171894 - The difference between singing and musical instruments, and the ruling on each

the question

I am writing to you with great hope that I will find an answer to my question and turn confusion into certainty, and that I will be able to learn what is lawful and what is prohibited of music, and what is the difference between singing (ghina') and musical instruments (ma`azif). This is a topic that was discussed by many of the scholars and shaykhs, but from my weak point of view, their answers fall below the level that the questioner who reads them expects, because their answers are very general and not specific, and do not differentiate between music, singing, and indecent content in lyrics. Every time someone asks about this topic, they start elaborating about the issue of free mixing, video clips, indecent lyrics, and so on. We do not doubt that such things are prohibited, but our question is: what is music? And what is the ruling on music on the basis of the religious texts? What is singing? And what is the ruling on listening to music clips, whether they are free of words or are accompanied by lyrics that are decent and highlight social issues? Is playing a musical instrument definitely prohibited, or does it depend...? Are there musical instruments that Islam prohibits and others that it permits?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

We do not deny that there is a great deal of confusion when scholars discuss this issue, as they conflate the terms ma`azif (musical instruments) and ghina` (singing). The cause of this conflation boils down to three things:

1. Not determining the precise meaning of these two words when they are mentioned in the

Quran and Sunnah and the words of the early generations (salaf).

2. Some scholars use the word ma`azif (musical instruments) to refer to ghina' (singing).

Al-Hafiz Ibn Hajar (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Al-Qurtubi narrated from al-Jawhari that ma`azif means ghina'.

Ibn Hajar also said:

The word ghina' (translated above as singing) may also refer to playing an instrument, and any musical instrument that is played may be called `azf.

Fat-h al-Bari, 10/55.

3. Nowadays, ghina' (singing) is only done with the accompaniment of musical instruments, so the word ughniyah (song) undoubtedly includes musical instruments, whereas the word nasheed – usually – is used when there are no known musical instruments being played. Therefore the one who talks about singing (ghina') and condemns it is referring to the indecent lyrics that are sung to a tune, with the accompaniment of musical instruments (ma`azif), and the one who talks about musical instruments is usually talking about their use by singers in their songs.

However, we would like to point out that there is a difference in usage between the words ma`azif (musical instruments) and musiqa (music). Many people think that they are synonymous, but in fact the word ma`azif is Arabic and refers to the instruments that are played, which are used for entertainment, whereas the word musiqa is a Greek word that refers to the art of playing different musical instruments... Musiqa is a technical term that refers to a branch of knowledge having to do with different types of melody and rhythm, and how to put them together to create different tunes and then decide sid which instruments should to be used to play them, as it says in Al-Mawsu`at al-Fiqhiyyah, 38/168.

The connection between musical instruments (ma`azif) and music (musiqa) is that the instruments are used to produce music, as noted in the reference quoted above.

Secondly

The religious texts differentiate between musical instruments and singing, and the reports from the scholars also refer to this distinction. We will quote some of these texts, after explaining the difference between the two terms, then we will state the ruling on each of them.

Definition of ghina’ (singing) and its types:

The word ghina’ refers to raising one's voice with a tune, and there are many known types, one of which is what travellers do on their journey. This is called ghina’ ar-rukban (the singing of camel riders) or an-nasb. There is also al-huda’, which is the song of the camel drivers. That also includes what pilgrims sing to express their longing to do Hajj and to pray in Makkah; what the poets say about jihad to inspire the fighters; and what a mother sings to her child when she plays with him. All of these are types of singing that are free of musical instruments, and they all come under the heading of singing (ghina’) that is permissible, as we shall see below.

Ibn al-Manzur said:

The word nasb refers to a kind of song that is sung by the Bedouin when riding their camels.

Lisan al-`Arab, 1/758.

Az-Zubaydi said, quoting from *Al-Fa’iq fi Gharib al-Hadith* by az-Zamakhshari about the meaning of nasb: It is called thus because the voice is raised (yunsab) when singing it, meaning that it becomes loud.

Taj al-`Arus, 1/972.

Al-Hafiz Ibn Hajar said:

The word ghina’ refers to raising the voice with a tune that the Arabs call nasb, and to huda’ (the singing or chanting of camel drivers). The one who does these actions is not described as a mughanni (singer); rather this word refers to one who elongates words when singing in a way to excite the listener, in addition to what the lyrics may include of hinting at immoral deeds or even

mentioning them clearly.

Fat-h al-Bari, 2/442.

Definition of musical instruments (ma`azif) and their types

The word ma`azif refers to instruments that are used for entertainment and which accompany singing. Their types vary from one era to another, and whether ancient or modern, they are usually made of strings, wood and leather.

Al-Fayruzabadi said:

The word ma`azif refers to instruments such as the oud and tanbour (types of stringed instruments), and the `azif is the one who plays the instrument whilst singing.

Al-Qamus al-Muhit, 1082.

Az-Zubaydi said:

Ma`azif are musical instruments that are played, such as the oud, tanbour and duff (hand-drum). In the hadith of Umm Zar`, it says: “If they hear the sound of musical instruments, they become certain that they are doomed.”

The `azif is the one who plays the instrument; this word may also refer to the singer.

Taj al-`Arus, 1/6022.

The tanbour is a stringed instrument with a long neck and a body shaped like half an egg, and it has two or three strings, as al-Albani stated in *Tahrim Alat at-Tarab* (p. 76).

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah said:

Ma`azif (sing. mi`zafah) means musical instruments, as the linguists said; this term refers to any instrument that is played to create sounds for entertainment.

Majmu` al-Fatawa, 11/576.

And he said:

Ma`azif are instruments used for the purpose of entertainment, according to the linguists. This word refers to all of these instruments.

Majmu` al-Fatawa, 11/535.

Ibn al-Qayyim said:

The word ma`azif refers to all instruments that are used for entertainment; there is no difference of opinion among the linguists regarding that.

Ighathat al-Lahfan, 1/260.

What was narrated regarding ma`azif:

It was narrated that Abu Malik al-Ash`ari (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Among my ummah there will surely be people who regard zina, silk, alcohol and musical instruments as permissible.”

Narrated by al-Bukhari in *Kitab al-Ashribah* as a mu`allaq majzoom report that is deemed to be authentic (sahih). It was narrated with a mawsul (uninterrupted) isnad by al-Bayhaqi in *As-Sunan*, 3/272; at-Tabarani in *Al-Mu`jam al-Kabir*, 3/319; and Ibn Hibban in his *Sahih*, 8/265, 266). It was classed as authentic (sahih) by Ibn al-Qayyim in *Tahdhib as-Sunan*, 5/270-272; al-Hafiz Ibn Hajar in *Al-Fat-h*, 10/51; and al-Albani in *As-Sahihah*, 91.

Ibn Hazm claimed that it is munqati` (i.e., its isnad is interrupted), and some others followed his view, but the leading hadith scholars rejected this view.

Al-Hafiz Abu `Amr ibn as-Salah said:

Ibn Hazm claimed that its chain of narration was interrupted between al-Bukhari and Hisham, so as

to prove that this hadith cannot be used as evidence that musical instruments are prohibited. But he was mistaken on many counts, because this hadith is authentic and is known to have a complete chain of narration that meets the conditions of *as-Sahih*. Al-Bukhari could mention it without a complete chain of narration because he had already mentioned it elsewhere in his book with a complete chain. And sometimes he did that for other reasons, where he narrated a hadith of which the chain of narration was not interrupted.

Muqaddimat Ibn as-Salah, p. 36.

What was narrated about ghina' (singing):

It was narrated that Anas ibn Malik (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) had a camel driver called Anjashah, who had a beautiful voice. The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said to him: "O Anjashah, go slowly when you are driving mounts that are carrying glass vessels."

Qatadah said: He was referring to those women who were physically weak.

Narrated by al-Bukhari, 5857; and Muslim, 2323.

Ibn Hajar (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

With regard to huda', it refers to driving camels with some special kind of singing or chanting. Huda' is usually in the form of rajaz poetry, or it may be composed in other metres of poetry. Hence he – al-Bukhari – mentioned it alongside poetry and rajaz. Camels usually run faster when someone sings to them in the form of huda'.

End quote from *Fat-h al-Bari*, 10/538.

Ibn al-Qayyim said:

`Umar ibn `Abd al-`Aziz wrote to his sons' teacher saying: The first thing that you should teach them is to hate musical instruments, which were initiated by the Shaytan, the consequence of which is incurring divine wrath, for I heard from trustworthy scholars that the sound of musical

instruments, listening to songs and singing them causes hypocrisy to grow in the heart as water causes plants to grow.

Ighathat al-Lahfan, 1/250.

Thirdly:

The four imams did not disagree about the prohibition on using all types of musical instruments. Whoever narrated from any of them that he permitted any instrument or used it is lying about him. What these senior imams said is based on what is narrated in the sound religious texts, and it is what was narrated from the companions of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and those who came after them.

Al-Qurtubi said:

As for wind instruments, stringed instruments and drums, there is no difference of scholarly opinion regarding the prohibition on listening to them, and I did not hear of any scholar whose words carry weight among the early generations or the leading scholars of later generations who permitted that. And how can it not be prohibited, when it is a symbol of drinkers and immoral people, and it stirs up desires, corruption and promiscuity? Whatever is like that, there can be no doubt that it is prohibited or that the one who does it is an evildoer and a sinner.

Narrated from him by Ibn Hajar al-Haytami in his book: *Az-Zawajir `an Iqtiraf al-Kaba'ir*, 2/193.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The view of the four imams is that all musical instruments are prohibited.

Majmu` al-Fatawa, 11/576.

In *Al-Mawsu`at al-Fiqhiyyah* (38/177), it says:

The jurists are of the view that it is prohibited to use stringed instruments such as the tanbour, rabab, fiddle, zither and all other stringed instruments. Using them means playing them. End

quote.

Based on that, the prohibition includes all musical instruments, ancient and modern, some of which are mentioned in the religious texts and others come under the general prohibition on musical instruments (ma`azif).

Shaykh al-Albani (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

You should understand, my Muslim brother, that the hadiths quoted above clearly indicate that musical instruments of all types and categories are prohibited, as some of them are mentioned by name, such as wind instruments, drums, guitars, and others are included on the basis of the general meaning of the hadith. That is for two reasons:

1. They are included in the general meaning of the word ma`azif.
2. They have a similar impact in the sense of entertaining and distracting people. That is supported by the words of Ibn `Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him): The duff (hand-drum) is prohibited, musical instruments (ma`azif) are prohibited, drums are prohibited and wind instruments are prohibited. Narrated by al-Bayhaqi, 10/222, via `Abd al-Karim al-Jazari, from Abu Hashim al-Kufi, from [Ibn `Abbas].

I say: this is a sound chain of narration, if Abu Hashim al-Kufi is Abu Hashim as-Sinjari, whose name was Sa`d, for he was Jazari [from the tribe of Jazar] like `Abd al-Karim, and they said that he narrated reports from him, but I have not come across anyone who said that he was Kufi [from Kufah]. In *Thiqat Ibn Hibban* (4/296), it says that he lived in Damascus. And Allah knows best.

Tahrim Alat at-Tarb, 92.

There is no exception to the prohibition on musical instruments except the hand-drum only, on specific occasions. This has been explained previously in the answer to question no. 20406.

Ruling on ghina’ (singing):

Based on the definition of singing (ghina’) that we have mentioned above, we may learn that in

principle singing is not prohibited; rather it is permissible, unless musical instruments are used with it, or the lyrics include indecent and evil words which dictate that it should be prohibited.

Ibn `Abd al-Barr (mam him) said:

This type of singing (without musical accompaniment) was permitted by the scholars, and there are reports from the early generations which indicate that it is permissible. It is called by various names that refer to the singing or chanting of camel drivers, and there is no dispute among the scholars that such types of singing are permissible. Ibn Wahb narrated from Usamah and `Abdullah, the sons of Zayd ibn Aslam, from their father Zayd ibn Aslam, from his father, that `Umar ibn al-Khattab said: Singing is like provision for the rider, or he said: for the traveller…

This is a matter concerning which I do not know of any difference of opinion among the scholars, if the poetry is free of any immoral and promiscuous content.

At-Tamhid, 22/197-198.

And he (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

As for the type of singing that the scholars regarded as disliked (makruh), it is the kind of singing in which pauses are introduced between the letters of words, or the rhythm of the poetry is spoiled, or words are elongated for the purpose of making it more exciting and entertaining, and it is done in a manner that was not known to the Arabs.

The evidence for the soundness of what we have said is the fact that those scholars who permitted what we have described of camel drivers' and camel riders' songs are those who disliked this type of singing, and it is not possible that they would do such things when they forbade them.

At-Tamhid, 22/198.

Al-Hafiz ibn Hajar said:

Huda' (camel-driving songs) here includes the singing of pilgrims which stirs up excitement for Hajj by mentioning the Ka`bah and other holy places. Similar to that is songs that raise the morale of

mujahidin for fighting, and songs that a woman sings to calm her child in the cradle.

Fat-h al-Bari, 10/538.

Every kind of singing that is prohibited and condemned in reports from the early generations is that which is accompanied by musical instruments, or it is sung by a non-mahram woman in front of men, or vice versa, or it is an overwrought performance with effeminate actions and body movements, or the lyrics contain words that make it prohibited and blameworthy, or it is done too much, to the extent that it distracts people from religious duties.

So singing is permissible if it meets certain conditions, namely:

1. It is not accompanied by the playing of musical instruments.
2. It does not involve imitating singers, male or female, who are evildoers or immoral people.
3. It is not done so much that it becomes a main preoccupation that causes one to neglect religious duties.
4. A woman should not sing in front of non-mahram men.
5. There should be nothing in the lyrics that promotes corrupt beliefs, immorality, obscenity or praise of unlawful actions.
6. It should not be taken as a profession for which the individual becomes known.

There is evidence in both general and specific terms for these conditions. This evidence includes the following:

1. It was narrated that Ibn `Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Whoever imitates a people is one of them.” Narrated by Abu Dawud, 4031; classed as sahih by al-Albani in *Sahih Abi Dawud*.
2. It is not prescribed for a woman to give the adhan or lead the people in prayer, and it is prescribed for her to clap during the prayer if she wants to alert the imam to a mistake, and it is not prescribed for her to say “Subhan Allah” in this case. So what is the ruling on her singing in front of men expected to be, especially if the lyrics contain indecent words?
3. It was narrated that ar-Rubayyi` bint Mu`awwidh (may Allah be pleased with her) said: After

the consummation of my marriage, the Prophet (blessings and peaceof Allah be upon him) came and sat on my bed as far from me as you are sitting now, and our little girls started beating the duff and reciting verses mourning their father, who had been killed in the battle of Badr. One of them said: Among us is a Prophet who knows what will happen tomorrow. At that the Prophet said, “Omit this and keep on saying the verses which you had been saying before.” Narrated by al-Bukhari, 3779.

Thus the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) disallowed some songs with words that are contrary to Islamic teachings.

4. It was narrated that `A’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) said: Abu Bakr came in and there were two of the young girls of the Ansar with me who were singing the verses that the Ansar had recited on the day of Bu`ath, but they were not known to be singers. Abu Bakr said: Singing of the Shaytan in the house of the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)? That was on the day of Eid. The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “O Abu Bakr, every people has its Eid and this is our Eid.” Narrated by al-Bukhari, 909; Muslim, 892.

Al-Hafiz Ibn Hajar (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Al-Qurtubi said regarding her words “but they were not known to be singers”: That is because they were not people who were known for singing as professional singers may be known for that. This serves to highlight that this was not a regular type of singing as done by those who are known for it, which is the type that moves people and stirs up emotions. With regard to that type of singing – if it is singing poetry that describes the beauty of women or wine and other prohibited things – there is no dispute about its being prohibited.

Fat-h al-Bari, 2/442.

Ibn Qudamah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Whatever the case, whoever takes singing as a profession whereby people come to him to listen to

him, or he goes to perform for people, and whoever buys a male or female slave to sing for him, and brings people together to listen to the singing, his testimony is to be rejected, because this, according to those scholars who did not regard it as prohibited, foolish, despicable and undignified. Whoever thinks that it is prohibited, yet he does it, is – in addition to being foolish – a sinner who is persisting in sin and committing his evil openly. This is the view of ash-Shafa`i and as-hab ar-ra'y.

Al-Mughni, 12/42.

Fourthly:

The one who researches this matter cannot overlook the foolish or provocative wording of songs, and he cannot overlook the alluring movements of female singers, or the provocative impact of musical instruments, and the effect all of that has on the one who listens to them.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Musical instruments intoxicate souls, and the impact of music on the soul is greater than the impact of alcohol. Once people become intoxicated by the sounds, they will become vulnerable to committing shirk, and will be inclined towards immoral deeds and transgression, so they will commit acts of shirk, kill souls whom Allah has forbidden us to kill, and commit zina. These three actions are very common among people who listen to music.

Majmu` al-Fatawa, 10/417.

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

What we and others have seen or come to know from experience is that when musical instruments become common and popular among people, and they become preoccupied with them, Allah will send an enemy against them and they will be tested with drought and famine and bad rulers. The wise man is the one who reflects on people's experience and sees for himself. And it is Allah Whose help we seek.

Madarij as-Salikin, 1/500.

And Allah knows best.