

1377 - Meaning of taghanni ('reciting in a melodious voice') in Qur'aan recitation

the question

I have heard that there are ahaadeeth which indicate that it is allowed to recite the Qur'aan in a melodious voice (taghanni). How are we to understand these ahaadeeth?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Reciting in a melodious voice (taghanni) may mean:

1 - Making the voice beautiful when reciting, whilst reciting aloud in a tone that conveys the feelings of humility, softening of the heart and sadness, without making too much effort or exaggerating.

Taghanni means reciting aloud, as it was narrated in Saheeh Muslim that Abu Hurayrah said: "The Messenger of Allaah SAWS (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: 'Allaah does not listen to anything (more approvingly) than He listens to a Prophet reciting the Qur'aan aloud in a melodious voice...' This indicates that we are commanded and encouraged to make our voices beautiful when reciting Qur'aan.

This hadeeth clearly states the meaning of taghanni. The phrase "reciting aloud" explains it. Reciting aloud means raising one's voice when reciting and making it beautiful, in a natural manner with no artifice, which one enjoys and finds pleasure in. Before the Qur'aan was revealed, the Arabs used to sing huda' (songs of camel drivers) when riding camels, to make the journey pass more quickly when they were sitting in their saddles, and so on.

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But when the Qur'aan was revealed, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) wanted to make them focus on the Qur'aan and raise their voices and make them beautiful when reciting it. He wanted that to take the place of singing, whilst paying attention to the correctness of the recitation. So in place of the pleasure of singing, they were given the pleasure of reciting Qur'aan, just as everything forbidden was replaced with something that was better for them. So istikhaarah was prescribed in place of seeking decisions from azlaam (arrows for divination) and marriage in place of fornication, and so on.

2 - It may be that what is meant by taghanni is that which resembles singing and music, and impressing others with the tune, without understanding and without any humility, as mentioned in the hadeeth which describes the Signs of the Hour.

3 - It is unlikely that taghanni means being content with the Qur'aan alone and having no need of people, because the meaning is different and is linguistically unacceptable.

This making the voice melodious in recitation should be done in a natural manner, not by means of teaching and training according to the rules of music.

Ibn al-Qayyim mentioned that reciting Qur'aan with a tune and in a melodious voice, if it is done naturally with no exaggeration or special teaching or training, then it is permissible. If extra effort is added to the natural tone to make it more beautiful, such as when Abu Moosa al-Ash'ari said to the Prophet SAWS (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), "If I had known (you were listening), I would have made it more beautiful for you," then that is OK. But if the reciting in a melodious voice is done in an artificial manner, with special training and musical rhythms, this is something which the salaf despised, and which they criticized and condemned. It is known that the salaf used to recite the Qur'aan in a sad tone, making their voices beautiful and giving it a sad tone sometimes and a joyful tone sometimes. This is something natural.

Defining the meaning of making the voice melodious (taghanni)

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(a) I say: there is no dispute concerning the validity of the fatwa of Imaam Maalik which is based on the hadeeth of the Signs of the Hour, with its various isnaads, and which states that it is not permitted to recite with a musical tune and following the rules of music in a manner that goes beyond the limits of recitation and correct pronunciation, and does not befit the dignity of the Qur'aan.

(b) The ahaadeeth of Anas and Abu Dharr (may Allaah be pleased with them both) refer to the recitation of the Khawaarij, who used to recite the Qur'aan throughout the night and day, but it did not go any deeper than their throats or collar bones, because they did not have knowledge of the Sunnah which clarifies matters, so they were deprived of proper understanding and the reward for recitation. In the ahaadeeth it says that they would exit from the religion like an arrow passing through its target. The ahaadeeth contain the command to kill them and says that they are the most evil of creation, even though you would think that your prayer and your recitation are as nothing when compared with their prayer and recitation. This is the description of the Khawaarij and those who are like them. Ibn Taymiyah said: the hadeeth about the Khawaarij is saheeh in ten different isnaads, which were narrated by Muslim in his Saheeh, and some of which were narrated by al-Bukhaari. The Khawaarij used to denounce the Muslims as kaafirs merely for committing sins, but they were the followers of bid'ah (innovations) and misinterpretations who had split away from the mainstream of the ummah. We ask Allaah to keep us safe and sound in our religious commitment and their worldly affairs.

This is a description which applies only to the Khawaarij and those who are like them. The reciters nowadays are not like this as far as we know.

(c) The fatwa of Imaam Ahmad has to do with distorting the letters and exaggerating elongated vowels, which results from altering the letters and elongating them too much, which takes the recitation beyond what is correct. This fatwa states that it is emphatically disliked, as al-Qaadi Abu Ya'laa said. This refers to someone who goes to extremes and whose recitation is not correct,

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because he adds letters, such as adding waw and alif to the word Muhammad, making it Moohaamad. This is haraam, according to consensus. At the time of Imaam Ahmad, the people used to sing poetry and elongate the letters however they wished. Ishaq al-Mawsili criticized Ibraaheem ibn al-Mahdi for doing that, because he distorted the words from the way they should be in Arabic.

And denouncing that in the case of reciting Qur'aan in a melodious voice is more essential, and this problem does not exist nowadays, praise be to Allaah.

(d)Ibn Taymiyah said: the kind of tune which the scholars regard as makrooh for reciting Qur'aan in is that which involves shortening long letters, lengthening short letters, giving a vowel to a silent letter, or making a vowelled letter silent, in order to make it fit the rules of music. If that also involves changing the way the Qur'aan should be recited and elongating the vowels, then this is haraam.

Reconciling between the evidence which says it is forbidden and the evidence which says it is allowed

There is no contradiction between the evidence which says it is forbidden and the evidence which says it is allowed if the prohibition applies to that which goes beyond the limits of correct recitation, whether by adding or taking away, or by neglecting an obligatory rule, or by going against the well-established rules of recitation.

The prohibition also applies to that which is recited according to the rules of music, even if it is without the accompaniment of instruments, to make the voice tremble or quaver, or exaggerating in going along with a particular musical key which is in the reciter's mind whilst he is reciting.

The permission applies only to that which is in accordance with the rules of sound recitation whilst making the voice beautiful.

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If what is meant by giving a tune is adding or taking away anything, or going against the well-established rules of recitation, this is haraam. If I mean making the voice melodious in recitation (taghanni), in order to make the listener feel happy or sad, or to soften his heart or to make the recitation attractive whilst also pondering the meanings and reflecting humility, then it is mustahabb, so long as it does not distort the meaning or change the pronunciation, or follow the rules of music.

Al-Suyooti said: Reciting Qur'aan with a tune and with beautiful, quavering voices, so long as it does not deviate from the correct way of reciting, is a good way (Sunnah hasanah); if it does deviate from the correct way of reciting, then it is haraam and is an evil deed.

And he said in Sharh al-Risaalah:

From the comments of the imams it may be understood that making the voice beautiful whilst paying attention to the rules of music and also following the rules of recitation is an area that is subject to scholarly dispute.

Some of the scholars said that this is different from the way of the salaf, because the reader may neglect to recite properly, so they said that this was not permitted, in order to prevent the means that may lead to something haraam.

But making the voice beautiful whilst reciting Qur'aan, without paying attention to the rules of music is what is required, and there is no dispute concerning this.

Ibn Qudaamah said: the scholars are agreed that it is mustahabb to read Qur'aan with a sad tone, with a measured pace and with a beautiful voice.

I say: this is taken from the hadeeth of Buraydah, "Recite the Qur'aan in a sad tone for it was revealed with sadness." And the hadeeth of Ibn 'Abbaas: "The best of people in reciting Qur'aan is the one who recites it in a sad tone." But these hadeeths are both da'eef (weak) and the first one

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is da'eef jiddan (very weak).