



The Ruling of Music in Islam: Evidences and Harms

نحمده ونصلي على رسوله الكريم

Music has become a deeply embedded part of modern life. It is played in shops, cars, and even phone calls. However, its Islamic ruling remains clear. Numerous verses from the Qur'ān, Aḥādīth of the Prophet ﷺ, and unanimous positions of the classical scholars of the four schools of law all point to one conclusion: music and unlawful singing are Ḥarām. This article will present evidences from the Qur'ān, Sunnah, and scholarly sayings with regards to music being Ḥarām, as well as its harms.

Qur'ānic Evidences

1. Allāh ﷻ states in Sūrah Luqmān (31:6):

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يَشْتَرِي لَهْوَ الْحَدِيثِ

"And among mankind are those who purchase idle speech to mislead others from the path of Allāh"

The great companions Ibn Mas'ūd and Ibn 'Abbās (RA), as well as scholars like Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Mujāhid, unanimously interpreted "idle speech" as referring to music and singing. Ibn Mas'ūd (RA) swore by Allāh that it referred to singing and musical entertainment.

2. In Sūrah al-Furqān (25:72), Allāh ﷻ says:

وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَشْهَدُونَ الزُّورَ

"And those who do not bear witness to falsehood"

Imām Abū Ḥanīfah and others interpreted "falsehood" (al-zūr) here as music and singing.

3. Lastly, Allāh ﷻ says in Sūrah al-Isrā' (17:64):

وَاسْتَفْزِزْ مَنِ اسْتَطَعْتَ مِنْهُمْ بِصَوْتِكَ

"And mislead whoever you can among them with your voice"

Exegesis from scholars like Mujāhid, Ḍaḥḥāk, and Suyūṭī (RA) interpret Shayṭān's "voice" as referring to music, singing, and wind instruments.

Aḥādīth of the Prophet ﷺ

There are numerous Aḥādīth from the Prophet ﷺ that speak about the harms of music and clearly state that it is Ḥarām. Below are just a few, which are sufficient for anyone seeking the truth and willing to understand.

1. Narrated Abū 'Āmir or Abū Mālik al-Ash'arī that he heard the Prophet ﷺ saying:

لَيَكُونَنَّ مِنْ أُمَّتِي أَقْوَامٌ يَسْتَحِلُّونَ الْحِرَّ وَالْحَرِيرَ وَالْخَمْرَ وَالْمَعَازِفَ

"There will be people from my ummah who will declare adultery, silk, alcohol, and musical instruments as lawful". (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī: 5590)

This Ḥadīth not only condemns music but equates its Ḥarām status with that of Zinā and alcohol.

2. It was narrated from Abū Mālik al-Ash‘arī that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said:

"لَيَشْرَبَنَّ نَاسٌ مِنْ أُمَّتِي الْخَمْرَ يُسَمُّونَهَا بِغَيْرِ اسْمِهَا يُعَرِّفُ عَلَى رُءُوسِهِمْ بِالْمَعَازِفِ وَالْمُعَنِّيَاتِ يَخْسِفُ اللَّهُ بِهِمُ الْأَرْضَ وَيَجْعَلُ مِنْهُمْ الْفِرْدَةَ وَالْخَنَازِيرَ"

"People will consume alcohol and change its name, and musical instruments will be played over their heads. Allāh will cause the earth to swallow them, and some will be transformed into apes and swine". (Sunan Ibn Mājah: 4020)

In the above two narrations, the word Ma‘āzif is used. The scholars of the Arabic language are unanimous that it refers to musical instruments. (Ibn Manẓūr, Lisān al-‘Arab, vol. 9, p. 189)

3. ‘Imrān ibn Ḥuṣayn narrated that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said:

"فِي هَذِهِ الْأُمَّةِ خَسْفٌ وَمَسْحٌ وَقَذْفٌ". فَقَالَ رَجُلٌ مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَمَتَى ذَاكَ قَالَ "إِذَا ظَهَرَتِ الْقَيْنَاتُ وَالْمَعَازِفُ وَشُرِبَتِ الْخُمُورُ"

"In this ummah there shall be khaṣf (collapsing of the earth), maskh (transformation), and qadḥ (pelting)". A man among the Muslims said: "O Messenger of Allāh! When will that be?" He said: "When singing slave-girls, musical instruments, and drinking intoxicants become widespread". (Jāmi‘ al-Tirmidhī: 2212)

4. Abū Umāmah reported that the Prophet ﷺ said:

"God has sent me as a mercy to the universe and as a guidance to the universe, and my Lord who is great and glorious has commanded me to annihilate stringed instruments and wind instruments". (Mishkāṭ al-Maṣābīḥ: 3654)

5. Salām ibn Miskīn, quoting an old man who witnessed Abu Wa'il in a wedding feast, said: They began to play, amuse and sing. He united the support of his hand round his knees that were drawn up, and said: I heard ‘Abdullāh (ibn Mas‘ūd) say: I heard the apostle of Allāh ﷺ say: "Singing produces hypocrisy in the heart". (Sunan Abī Dāwūd: 4927)

There are numerous other Aḥādīth that deal with the consequences of music, its prohibition, and the spiritual damage it causes.

Statements of the Fuqahā’ (Classical Jurists)

The four schools of Islamic law are consistent in their position:

- Ḥanafī jurists like Ibn ‘Ābidīn, al-Kāsānī, and Ibn al-Humām held musical instruments designed for entertainment including like guitars, flutes, and violins as Ḥarām. Even if the song content is wholesome, the use of these instruments renders it impermissible.
- Mālikī scholars like al-Qurṭubī condemned music for its influence on the heart and soul. Ishāq ibn ‘Īsā al-Ṭabbā’ said: "I asked Mālik ibn Anas about what some of the people of Madīnah take as a concession regarding singing (al-ghinā’), and he replied: 'Only the wicked (al-fussāq) do that among us'. (Narrated by ‘Abd Allāh ibn Aḥmad in al-‘Ilal (1/260)).
- Shāfi‘ī authorities such as Imām Nawawī ruled that instruments used by drinkers, such as the flute and lute, are forbidden.
- Ḥanbalī works like Ibn Qudāmah’s al-Mughnī distinguish between the lawful use of the daf (one-sided tambourine) in weddings and the prohibited instruments designed purely for entertainment.

Imām Ibn Hajar al-Haytamī concluded in his encyclopedic work *Kaff al-ra'ā 'an muḥarramāt al-lahw wa-l-samā'* that the prohibition of musical instruments is decisively established through approximately forty Aḥādīth, of which many are Ṣaḥīḥ or Ḥasan.

What is Forbidden?

Based on the above, the following are deemed Ḥarām:

1. All musical instruments designed for entertainment and pleasure, such as the guitar, violin, flute, drum sets, keyboard, and others.
2. Singing that:
 - Distracts from Farḍ or Wājib obligations,
 - Promotes immoral or inappropriate themes,
 - Is performed by non-Maḥram women for men,
 - Is accompanied by forbidden instruments.

Why Is Music Harmful?

Islam does not prohibit without reason. Music is not just a “harmless pastime”; it carries spiritual, psychological, and social consequences:

1. Music leads to spiritual decline

Music shifts the heart away from the remembrance of Allāh ﷻ. The Arabic word for musical instruments, مَلَاهِي, literally means “that which distracts from Allāh.” It drowns the soul in heedlessness and fleeting pleasures. Allāh ﷻ says:

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

“I did not create jinn and humans except that they worship Me”. (51:56)

2. It stirs desires and leads to immoral acts

Psychologists have proven that music arouses passion, affects emotions, and changes body chemistry. It is often used to enhance emotional states, whether of excitement, lust, rebellion, or sadness. This is why music is closely associated with Zinā, indecency, and emotional instability. Allāh ﷻ says:

فَلَا تَخْضَعْنَ بِالْقَوْلِ فَيَطْمَعَ الَّذِي فِي قَلْبِهِ مَرَضٌ

“O wives of the Prophet! Do not be soft in speech, lest he in whose heart is a disease should be moved with desire”. (33:32)

If soft speech can arouse desire, what then of singing layered with music?

3. It promotes un-Islamic ideologies

Much of modern music glorifies values like rebellion, Zinā, drugs, and “freedom” from religion. Songs idolise romantic love and suggest “follow your heart” instead of obeying Allāh ﷻ. These messages run completely counter to Islamic teachings and subtly corrupt the listener’s worldview.

The Illusion of Harmlessness

Some may argue: “What if music doesn’t affect me in those ways”? Islam’s rulings are not based on personal experiences but universal principles. Just as alcohol is Ḥarām because it intoxicates, even if one claims it doesn’t harm them, music is Ḥarām because of its nature, not only its effect. The principle in Islamic jurisprudence is:

دَرْءُ الْمَفَاسِدِ أَوْلَى مِنْ جَلْبِ الْمَصَالِحِ

“Preventing harm takes precedence over achieving benefit”

Even if someone claims that music brings comfort, Islam teaches that long-term harm outweighs temporary pleasure.

What About the Hadīth of the Two Girls Singing?

Some cite the Ḥadīth where two girls were singing in the presence of the Prophet ﷺ and ‘Ā’ishah (RA) as proof of permissibility. However, it must be noted that:

- The girls were singing without instruments,
- The content was about battle, not love or lust,
- They were not professional singers,
- The Prophet ﷺ turned away, showing disapproval, though he did not stop them due to the occasion (‘Eīd).

Permissibility of Nasheeds

A nasheed is a form of vocal poetry or song recited without musical instruments. It is permissible if free from words or themes contrary to Islamic beliefs, does not imitate the tunes of immoral people, and is not composed in moving, song-like tunes that cause listeners to become entranced and overlook the message. When within these limits, nasheeds are permissible.

Conclusion

In light of the clear Qur’ānic verses, numerous Ḥadīth, and the consensus of jurists from all four Madhāhib, music - especially involving instruments and unlawful themes - is Ḥarām. Its harms are spiritual, psychological, and societal. It dulls the heart, distracts from the purpose of life, and paves the way to sin.

A Muslim striving for closeness to Allāh ﷻ should distance themselves from music and seek healthier, spiritually nourishing alternatives - like reciting the Qur’ān, listening to beneficial talks, or enjoying Ḥalāl forms of poetry.

May Allāh ﷻ protect our hearts from heedlessness and keep our ears away from what displeases Him.

References:

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Written by: Mufti Naeem Ali

Editors: Maulana Eshfaq Akbar, Mufti Umar Azhar Syed