12567 - Is Playing Cards Prohibited?

the question

Why is playing cards – I mean only playing, without gambling – counted as haram? We are not playing for money.

Summary of answer

Playing cards is prohibited in Islam even if there is no money involved, because the problem with playing cards is that it distracts people from remembering Allah and from prayer. Also it is still a means that may lead to gambling which is expressly forbidden in the Quran.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Is playing cards prohibited in Islam?

The Standing Committee was asked about playing cards if that does not distract people from prayer and there is no money involved. They answered:

"Playing cards is not permitted , even if there is no money involved, because the problem with that is that it distracts people from remembering Allah (Dhikr) and from prayer. Even if they claim that this is not the case, then it is still a means that may lead to gambling which is expressly forbidden in the Quran . Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"Intoxicants (all kinds of alcoholic drinks), and gambling, and Al-Ansab (stone altars for sacrifices to false gods) and Al-Azlam (arrows for seeking luck or decision) are an abomination of Shaytan's (Satan's) handiwork. So avoid (strictly all) that (abomination) in order that you may be successful." [Al-Ma'idah 5:90]

These cards have an effect on society, for the bonds of a strong society are achieved by means of two things: following the commands of Allah and heeding His prohibitions. A society disintegrates when it neglects any of those duties or does any of those things that are forbidden. These cards form one of the factors which have an effect on society. They cause people to neglect prayer in congregation, and they generate alienation, breaking of ties, hatred and negligence through the committing of haram actions, and they make people too lazy to earn a living." (Fatawa Islamiyyah, 4/436)

History of playing cards

With regard to the history of these playing cards: No one really knows who invented playing cards or when or where they were invented. It has been said that they are of Chinese or Indian origin, or otherwise. But historians agree that they came to Europe from the Middle East in the latter part of the Middle Ages. Experts also say that there is agreement that playing cards have clearly evolved from that time until now.

Playing cards made their first appearance in Europe in Andalusia, and were brought to northern Spain in the eleventh century CE.

The traditional deck of cards in Spain consisted of 40 cards, including the numbers 1 to 7, plus three characters, the highest of which was the "ruler", followed by the "deputy", then the "scribe" or "knight."

In the sixteenth century, the French changed the cards, replacing the "ruler" with the king, the "deputy" with the queen, and the "knight" with the jack. They also added three new numbers, so that the deck now consisted of 52 cards. In the seventeenth century, the Germans added a fourth character, the joker.

We have quoted above the fatwa on playing with these cards. It may also be added that playing cards is devoid of any of the goals of recreational activities as required in Islam; it does not teach any skill that is needed for Jihad or any useful knowledge or bring any social benefit or relaxation that will calm the nerves. Rather it is a game that has nothing good in it; it causes arguments and

simply kills time. It is based on speculation and chance, and it is like playing with dice, in that it leads to disputes and fighting, and it is like alcohol and gambling.

Based on the above, it would not be farfetched to suggest that it is prohibited rather than disliked, by analogy with dice, because both are based on chance and both lead to arguments.

The same view was favoured by Shaykh Ibn Hajar Al-Haythami (may Allah have mercy on him), and it is the view of our contemporary scholars, and of Shaykh Muhammad ibn Salih Al-`Uthaymin (may Allah have mercy on him) among the jurists of Al-Najd, who transmitted it from his shaykhs. This is based on the fact that it leads to enmity and hatred, and because it is a great waste of time and it distracts people from remembering Allah (Dhikr) and keeps them from worshipping and obeying Him.

This view is further supported by the fact that one of the French kings issued orders banning people from playing cards during the day, and stating that everyone who went against this order was to be arrested and punished. That was because the French people loved playing cards too much, to such an extent that they were neglecting their work in order to play cards. The punishment dictated by this French king was not just a brief imprisonment, he also added a severe beating as a deterrent to others.

Yet despite these decrees and others, he did not succeed in uprooting the habit of playing cards; the only result was that the people started to play in secret rather than openly. (From Qadaya Al-Lahw wat Tarfih by Madun Rashid, p. 185-187)

For more details, please refer to the following answers: 120806 , 335520 , 95409 , and 181642 .

And Allah knows best.