

The Status of Music in Islam

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Written by Saleem Bhimji

Introduction

Since time immemorial, the issue of music has been debated by various sectors of the Muslim world. Both sides in the debate have brought their proofs and arguments with the hope of making the other side see "the light" and thus bring an end to this time consuming dilemma.

It is not the purpose of this short article to bring all the evidence in regards to the ruling of Allah جل جلاله and His Prophet صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم in regards to music; rather, we will suffice with the minimum, with the hopes that Insha-Allah, it will help and guide the Muslims – especially the youth – to distinguish between what is right and what is wrong.

Before discussing the ruling of music, a few of the Islamic (Arabic) terms must be defined that are constantly referred to in this article, in the different ahādīth and in the various books of Ahkam. These include the following:

Muḥrib: The definition of Muḥrib is:

خفة يعتري الانسان لشدة حزن أو سرور

They (the scholars of Islam and the Arabic language) have said that: Muḥrib sounds are those which cause a person to become carefree, happy or sad (bring about a change in one's emotions).

Ghin: The 'Ulamā have defined Ghin as such:

مد الصوت المشتمل على الترجيح المطرب

Ghin is the prolonging of the voice, along with a change of pitch in the throat, such that it would be suitable for gatherings of vain and futile pleasure (muḥrib).

In itself, a pleasing sound or reciting something in a pleasing way does not constitute Ghin. Rather Ghin is explained as the prolonging of the sound along with a change in the pitch in such a way that is

suitable for vain and futile gatherings and assemblies of sinning (such as nightclubs, discos, dance-halls, etc.).

Lahw: This is an Arabic term which is used extensively in Islamic jurisprudence and it means anything that is vain or futile. Sometimes, it will be used to refer to a place such as when the scholars refer to music that is played or used in places where vain or futile acts are taking place such as the nightclub, disco, etc; and sometimes it refers to a particular act or certain acts that are done with no use or purpose behind them except to 'waste time'.

Music: When we talk about Music, we are actually referring to the complete piece of work that one is listening to which includes the sounds (instruments) and the lyrics.

When we refer to the dictionary, we see the following definition of music¹:

mu·sic (myzk)

n. Abbr. mus.

1. The art of arranging sounds in time so as to produce a continuous, unified, and evocative composition, as through melody, harmony, rhythm, and timbre.
2. Vocal or instrumental sounds possessing a degree of melody, harmony, or rhythm.
 - a) A musical composition.
 - b) The written or printed score for such a composition.
 - c) Such scores considered as a group: *We keep our music in a stack near the piano.*
3. A musical accompaniment.
4. A particular category or kind of music.
5. An aesthetically pleasing or harmonious sound or combination of sounds: *the music of the wind in the pines.*

In the religion of Islam and the Fiqh of the Ahl al-Bait عليهم السلام, listening to *forbidden music* has been counted as one of the *major* sins.

In the famous book, *The Major Sins* written by the martyred scholar Ayatullah Sayyid Dastghaib ash-Shirazi, he wrote the following concerning the sin of listening to and indulging in music (this has been listed as sin number 15 in his monumental work):

Music as stated in Greater Sins, Sin 15

Playing instruments of music is a great Sin. It is haram to play instruments such as the guitar, piano, tambourine, drums etc. Listening to music is also a great sin. Music as a great sin is reported by Faql ibn Sha'qan from Imam 'Ali ibn Musa ar-Rida عليه السلام :

"And to be engrossed in musical instruments is also one of the great sins."

All the Mujtahids are unanimous in their opinion that the manufacturing, selling and purchasing of musical instruments is *haram* (forbidden) and any income derived from musical activity is also haram. The transactions involving these (instruments) are invalid (*b^{at}il*). It is *haram* to keep instruments of music in one's possession – it is obligatory to destroy them. This is revealed in a lengthy tradition from Imam Ja'far ibn Muhammad as-Sadiq عليه السلام , as recorded in the book "Tuhaf al-'Uqul". Similarly, Shaykh Hurr al-Amuli (the compiler of the famous collection of hadith entitled Wasa'il ash-Shi'a) records the following tradition from Imam Ja'far ibn Muhammad as-Sadiq عليه السلام :

"The Almighty Allah has prohibited the manufacturing of all such things that are exclusively used in haram ways; and things that only create evil such as the pipe, flute, chess and all types of instruments of gambling, images and statues. The manufacturing of all such articles is haram."

The Imam عليه السلام concluded, *"Thus even learning to sing or play music, teaching it, to be paid for these things, or to be in any way engrossed in these vices is haram."*

Music – According to the Ahadith (Traditions)

Some more traditions prohibiting music are given below.

Imam Ja'far ibn Muhammad as-Sadiq reports from the Holy Prophet Muhammad that he said: *"I prohibit for you dancing and playing flute and drums."* (Al-Kafi)

The Holy Prophet also said: *"The Almighty Allah has sent me as a mercy to the worlds and to guide the people. He ordered me to eradicate the playing of flute, other instruments of music, all games of vice, idol (worship) and all practices of the days of ignorance."* (Mustadrakul Wasa'il, Chapter 79)

Imam Ja'far ibn Muhammad as-Sadiq says: *"A person who has received blessings from Allah and while having these blessings, he plays the flute, it is as if he has been thankless of the blessings."* (Wasa'il ash-Shi'a)

Let us remember that every moment of our lives, we are enjoying Allah's unlimited benevolence.

Music Causes Shamelessness and Hypocrisy

The Sixth Imam, Ja'far ibn Muhammad has also stated: *"The playing of the violin promotes the growth of hypocrisy in the heart like water assists the growth of vegetation (algae)."* (Wasa'il ash-Shi'a)

The Imam also says: *"If drums and cymbals are played at one's house, then for forty days, Allah will impose a satan by the name of 'Qafandar'. The satans will infiltrate into every cell of the person's body. With the spread of this evil, the person loses all sense of dignity and self-esteem. One will then not care as to what he says or what is said about him. Then, this satan will blow into this person and as a result, one will become utterly shameless. So much so that he will not be concerned or affected even if his women are dishonored."* (Wasa'il ash-Shi'a)

It is usually observed that people in whose homes music is played on a regular basis, either using musical instruments, by radio or cassettes, are absolutely shameless and wanton.

Musicians and Songs

Muaddal Ibn Ziyad says: "I was in the company of Imam Ja'far ibn Muhammad as-Sadiq when a person said, *"When I go to the toilet, I can hear the singing girls of my neighbor. Sometimes, I remain (in the toilet) a bit longer so that I may listen to more of it."* Imam replied: *"Desist from listening to music and songs attentively."* Then this man further said, *"Master, I do not go to music gatherings! I only hear the sounds!"* The Sixth Imam said, *"Have you not read the Quranic verse: **"Surely, the hearing and the sight and the heart, all of these shall be questioned about that?"*** (Surah Bani Isra'il 17:36)

The man replied: *"I was not aware of this verse and thus, I regret my actions. I shall not listen (to music) in the future. I repent for my past sins and I seek forgiveness from my Lord."*

Seeing his condition, Imam said: *"Get up! Go perform ghusl, offer Salat and pray for your forgiveness. You have certainly been involved in a deadly sin and a terrible situation. You have repented for it and I thank Allah for that; and I seek forgiveness of Allah for all those things that He dislikes. Certainly, Allah only dislikes the evil things. Leave the evil things for the evil people, because there are different people suitable for different things."* (Al-Kafi – Chapter on Music).

Divine Bounties (Barakah) are Removed

Amir Al-Momineen 'Ali ibn Abi Talib says: *"Angels do not even enter a house in which there is wine, drums, tambourines or a flute. Even the prayers of the inhabitants of this house are not accepted. They are deprived of any barakah."* (Wasail ash-Shia)

Imam 'Ali ibn Musa ar-Rida has said: *"To listen to a musical instrument is one of the major sins."* (Mustadrak al-Wasa'il)

Blackened Face of the Musician

The Holy Prophet of Islam has stated: *“A person who possesses a ‘sitar’ will be raised on the Day of Judgement with a black face. His hands will be holding a ‘sitar’ of fire. Seventy thousand angels with maces of fire will hit him on the face and the head. The singer will arise from his grave – blind, deaf and dumb. The adulterer will be similarly raised. The player of flute will also be made to rise in this way, as will be the drum player.”* (Mustadrak al-Wasa’il).

It means that all such people will appear on the field of “Mahshar” (on the day of reckoning) as blind, deaf and dumb.

Houses Where Music Is Played for Forty Days

Imam ‘Ali ibn Musa ar-Rida has said: *“A person invites Divine wrath when instruments like flute, drum and chess are played for forty days in his house. If this man dies within these forty days, his death would be of a sinner and a transgressor. His place shall be in Hell and what a dreadful place this is!”* (Mustanad al-Taraqi)

Music in the Last Period of Time

The traditions concerning the signs of the last stage before the return of our twelfth Holy Imam mentions the following about music:

“You shall see that music will be so prevalent that no one will dissuade others, nor will one find in one self the need to do so. You shall see that music will be openly played even in the two sanctuaries (the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah).” (Mustanade Naraqı)

This is what we see in the present age where obscene music is openly played: in the markets, on the streets, in shops, in houses and even cars, and no one bothers to prevent it!

So far we have mentioned the punishment in the hereafter for the playing or listening to music. Now, we shall discuss the evils of music that affect one’s life on earth.

These evils too are numerous; and scholars have compiled complete books on this subject. For example, there are the following books in Persian: “Munazrah Doctor-o-Peer – A Discussion between a Doctor and Patient”, “Balahaee Ijtemai – Societal Problems”, “Mauseeqi-o-Islam – Music and Islam”, etc.

Effects of Music on Nervous System

Expert Doctors, Scientists and Biologists have defined two types of nerves – the principal nerves and the

arterial nerves. The principal nerves stretch from the neck to all vital organs; while the arterial nerves spread from the main nerves to all parts of the body.

The secondary nerves are connected to outward parts of the body and convey the messages to the brain. When the veins enlarge, the blood pressure decreases. Due to the shriveling of blood vessels, the blood pressure increases. When the blood pressure varies at different parts of the body, thus as a result, it affects the health.

The secondary nerves work to produce heat, whereas the function of the central nerves is to produce the opposite effect. It is due to these nerves that feelings of sloth, sleep, thoughtlessness, forgetfulness, grief, sorrow, fainting, unconsciousness and even death occur.

Since music affects various nerves, it can give rise to various maladies. Mental diseases, as well as physical ailments can also occur, and these mental effects can destroy man's reasoning capacity. It is for this reason that one who listens to music is unable to perform work that can be accomplished by a sane person.

Music creates vibrations in the body which are conveyed to all parts of the body through the nervous system. As a result of this, indigestion occurs. Music affects the heart in such a way that the heart beats become irregular. The blood pressure goes awry. All such ailments make a person permanently ill.

Consequently, even modern medical science, in spite of its astonishing progress, fails in such a situation. Sometimes, the music is so intense that the listeners lose their sanity; and they become dumb and various kinds of mental diseases occur. In places where music is more prevalent, we find that there are more neurotic illnesses. It is for this reason that more mental hospitals are found in Europe and America.

Dr. Adlen writes against music, "Even though it seems pleasant, the effects of music is profound upon the nervous system. Especially, when the temperature is high, the ill effect of music is more. This is the reason that ill effects of music are more in the hot areas of Iran and Saudi Arabia.

The American people are so disgusted with the bane of music that they have united to demand from the senate a permanent ban on music. It is a pity that the whole world clearly perceives the evils of music but yet still adopt it as entertainment."

(Refer to the booklet; "Tasir Mausiqi bar Asaab – The Effects of Music on Parts of the Body" Pg. 3, 6,10)

Initially, it may seem unrealistic that any pleasing or harmonious sound could be forbidden and one will be given such a painful punishment for indulging in such a thing, but there is no need to be amazed. Insha–Allah, by the end of this article, that which is forbidden will be made clear, and that which is allowed will also be made clear.

In Islam, the term Ghina is used in reference to "singing" and as explained in the beginning of this article,

not every pleasing sound or voice in which the pitch is changed up and down can be classified as singing – thus making it forbidden to listen to.

From this, it is clear that not all sounds that are pleasing are forbidden. However, if one recites something in a manner in which those listening would think he/she is reciting it in a way of singing, then it crosses the boundaries of permissibility making it Ghina and a sin.

It makes no difference if what is being recited is Qur'an, a Dua, Nawhas (poetry in praise of the Prophet, or the Ahl al-Bait recited during the months of Muharram, Safar, and other times), or anything else.

Who was the founder of Music?

لما مات آدم عليه السلام وشمّت به إبليس وقابيل فاجتمعا في الارض فجعل إبليس وقابيل المعازف والملاهي شماتة بآدم عليه السلام فكل ما كان في الارض من هذا الضرب الذي يتلذذ به الناس فإنما هو من ذاك

"When Adam (peace be upon him) passed away, Iblis and Qabil (the son of Adam) were delighted. They both gathered on the Earth and Iblis and Qabil used a Ma'azif (stringed instrument – violin, guitar, piano, etc.) and the Malahiyah (any type of musical instrument) to rejoice on the death of Adam (peace be upon him). Thus, whatever types of instruments are on the Earth that people derive pleasure from are from these instruments (that they had first used).

قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله: كان إبليس أول تغنى

The Prophet of Allah (blessings of Allah be upon him and his family) said: *"(Iblis was the first person to play music/sing."*

قال الامام جعفر الصادق عليه السلام: مَنْ أَنْعَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ بِنِعْمَةٍ فَجَاءَ عِنْدَ تِلْكَ النِّعْمَةِ بِمِزْمَارٍ فَقَدْ كَفَرَهَا وَ مَنْ أُصِيبَ بِمُصِيبَةٍ فَجَاءَ عِنْدَ تِلْكَ الْمُصِيبَةِ بِنَائِحَةٍ فَقَدْ كَفَرَهَا

Imam Ja'far ibn Muhammad as-Sadiq (peace be upon him) had said: *"When a person is graced with a blessing from Allah and with this blessing, the person goes towards music, then verily he has been ungrateful to Him. As well, if a person is afflicted with trials and tribulations and he responds to them by sighs or lamenting, then too, verily he has been ungrateful to Him."*

As for the punishment of one who listens to Music, we read the following narrations from the Prophet and his Ahl al-Bait:

قال الامام جعفر الصادق عليه السلام: ان شيطاناً يقال له: القفندر، اذا ضرب في منزل اربعين صباحاً بالبربط

ودخل عليه الرجال وضع ذلك الشيطان كل عضو منه على مثله من صاحب البيت، ثم نفخ فيه نفخة فلا يغار بعدها حتى تؤتى نساؤه فلا يغار.

Imam Ja'far ibn Muhammad as-Sadiq (peace be upon him) said: *"Verily Shaitan is referred to as al-Qafandar (one with a bad face) because he spends forty days in the house of a person who plays drums and cymbals. The Shaitan strokes all the parts of the person's body (so that the eyes, ears, tongue and all other parts of the body are placed under the control of Shaitan so that they can all fall into sin). After this, in order to completely drown the person in evil and darkness, Shaitan blows a wind into this person, making him become utterly shameless so much so, that even if his own wife was to have unlawful relations with another person, he would not be concerned or affected."* (Usul al-Kafi, Volume 6, Page 432)

قال الامام جعفر الصادق عليه السلام: يت الغناء لا تؤمن فيه الفجيعة، ولا تجاب فيه الدعوة، ولا تدخله الملائكة

Imam Ja'far ibn Muhammad as-Sadiq (peace be upon him) further said: *"Those who live in a house in which music is played are not protected from painful death and troubles, their supplications are not answered, and the Angels do not enter (their house)."* (Usul al-Kafi, Volume 6, Page 433)

قال الامام جعفر الصادق عليه السلام: لا تدخلوا بيوتا الله معرض عن أهلها

Imam Ja'far ibn Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: *"Do not enter into the houses which due to committing sins (listening to music) have been prevented from enjoying the mercy of Allah."* (Usul al-Kafi, Volume 6, Page 432)

قال الامام جعفر الصادق عليه السلام: ضرب العيدان ينبت النفاق في القلب كما ينبت الماء الخضرة

Imam Ja'far ibn Muhammad as-Sadiq (peace be upon him) said: *"Playing music (for example hitting the drum, etc.) makes hypocrisy grow in the heart, just like water makes vegetation grow."* (Usul al-Kafi, Volume 6, Page 434)

قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله: إنما نهيت عن صوتين أحمقين فاجرين: صوت عند نعمة لهو ومزامير الشيطان وصوت عند مصيبة خمش وجوه، وشق جيوب، ورنه شيطان.

The Prophet of Allah (peace be upon him and his family) said: "Verily I was prohibited from two types of sounds which are useless and vain- one is the sound of the vain song or chant and the sound of Shaitan that misguides people; and the other is the crying that one does when he hears of a problem

which accompanied by the scratching of the face, ripping of the clothes and the satanic sound of crying accompanied with this.” (Al-Ghadir, Volume 8 Page 235 Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, Volume 13, page 218)

قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله: لا تدخل الملائكة بيتا فيه خمر أو دف أو طنبور أو نرد ولا يستجاب دعائهم و ترفع عنهم البركة.

The Prophet of Allah (peace be upon him and his family) said: "*The Angels do not enter into that house in which there is alcohol, a drum, a tanbour or cards (gambling instruments); their supplications are not answered and the blessings are removed from them.*" (Wasa'il ash-Shi'a, Volume 12, Page 235 I Mustadarak al-Wasa'il, Volume 13, Page 218)

قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله: الغناء رقية الزنا

The Prophet of Allah (peace be upon him and his family) said: "*Singing (music) is close to adultery.*" (Ad-Dur al-Manthur, Volume 5, Page 308 I Mustadarak al-Wasa'il, Volume 13, Page 215 (new print))

قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله: إياكم والغناء ، فإنه يُنقص الحياء ويزيد في الشهوة ويهدم المروءة ، وإنه لينوب عن الخمر ، ويفعل ما يفعل السكر ، فإن كنتم لا بُدَّ فاعلين فجنبوه النساء ؛ إن الغناء داعية الزنا

The Prophet of Allah (peace be upon him and his family) said: "*Stay away from ghina (singing and music) because it destroys the shame (modesty) and increases the sexual excitement. It kills one's manliness and verily leads one to alcohol and he will then become drunk. Thus, if you are lead into music, then stay away from women since music and singing will lead a person to commit adultery.*" (Ad-Dur al-Manthur, Volume 5, Page 308)

قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله: إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ بَعَثَنِي هُدًى وَرَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ ، وَأَمَرَنِي رَبِّي أَنْ أُمَحِّقَ الْمَزَامِيرَ ، وَالْمَعَارِفَ ، وَالْخُمُورَ ، وَالْأَوْتَانَ وَأُمُورَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ إِلَى أَنْ قَالَ إِنَّ الْإِتْمَارَ الْمَزَامِيرَ شَرَّهَا وَبَيْعُهَا وَثَمْنُهَا وَالتَّجَارَةُ بِهَا حَرَامٌ. الْخَبَرُ.

The Prophet of Allah (peace be upon him and his family) said: "*Verily Allah, the Highest appointed me to guide (mankind) and as a mercy for the entire universe, and commanded me to remove the Mazamir (a type of drum), the Ma'azif (a stringed instrument such as a piano, violin, guitar, etc.), the autar and the awthan as well as the acts of the period of Ignorance.*" He then said, "*Verily the instruments of music, its construction, selling, profit and trading (of them) are all forbidden.*" (Mustadarak al-Wasa'il, Volume 13, Page 219)

قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله: يحشر صاحب الطنبور يوم القيامة وهو اسود الوجه وبيده طنبور من نار ، وفوق رأسه سبعون الف ملك بيد كل مقمعه يضربون وجهه ورأسه ويحشر صاحب الغناء من قبره اعمى واخرس وابكم ويحشر الزاي مثل ذلك وصاحب المزممار مثل ذلك وصاحب الدف مثل ذلك

The Prophet of Allah (peace be upon him and his family) said: *"The person who plays the drum will be raised on the Day of Judgement while his face will be black and in his hands will be a drum made of fire. Above his head will be 70,000 angels and in the hand of each of them will be a chain, which they will hit against that person's head and face. The person who sang will be brought forth from his grave blind, deaf and mute. The one who performed adultery will be gathered and raised in the same manner. The one who played the wood instrument will be the same, and so will the player of the drum."* (Mustadarak al-Wasa'il, Volume 13, Page 219)

قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله: من استمع الى اللهو يُذاب في اذنه الإنك

The Prophet of Allah (peace be upon him and his family) said: *"One who listens to lahw (music or any vain talk) will have hot molten lead poured into his ears on the Day of Judgement."* (Mustadarak al-Wasa'il, Volume 13, Page 222)

قال الامام جعفر الصادق عليه السلام: المغنية ملعونة ومن اداها ملعون وأكل كسبها ملعون

Imam Ja'far ibn Muhammad as-Sadiq (peace be upon him) said: *"The female slave girl or woman who sings is cursed, and so is the one who gives her money, as well one who spends that money is also cursed."* (Safinatul Bihar, Volume 2, Page 32)

The Reward of One Who Keeps Away from Music

قال الامام علي بن موسى الرضا عليه السلام: من نزّه نفسه عن الغناء فإنّ في الجنة شجرة يأمر الله عزّ وجلّ الرياح أن تحركها، فيسمع منها صوتاً لم يسمع مثله، ومن لم يتنزّه عنه لم يسمعه

Imam 'Ali ibn Musa ar-Rida (peace be upon him) said:

"One who stays away from Ghina will be given a tree in Paradise in its place which Allah (SWT) will order the wind to move. A beautiful sound will come from that tree filling up paradise – a sound which no person till today has ever heard. However, a person who did not keep away from Ghina will never hear that sound."

The Holy Qur'an and Music

In addition to the al-hadith, there are numerous verses of the Qur'an dealing with "music" as we know it today, and in actuality, anything which is vain or futile. Allah has mentioned:

فَاجْتَنِبُوا الرِّجْسَ مِنَ الْأَوْثَانِ وَاجْتَنِبُوا قَوْلَ الزُّورِ ...

"So abstain from the pollution of the idols and abstain from false, vain words." (al-Qur'an 22:30)

The Arabic word *Zur* (false, vain words) has several meanings some of which include falsehood and the musical expressions. According to Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq "pollution of the idols" means chess; and "vain words" means music. In this verse we see how Allah compares refraining from "idols", with staying away from "vain words" or music!

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يَشْتَرِي لَهْوَ الْحَدِيثِ لِيُضِلَّ عَن سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ وَيَتَّخِذَهَا هُزُوًا أُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مُّهِينٌ

"And amongst people there is he who buys 'vain talk' so that he may lead others astray from the path of Allah without (real) knowledge and takes it (the revelation of Allah) for a mockery; for these shall be a disgracing chastisement (punishment)." (al-Qur'an 31:6)

'Lahw' means anything that diverts the mind from serious thinking. "Vain talk" has been interpreted by the Imam as any talk, sound or thing which diverts the attention of man from the ultimate aim of his creation, in other words, it makes him forget Allah and His commands: example, fictions, romantic stories, novels, and such literature and as well as all useless talk. It includes music, intoxicants and all such diversions. (Tafsir As-Safi)

Imam Muhammad ibn 'Ali al-Baqir said: "Music is among the things for which Allah has promised the Fire (of Hell). Then he recited the above verse." (al-Kafi; Wasail ash-Shia; Tafsir As-Safi)

* قَدْ أَفْلَحَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ * الَّذِينَ هُمْ فِي صَلَاتِهِمْ خَاشِعُونَ * وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنِ اللَّغْوِ مُعْرِضُونَ

"Successful indeed are the believers those who in their prayers are humble and those who keep themselves aloof from vain (words and deeds)." (Holy Qur'an 23: 1-3)

What does the word 'Lahw' (vain words and actions) mean in this verse? The first Imam, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib said that "all that is void of the remembrance of Allah is 'lahw'".

According to other authentic traditions of the A'immah, 'lahw' means all useless entertainment, wasteful of times among which music has been specifically mentioned. Also included in this term are vain games

which are played just to waste time.

وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَشْهَدُونَ الزُّورَ وَإِذَا مَرُّوا بِاللَّغْوِ مَرُّوا كِرَامًا

"(And the servants of the Merciful Allah are those...) who bear not witness to what is false, and when they pass by what is vain they pass with dignity." (Holy Qur'an 25:72)

The words 'Zur' and 'Lahw' have been explained earlier. According to the traditions from the A'immah, the first part may also be translated in this way: "who do not witness what is vain;" and accordingly, it has been interpreted in the exegesis of the Qur'an as "do not listen to music."

The following two traditions explain the second part of the verse:

Imam Ja'far ibn Muhammad as-Sadiq asked some of his companions: "Where are you staying?" They replied: "With so and so, who has singing and dancing girls." Imam said: "You should have dignity." They thought that the Imam had advised them to treat the host generously. But they were not sure so they returned to the Imam and requested him to explain the meaning of it to them.

The Imam said: "Have you not heard Allah saying 'when they pass by what is vain they pass with dignity'? The Imam meant that you should not stay with a man who has singing and dancing girls.

Muhammad ibn Abi 'Ibad was known to indulge in music and liquor. He once asked Imam 'Ali ibn Musa ar-Riqa about listening to music. The Imam said: "Some people in Hijaz have their own view about it; but that view is absolutely wrong. Have you not heard the word of Allah 'when they pass by what is vain they pass in dignity'?" Meaning that his opinion regarding music was that those who 'heard' it, would pass by it and pay it no heed.

عن أبي بصير قال: سألت أبا عبد الله عليه السلام عن قول الله عز وجل: ((فَاجْتَنِبُوا الرِّجْسَ مِنَ الْأَوْثَانِ وَاجْتَنِبُوا قَوْلَ الزُّورِ)) قال: الغناء

It has been narrated from Abi Basir that he said, "I asked Aba 'Abdillah regarding the words of Allah, The Glorious and Great, 'and stay away from the filth of the idols and stay away from the vain talk.' Surah al-Hajj, Verse 30 The Imam said, 'This is Ghina'" (Al-Kafi, Volume 6, Page 431)

عن أبي عبد الله عليه السلام قال في عن قول الله عز وجل: ((فَاجْتَنِبُوا الرِّجْسَ مِنَ الْأَوْثَانِ وَاجْتَنِبُوا قَوْلَ الزُّورِ)) قال: الرجس من الاوثان الشطرنج وقول الزور الغناء

It has been narrated from Abi 'Abdillah that he said regarding the words of Allah, the Glorious and Great, 'and stay away from the filth of the idols and stay away from the vain talk.' That he said, "The filth of the

idols is chess and the vain talk is ghina." (Tafsir Nur ath- Thaqaalain, Volume 3, Page 496)

وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَشْهَدُونَ الزُّورَ ((أَي مَجَالِسِ الْفَسَاقِ وَلَا يَحْصِرُونَ الْبَاطِلَ))

"...and those people who do not witness false speech." Means the gatherings of the immoral (people) and those who are not surrounded by false (speech).

عن أبي جعفر عليه السلام قال: الغناء مما وعد الله عز وجل عليه النار وتلا هذه الآية: ((وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يَشْتَرِي لَهْوَ الْحَدِيثِ لِيُضِلَّ عَن سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ وَيَتَّخِذَهَا هُزُوًا أُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مُّهِينٌ))

It has been narrated that Abi Ja'far said: "*Ghina is that (sin) for which Allah, the Glorious and the High, has promised the hell-fire.*" The Imam then read the following verse of the Qur'an: "**And among the people is he who purchases vain talk so as to mislead people from the path of Allah without knowledge and he takes that (vain talk) as treat it as a matter of fun. Verily for them is a punishment.**" (Al- Kafi, Volume 6, Page 431)

الغناء مجلس لا ينظر الله إلى أهله وهو مما قال الله عز وجل: ((وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يَشْتَرِي لَهْوَ الْحَدِيثِ لِيُضِلَّ عَن سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ))

Imam Ja'far said: "*A gathering in which there is Ghina is one in which Allah does not even look upon the people in attendance (meaning His blessings and mercy are taken away from the people in such a gathering) and it is this kind of a gathering that Allah, the Glorious, the High has said, "And amongst the people is he who purchases vain talk to mislead people from the path of Allah."* (Al-Kafi, Volume 6, Page 433)

A man said, "I was in the presence of Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq when someone said to him, 'May my father and mother be sacrificed for you! My neighbor has a slave girl who sings while using the Oud (a type of musical instrument). When I need to go to the washroom, I delay my stay there so as to be able to listen to her longer!'"

The Imam replied: "*Do not do this! On the Day of Judgement, you will have no excuse or justification to present. Have you not heard the words of Allah in the Qur'an where He said, 'Verily the ears, the eyes and the heart all of them will be questioned!'*" (Surah al-Isra, Verse 38)

The man replied, "I swear by Allah! It is as if I have never heard this verse be it from an 'Arab or a non-'Arab. I promise to Allah that from this day on, I will never do this again and I ask forgiveness from Him."

The Imam then said, "*Get up and perform a ghusl and however much you are able to, perform Salat since up until now you have been submerged in performing a major sin. What kind of a bad state you*

would be in were you to die like this!" (Al-Kafi, Volume 6, Page 432, Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, Volume 13, Page 221)

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنِ اللَّغْوِ مُعْرِضُونَ ((يعني عن الغناء والملاهي))

"And those who stay away from vain talk meaning from al-Ghina and Music." (Tafsir Nur al-Thaqalain, Volume 3, Page 539, Bihar al-Anwar, Volume 76, Page 24)

There are hundreds, if not thousands, of ahadith in relation to the prohibition of music and singing, which we cannot mention here. The above mentioned ahadith and verses of the Qur'an should suffice for the true Shi'a and follower of the Prophet of Allah to convince him/her that listening to various (if not all) types of music are forbidden in Islam.

Classifications of Music

In regards to the various categories of Music and how to differentiate which are permitted and which are not, these can be broken up into four groups:

1. "Music" which contains both instruments that are forbidden and lyrics that are forbidden. For example, a specific type of "music" has instruments which the Islamic Shariah does not allow such as string instruments (guitar, violin, etc.); thus any "music" which contains these instruments is forbidden.

This same "music" may also have lyrics, which are vulgar or obscene, and due to this factor too, that "music" is forbidden for a Muslim. This would include most if not all forms of Rock & Roll, Country, Heavy Metal music and almost all other types of Popular Music because they ALL use forbidden instruments and their lyrics talk about sex, drugs, worshipping the devil, use of vulgar language, and other obscene things.

2. "Music" which contains instruments that are forbidden, (as were mentioned above), but their lyrics are permitted – meaning that the lyrics do not enjoin or lead one to perform or think about forbidden acts.

Some examples of this type of "music" may be the traditional "Qawwali" stemming from India, Pakistan and other parts which may contain a beautiful message about Allah, His Prophets, the Ahl al-Bait, etc., but since they may contain unlawful musical instruments, the entire thing is forbidden. Some examples that come to mind are the late Nusrat Fateh 'Ali Khan and others like him.

3. "Music" which contains instruments that are permitted such as the drum and other types, but their lyrics are not permissible.

The instruments may be allowed in Islam, but unfortunately their message is negative – cursing may be involved, or for any other reason, the lyrics may not be appropriate.

Many of the hip-hop and rap music groups may fall into this category. The earlier ones may have only used a drum machine for a simple beat, but the fact that they curse, put down and outright insult women, talk about drugs, alcohol, etc. their work is useless for a true Muslim and Believer.

4. "Music" which contains instruments that are permitted (such as those mentioned above) and the lyrics are also permitted.

This type of "music" is permitted in Islam, however, it is very rare to find.

You may have certain Muslim "performers" (for lack of a better word), who recite beautiful songs in praise of Allah, the Prophet, or on moral issues. They have only used "halal" instruments, and there is nothing in their vocals that one could raise objection to. We have some examples such as Yusuf Islam, Dawud Wharmsby 'Ali (from Canada), and others.

To find "music" that fits into this group is very difficult but it does exist. This music, although it contains a positive message should never be substituted for the real thing. What we mean here is that one can listen to it for a type of 'pleasure' or to teach and train the younger children, but one must turn back to reading books, listening to and reading the Qur'an and supplications, etc. to truly learn about the all-comprehensive religion al-Islam. In no circumstances should we treat this last form as 'simple' entertainment that we put on to pass time or to relax with.

Notes and Summary from the Verses of the Holy Qur'an and the Ahadith

1. It is worthy to mention that some of the instruments used in Ghina such as the tanbur, 'Oud, Ni, Dairah, etc. that have been mentioned in the ahadith have just been used as examples of instruments which were used during that time period. Therefore, in today's day and age, any kind of Instrument for music is haram.

2. The ahadith and the verses of the Qur'an mentioned do not differentiate between the various categories of music. Thus, there is no difference between national and foreign music, original and non-original music, traditional and non-traditional music, etc. That which must be used as the measuring stick is if the music is one which would fall into the category of being considered as lahwa (as was defined earlier) in which case it would be haram even if it was original or traditional music of a particular country.

This point is emphasized since Muslim youth usually note that since a particular Islamic country plays music or permits their traditional or cultural music, then this is allowed! We must learn to differentiate between what is Islam and the actions of a "Muslim" country – these two are not synonymous with one other!

3. From various verses of the Qur'an, we can deduce that a person who goes after music and these

types of sounds, slowly but surely, will get to a point where he will begin to mock his religion, the verses of Allah, the Prophets and the righteous believers of Allah. The Qur'an states, ***"Those people who chase after false words have become so drowned in sins that they begin to misguide people, and take the signs of Allah as a joke."*** (See Surah Luqman, Verse 6, Surah Jfijr, Verse 11, Surah Mo'minun, Verse 110, and Surah Mutaffin, Verse 29)

4. We must pay attention to the fact that Shaitan will approach people in various ways to misguide them. It is possible that by slipping or forgetfulness, the name of 'Azadari or weeping for the martyrdom of the Leader of the Shuhada Husayn (peace be upon him) and the other A'immah (peace be upon all of them) one may fall into the sin of listening to or creating ghina.

All the Mara'ja Taqlid are unanimous on the fact that even the recitation of the Holy Qur'an or Marthiya (poems) to commemorate the death of the A'immah and Imam Husayn recited in the form of Ghina is haram. This is a point we all need to ponder upon when he listens to or recite Nawha or other things similar to this in our various gatherings.

5. In reality, the complete set of rules of Allah have been communicated to us through the Prophets and Imams to guide us to prosperity and success, and a true Muslim is one who accepts ALL of these rules and likewise, acts upon all of them. (See Surah al-Baqarah, Verse 2 – 5, Surah an-Nisa, Verse 149 – 152, Surah al-Anfal, Verse 2 to 4)

It is not possible for one to act according to some of them and disregard the others. A person who sins or goes out of his way to listen to music which is haram or changes his state, then even though apparently the blood of faith (iman) flows through his veins, however due to his actions, he shows that deep down he does not truly believe in Allah.

This is the negative attribute of 'Nifaq' or hypocrisy that gradually, by listening to music, grows in one's heart! It is because of this that Imam Ja'far ibn Mul'ammad as-Sadiq said that music and ghina leads one to hypocrisy.

6. In the narrations we read that (الغناء رقية الزنا) meaning that slowly – step by step, ghina leads one to commit adultery.

It is not possible for Shaitan just to leave the person alone who is listening to music, singing or even associating with the people who indulge in music. Rather, he tries, day by day, to drown such a person in deeper and greater sins!

Shaitan begins to misguide one by introducing gatherings of sins whereby there is music, clapping and dancing (with others). After this, comes the mixing and mingling of men and women, which leads to exciting the sexual instincts of them – especially the youth! When such a gathering takes place, it is the breeding ground for loss of shame and humility and thus adultery even takes its root.

The people who simply start out by listening to music in gatherings with their families, gradually get to a stage where they do the same in their universities, clubs and organizations; and then from there, go to merry-making, dancing, the free mixing of men and women, drinking alcohol and eventually even adultery. May Allah protect us from all these evils.

7. From the ahadith it is clear that committing sins and listening to music leads to the removal of Allah's blessings from a society and sending down of the punishment upon them.

The final Prophet of Allah, Muhammad (SAW): has said: *'A person who has fallen prey to the instruments of lahw and other sins should be in waiting for red wind and disgrace to fall upon the land.'* (Wasa'il ash-Shi'a, Verse 12, Page 231, Khi'al Shaikh Saduq, 15th Section)

One of the indisputable facts from the Qur'an is that having taqwa and performing righteous acts leads to the sending down of good tidings and blessings from Allah whereas oppression and corruption in the society leads to being afflicted by punishments. Looking through the history of those who came before us, this fact of the Qur'an is very clear. (See Surah al-Baqarah, Verse 61 & 62, Surah Aale-Imran, Verse 123 and after, Surah al-Maidah, Verse 66, Surah al-A'raf, Verse 99, Surah al-Anfal, Verse 29 and 53, Surah Hud, verse 52, 57, and 117, Surah al-Ra'd, Verse 11, Surah Yunus, Verse 98, Surah al-Jijr, Verse 66 and after, Surah Marium, Verse 59 and 60, Surah al-Akkabut, Verse 40, Surah al-Mo'min, Verse 51, Surah at-Talaq, verse 2, 3, 7, 8, and 9)

8. From a ahadith mentioned, we can conclude that using the drum during the wedding commemoration is not a problem, as long as the men and women are not present in the same gathering and the using of the drum does not lead the program to the point of being considered as ghina.

However, the late Shaikh Murtaqa Ansari has said that, 'it is better that even this amount is refrained from.'

From the collection of verses of the Qur'an and the ahadith that have been presented in relation to music, we can conclude that Shaitan was the first one on earth to indulge in music, and thus, the one on Earth today who takes charge of all parties and forbidden gatherings is none other than this sworn enemy of Mankind!

According to his own opinion, it is he who adds life to gatherings and parties through the use of various instruments and certain tactics, and keeping the people away from the remembrance of Allah and pulling them towards sin.

Therefore, if a person indulges in music, dancing and these types of gatherings, or makes music – which has many social and psychological dangers – as a part of his daily schedule of life, then slowly he will be drawn in indulging into vain and futile acts such as forbidden relations with the opposite sex (or in some cases, with the same sex!). These people, in addition to forgetting Allah and His bounties will also become negligent of their Islamic responsibilities and will fall into forgetfulness of the life after death.

It is evident that once a person reaches this stage, then the punishment of any sin or evil act will not mean anything to him, and he will freely indulge in fornication, adultery, homosexuality, murder, rape, theft, and all other vices that are evident in today's society. In addition to hurting others around him, his own physical body and soul will also face many problems.

In addition, when looking at history, we see that dancing and music were two particular acts which were related to the gatherings of the Khulafa (those governors and rulers who unjustly reigned over the Muslim masses through tyranny and violence) and the oppressive kings and leaders, and those who mainly attended were the rich people of their communities.

During the tyrannical reign of the Bani Ummayah and Bani 'Abbas, the kings of Iran and other empires (may the curse of Allah be upon all of them) these things were prevalent.

Apart from hosting such forbidden parties and gatherings, these so-called leaders were also busy in killing hundreds and thousands of innocent people – and the killing of the Prophet Yahya and that of Imam Husayn can be attributed to such corrupt gatherings and the people that frequented such places.

It is because of this that from the very beginning of the appearance of al-Islam by the Holy Prophet Muhammad and during the days of leadership of the A'immah that music, dancing and gatherings associated with these were forbidden.

Even today, we see that the promotion of music and dancing is one of the ways that the Western powers, (especially that of the colonialists) have used to suppress the developing countries and thus they are always looking for help and handouts. In addition to corrupting their own societies, they have now moved onto the purer pastures and are trying to promote and propagate their own immoral ideas!

In closing, we present some of the rulings of the great Mara'ja Taqlid in regards to music, and singing. The letters after the question or rule in circles refer to various Mara'ja Taqlid, namely; (A) – Ayatullah Araki; (B) – Ayatullah Behjat; (G) – Ayatullah Gulpaygani; (K) – Ayatullah Khomeini; (L) – Ayatullah Lankarani; (M) – Ayatullah Makarim Shirazi; (S) – Ayatullah Seestani; (T) – Ayatullah Tabrizi.

Rulings on Music

Question: Please inform us what is meant by entertaining music?

Answer: That music which is used in vain gatherings and gatherings of amusement. BGKST

Question: Please inform us how to differentiate between entertaining music and music that is not such, especially since the common people differ concerning one particular type of music. Those who used to listen to music in the past for example, would say that it is entertaining music, and others that have not heard that type of music will say that it is not entertaining music; in either scenario, what is one's responsibility in this difference? Is it permitted to listen to such types of music?

Answer: The basis of determining entertaining music is either one's own certainty that that kind of music is entertaining music, or else one can refer to the common people. In the event that one is in doubt, it is not a problem to listen to it. ABKLMS

Answer: The basis of determining entertaining music is either one's own certainty or those who have knowledge (of music) inform him. Notwithstanding, in the event that someone else does not tell him something that contradicts the speech of those who have knowledge (regarding music). However, if the common people have a difference in regards to a type of music such that the person doubts whether it is entertaining music or not, then in this case listening to it, according to Ihtiyat Wajib, is not permitted. T

Question: What is the meaning of entertaining music?

Answer: Entertaining music is that which changes a person's mental state into one that is not normal, and brings about pleasure and joy. L

Rule: It is not a problem to listen to or compose 'War Songs', or music that is used at the time of war or 'Azadari – in summary, whatever type of music that is not considered as entertaining music that would change one's mental state (is allowed). ABKMST

Question: If a person does not get stimulated or aroused by listening to music, then what is the ruling for him listening to such types (of music)?

Answer: The basis for music being haram is that which the general public consider as entertaining music or otherwise, and it does not matter whether a particular individual becomes stimulated or not (by listening to it). ABKLMST

General Rule

Therefore, listening to or producing any type of entertaining music is haram, whether because of that (entertaining music), one would become stimulated by it or not, and whether one would gain pleasure from it or not. It makes no difference if the music brings one happiness or sadness; whether it is traditional music or otherwise; Iranian or non-Iranian; whether it be in a wedding ceremony or anywhere else.

In the event that the music is not entertaining music, then it is not a problem to listen to or compose it. If a certain type of music is doubtful (one does not know whether it is entertaining music or not), then it is not a problem for one to listen to or compose it (according to most of the Mara'ja Taqlid).

Question: Is it permissible to listen to certain types of music if we are listening to it without the intention of it being a vain and futile act? For example, music that is said to be good to calm and soothe the body, or music that some doctors recommend (their patients to listen to) for healing, or music that has been composed for the war in which there is no intention of vain and futile acts?

Answer: In all instances, as long as the music is not entertaining music, then it is not a problem to listen to it. ABKLMST

Rule: It is haram to listen to entertaining music and singing, however hearing these (without paying attention to them) is not a problem. T

Summary: Sometimes a person listens to music and is actually paying attention to it – this is haram; however if a person simply hears the music but is not paying attention to it – then in this instance, it is not a problem. An example of this is if music can be heard from the house of one's neighbours; or someone else who is listening to entertaining music drives by, but the person pays no attention to it – in these instance, even if the person hears the music, it is not a problem (because he did not intend to want to listen to it).

Reciting

Rule: It is not a problem for men to recite, as long as it is not in the form of Ghina and there is no corruption involved with it. BKLMST

Question: Please clarify to us what Ghina means. Does reciting something in a pleasing way constitute Ghina?

Answer: A pleasing sound, or reciting something in a pleasing way in itself does not constitute Ghina, rather Ghina can be explained as: prolonging the sound, along with a change in the pitch in such a way that is suited to vain and futile gatherings and assemblies of music and sinning. K

Answer: Ghina can be explained as something that takes place in the gatherings of the people of corruption. B

Answer: Ghina is a sound in which the tone comes from the throat which the common people refer to as singing, it causes excitement in the person, and is suitable for gatherings of vain and futile entertainment. L

Answer: If a text, poem or prose is read in such a way that it would be appropriate for gatherings of vain and futile entertainment, then it would be considered as Ghina. ST

Question: In auspicious occasions, is it permissible to recite songs, poetry, various supplications or poems in praise of the Sinless Imams (peace be upon all of them) which contain a virtuous message with a good voice?

Answer: To recite anything – whether it be poetry, prose, Qur'an, or poem in praise of the Pure Imams – in any form that would be considered as Ghina is haram; and to recite the Qur'an, supplications or things such as this in the form of Ghina would actually incur more of a punishment. BKLMST

In closing, one point should be mentioned regarding what some may see as an apparent 'conflict' between what has been written by the late Dastghaib Shirazi in his book, The Major Sins as well as other teachers of Akhlaq and Irfan and what some of the Mara'ja Taqlid have expressed in regards to learning, teaching or listening to music and addition to the listening of certain instruments which may indeed be permitted according to the Mara'ja.

The 'Ulama of Fiqh teach us the 'minimum' requirements for a Muslim and what he or she must refrain from to be protected from the punishment of Allah. By following them, we can be 'guaranteed' our spot in Paradise since we have performed that which Allah has commanded us to do and refrained from that which He has prohibited us from.

On the other hand, the teachers of Akhlaq or Etiquette teach us the spiritual path of Islam, which will not only keep us away from the hell-fire, but will raise our rank and station in the Hereafter.

As it has been said, following the rulings of our Marja' makes us fall into the fold of being called a Muslim, whereas following what the teachers of Akhlaq have conveyed to us makes us enter into the level of being called a Mo'min or true believer.

Thus, although some forms of music may be permitted according to the Fiqh of Islam, but if one wants to reach to that station of proximity to Allah in this world, and one of closeness to the Prophet and his Ahl al-Bait ' in the hereafter, it is necessary to refrain from even those things which may be permitted – music being one of them.

Insha–Allah, it is hoped that with this short article, issues and confusions regarding Music is made clear and that those types of Music which are indubitably forbidden are shunned. May Allah (SWT) guide us all to His pleasure.

¹. This definition has been taken from the electronic version of Webster's Dictionary found on www.dictionary.com [2].

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