and daughters to attend such classes?

Answer: Yes, if it contravenes the religious upbringing. Rather it is, based on obligatory precaution, forbidden absolutely, if the student has reached the age of maturity — except if he has a valid reason for approving of it; for example, if he follows a *mujtahid* who allows it. In the latter case, nothing prevents him from allowing his child to take part in [such activity].

[1.](#) As-Sayyid al-Khu'l, al-Masa'ilu 'sh-Shar'iyya, vol. 2, p. 22.

[2.](#) Ibid.

[3.](#) Ibid, p. 23.

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