169799 - Recitation of Qur’an according to maqaamaat (melodic modes)

the question

You know what Allah, may He be exalted, has prepared of immense reward for those who recite the Holy Qur’an, as the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “The one who is skilled in reciting the Qur’an will be with the noble, obedient scribes, and the one who recites Qur’an and falters therein, and finds it difficult, will have a double reward.” But nowadays something that is known as knowledge of the maqaamaat (melodic modes) has become widespread. This is a science that focuses on the voice and beautiful performance; naturally it was originally set out by those who specialise in music and singing. Is it permissible for me to learn this science and use it when reciting the Holy Qur’an so that I can avoid mistakes in it, and so that I may be included in the words of the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), “The one who is skilled in reciting the Qur’an will be with the noble, obedient scribes…”?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

The maqaamaat (melodic modes) mentioned in the question are kinds of tunes or melodies used by musicians and singers. Those who specialise in that art have classified the tunes by specific rhythms and called them maqaamaat. This is not an invented science; rather it was compiled by studying and listening to the tunes of people, as was done by al-Khaleel ibn Ahmad al-Faraaheedi with the rhythms of poetry. What he compiled was sixteen meters (bahr). With regard to the modes compiled by musicologists, there are six modes, as follows:

1. Maqaam al-Bayyaat (Bayati)

This is a maqaam that evokes humility and monasticism. It is the maqaam that focuses the heart and makes it ponder the verses of Allah and their meanings.

2. Maqaam ar-Rast (Rast)

Rast is Persian word meaning steadfastness. Specialists in maqaamaat prefer this maqaam when reciting verses that tell narratives or prescribe rulings.

3. Maqaam an-Nahaawand (Nahawand)

This maqaam evokes emotions of compassion and gentleness, and instils humility and reflection. Nahawand is an Iranian city after which this maqaam was named.

4. Maqaam as-Seeka (Sikah)

This maqaam is distinguished by its slow and easy pace.

5. Maqaam as-Saba (Saba)

This maqaam is very spiritual and powerful, and evokes emotions of compassion.

6. Maqaam al-Hijaaz (Hijaz)

This is a maqaam of Arabian origin, named after the Hijaz region of Arabia. It is one of the most spiritual maqaams and one of the most effective in helping one to focus in recitation of Qur'an.

These are the words of specialists in that field, and these are their literal definitions. It may be noted that they are all non-Arabic maqaamat, except for the last one. It may also be noted that the maqaamaat are based on the tunes used by people in their singing and music. Hence this is a science that preceded the Qur'an and its recitation. Readers may recite according to one of the maqaamaat without knowing anything about it, and a reciter may vary his recitation, using a variety of maqaamaat, according to the verses and their meanings.

Secondly:

With regard to the ruling on reciting according to these maqaamaat, in the answer to question no. 9330 we quoted a fatwa of Shaykh 'Abd al-'Azeez ibn Baaz (may Allah have mercy on him) stating

that it is not allowed to recite according to these musical maqaamaat.

In the answer to question no. 1377 there is a detailed discussion of the issue; please refer to that question.

We will add here some comments from specialists, as follows:

Dr Ibraaheem ibn Sa'eed ad-Dawsari, Vice President of the Saudi Academic Committee for Qur'anic Sciences, and President of the Department of Qur'an and Its Sciences at al-Imam Muhammad ibn Saud University said:

Recitation with a tune or melody can only be one of two things:

1.

Tunes that a person naturally comes up with, without much conscious effort. This is what most people do when reciting Qur'an. So everyone who recites Qur'an in a melodious manner would not go beyond that simple way of coming up with a tune. This is permissible, and it is a type of melodious recitation that is good and praiseworthy, as the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "He is not one of us who does not beautify his voice for the Qur'an." Narrated by al-Bukhaari in his Saheeh (7527). In this case the ruling is that it is permissible and mustahabb.

2.

Developed tunes and musical rhythms that can only be acquired by learning and training, for which there are certain measures and vocal control without which they cannot be done properly. This is not permissible, because reciting the Qur'an has its own measures and vocal control that are subject to the rules of tajweed that have been transmitted (from the time of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)), and cannot be in accord with the measures as dictated by the rules of those tunes that are used in singing, because if we tried to do that, it would undermine the rules of tajweed. This is something that is not allowed.

Concerning that, Ibn al-Qayyim said in Zaad al-Ma‘aad fi Hadiy Khayr al-‘Ibaad (1/493):

Everyone who has knowledge of the life of the early generations will know definitively that they had nothing at all to do with reciting Qur’an with musical tunes that require effort to learn and perform them and which are based on rhythmic movements and are measured, counted and have a specific limit. They were too pious to recite in accordance with those tunes and to allow that. It is known for certain that they used to recite Qur’an in a sad tone and in a joyful tone, and they would make their voices beautiful for the Qur’an, sometimes reciting in sad or joyful tones, or with a tone of longing. This is something instilled in and dictated by human nature, and the Lawgiver did not forbid it, because there is a strong natural inclination towards that. Rather the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) directed people to that and encouraged it, and stated that Allah would listen to one who recites the Qur’an in a beautiful voice, as he said: “He is not one of us who does not beautify his voice for the Qur’an.” This hadith may be interpreted in two ways: 1. that it is telling them something that all of us (Muslims) do; 2. that it is stating that those who do not do it are not following the guidance and way of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him).

Ibn Katheer said in Fadaa’il al-Qur’an (p. 114):

The point is that what is prescribed in Islamic teaching is no more than beautifying the voice in such a way that will prompt one to ponder the Qur’an and understand it, and to be humble and submit to Allah’s commands. As for reciting in a melodious manner that is based on developed tunes, rhythms and rules of music that is usually used for entertainment purposes, the Qur’an should be protected from that; it should be respected and should not be recited in this manner.

What some people promote of reciting the Qur’an with musical tunes, on the grounds that this will help to convey the meaning and give a mental image to the meaning, and subjecting the recitation to the rules of music – and some of them go so far as to demand that this tuneful recitation should be accompanied by musical instruments – all of that is showing disrespect to the Book of Allah, may He be exalted and His names sanctified. Undoubtedly focusing on these musical tunes will affect the pronunciation of some words and distract the listener from pondering the meaning: indeed it may lead to changing the pronunciation altogether. The Book of Allah, may

He be exalted, is the glory of the Muslims and should be kept away from such things.

End quote from an article in Multaqa Ahl at-Tafseer

We are surprised that there are people who are famous for their recitation in the Muslim world, whose way of learning how to recite properly was through indecent songs! One of them admitted that he used to listen to songs accompanied by instruments in order to learn how to recite Qur'an. There is a famous photo of one of the senior reciters standing next to a piano! There is even an Arabic radio station that stipulates that any reciter must have a certificate from a music academy, otherwise he will not be allowed to recite Qur'an on that station. Allah, may He be exalted, has enabled many people in the Muslim world to become great reciters, who bring people to tears with their recitation, but they have never learned a single maqaam or heard any songs. Some of those who are obsessed with these maqaamaat may hear a skilled reciter who is righteous, and he classifies his recitation according to the maqaamaat and tries to deceive himself and others by suggesting that this reciter is one of those who follow his own way, and that he is reciting it according to a certain song or tune, but that is not the case; rather it is merely his imagination.

And Allah knows best.