138652 - Ruling on betting on competitions in Quran memorization and Islamic knowledge

the question

We are members of a halaqah for Quran memorization. Sometimes there are things that happen among the youths that we want to ask about. Often the youth will challenge one another, when there is a competition between two groups. One of the groups will say to the other group: If you beat us, you will deserve such and such (dinner, for example), or one of the people in one group will challenge the other group, saying that if they win, he will invite them all for dinner, but if this group wins, the other group is not obliged to offer them dinner (in other words, the challenge is from one side only). What is the ruling on such challenges and commitments – is that permissible? Is it also permissible if the challenge comes from both groups, meaning that the one that is defeated is the one who will offer dinner to the other group?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Abu Dawud (2574), at-Tirmidhi (1700) and Ibn Majah (2878) narrated from Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Wagers are allowed only for archery, racing camels or racing horses.” Al-Albani classed it as authentic in *Sahih Abi Dawud*.

What is meant by a wager is a reward or prize that is taken by the winner of the race or contest.

Ibn al-Athir said in *An-Nihayah* (2/844): [It is] what is assigned of wealth by way of betting on a competition. End quote.

The Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) forbade accepting bets except in the case of competitions in archery, horse racing and camel racing, because that is encouraging jihad

and training for it, and this brings great benefit and helps in supporting Islam. Some of the scholars were of the view that it is permissible to bet on contests in Quran memorization and Islamic knowledge, by analogy with the three types of contests mentioned in the hadith quoted above from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), because Islam prevailed and continues to prevail by means of Islamic knowledge and jihad in Allah's cause. As it is permissible to hold contests that help in preparation for jihad in Allah's cause, the same applies to contests that help in seeking Islamic knowledge.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah and his student Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on them both) favoured the view that such contests are permissible, and among our contemporary scholars, it was favoured by Shaykh Ibn `Uthaymin and the scholars of the Permanent Committee for Ifta'.

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Contests in Quran memorization, hadith, jurisprudence and other beneficial branches of knowledge, and giving the right answers to questions – is it permissible to give rewards or prizes for that? The companions of Malik, Ahmad and ash-Shafa`i disallowed that, whereas the companions of Abu Hanifah and our shaykh allowed it, and Ibn `Abd al-Barr narrated that from ash-Shafa`i. That is more appropriate than prizes for fighting skills, wrestling and swimming. They allowed competing in those skills in return for rewards or prizes, so it is more appropriate that prizes be permissible for contests in knowledge. This is similar to Abu Bakr's bet with the disbelievers of Quraysh on the issue of whether what he told them was true, and we have noted above that there is no textual evidence to indicate that this was abrogated, that Abu Bakr collected the bet after gambling had been prohibited, and that religion may be supported by presenting evidence and engaging in jihad. Therefore if it is permissible to bet on contests in fighting skills, then it is more appropriate that that should be permissible with regard to knowledge. This view is the one that is most likely to be correct.(*Al-Furusiyyah*, p. 318).

Al-Mirdawi (may Allah have mercy on him) said in *Al-Insaf* (6/9 1) regarding this view:

This appears to be the view favoured by the author of *Al-Furu`*, and it is good. End quote.

Shaykh Ibn `Uthaymin (may Allah have mercy on him) was asked:

When studying Islamic knowledge, some students make the one who gives the wrong answer buy a book, for example, and give it to the one who got it right. Is this permissible?

He replied:

This is a contest, and Shaykh al-Islam held the view that there is nothing wrong with contests in Islamic knowledge. He (may Allah have mercy on him) explained the reason for that by noting that jihad may be either by means of knowledge or by means of weapons. He also quoted as evidence what was narrated from Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him), when the following passage was revealed:

{Alif, Lam, Meem

The Byzantines have been defeated

In the nearest land. But they, after their defeat, will overcome

Within three to nine years} [Ar-Rum 30:1-4].

The Persians were the ones who had defeated the Byzantines; the Byzantines were Christians, People of the Book, whereas the Persians were Zoroastrians who had no book. Allah, may He be Exalted, says:

{On that day, the believers will rejoice

at the victory granted by Allah } [Ar-Rum 30:4-5]

because the believers liked the Christians to defeat the Persians, for the Christians are people of the book, so they are closer to Islam than the Zoroastrians. On the other hand, Quraysh liked the Zoroastrians to defeat the Byzantines. Hence Quraysh said: The Byzantines cannot defeat the Persians, because the Persians are stronger than them, and they do not believe in the Quran. So Abu Bakr made a bet for a certain number of camels for a period of seven years. The seven years

went by and nothing happened, so Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) went to the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), who said to him: “Extend the time of the bet for another two years, and increase the amount.” So Abu Bakr did that, and before the two years had passed, travellers came with the news that the Byzantines had defeated the Persians. From this incident, Shaykh al-Islam derived the ruling that it is permissible to bet on issues of Islamic knowledge. (*Al-Bab al-Maftuh*, 59/26).

The scholars of the Permanent Committee for Ifta’ said:

It is not permissible to accept prizes for contests except those which are in accordance with what the Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) specified, that they may be contests in archery or riding horses or camels, because these are means of jihad in Allah’s cause. To that may be added contests in knowledge, which deals with Islamic rulings, because seeking knowledge is part of jihad in Allah’s cause.(*Fatawa al-Lajnah ad-Da’imah*, 15/179).

The Committee was also asked: is it permissible to accept prizes for Quran contests?

They replied:

There is nothing wrong with accepting prizes that are offered by charities and others who promote memorization of the Book of Allah.(*Fatawa al-Lajnah ad-Da’imah*, 15/189).

Shaykh Ibn Jibrin (may Allah have mercy on him) said: There are permissible contests which do not come under the heading of gambling. They include competitions in Quran memorization and competitions in Islamic knowledge, such as research and the like. These are permissible with and without prizes.(*Fatawa ash-Shaykh Ibn Jibrin*, 6 5/22).

Based on that, it is permissible to accept prizes for competitions in Quran memorization and Islamic knowledge, whether the prizes are offered by a third party other than the contestants, or by one of the contestants, or by all of them.

And Allah knows best.