

To Zain the “Master”, with Love

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We were given so many prizes,
We changed the dessert into oases,
We built buildings of different lengths and sizes,
And we felt so very satisfied.

We bought and bought and couldn't stop buying,
We gave charity to the poor because we couldn't stand their crying,
We thought we paid our dues, but in fact to our selves we were just lying.

Ohhh, I am walking with my head lowered in shame for my place,
Yes, it is easy to blame everything on the west,
When in fact, all focus should be on ourselves!!

These are the powerful and moving words of an Islamic song called “Awakening” by world-famous nasheed artist - Maaher Zain - in his CD album entitled “Thank You Allah”. This CD took the world by storm in 2009 and in April 2012, when the Master of his art released his next album entitled: “I Believe,” an astonishing 100 million YouTube views were recorded on his various songs in the first week alone, breaking all other YouTube records thus far.

Maaher Zain, as well other nasheed artists like Sammy Yusuf, Irfan Makki and Mesut Kurtis undoubtedly possess extraordinary talent. They have reached out to millions of youth worldwide and have touched them in unimaginable ways. Their nasheeds in particular have kept many a driver awake on a lonely stretch of road and have kept many a lost soul company when they were plagued with worries and anxiety.

However, these talented artists may have unknowingly treaded on a grey area in Islam – the acceptable boundaries of music. Prominent mystics also dabbled in Sama, a form of mystical music so named to distinguish it from sensuous music, a few centuries ago, but it was done with strict conditions. Only their mature disciples were allowed to attend, no women and children were allowed in the gathering, it was not held in a public arena with free-mixing of sexes and enticing lights and sound effects, and it was presided over by a Shaikh Kaamil (Perfected Sufi Mentor). Though strictly controlled and meant to attain spiritual ecstasy, Sama was strongly opposed by later scholars such as Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and Hajee Imdadullah Muhajir Makki saying that the justification they sought for it was flawed.

If an austere Sufi gathering came under fire, how can a modern musical concert be justified?

The Almighty informs us in verse 17:64 of the Qur'an that the devil was given an alluring voice to mislead mankind. Our Noble Prophet (Peace be upon him) was never seen with any musical instrument in his hand and nor did he attend any musical concert, but he did not object to the tambourine (one-sided drum) being played in his presence on some occasions such as weddings and on the day of Eid by innocent minors. He also praised Sayyadina Hassan ibn Thabit for upholding his honour in poetry saying to him: “O Lord! Aid him by the pure soul”, but he stuffed his ears tightly when he heard the sound of a flute being played by a lonely nomad in the dessert.

There is a place for gaining nearness to the Almighty through pure sounds and voices in Islam, but modern music plays no part in this. And so, with love, do I address this article to such artists and to all those who listen to their music and seek to justify it.

Interview

On Oct. 4, 2010, the Brunei Times sought Maher's opinion on music. He responded thus: “There's a lot of scholars who say it's haraam and there are also a number of scholars who say it is halaal. It's just a difference in opinion. We also know that 99% of what we hear outside is clearly haram.” Maher further went on to say that his music is meant to dispel the image of Muslims being “terrorists” and he will focus in future on relationship and societal issues. There is no doubt that the Master intends doing good, but allow me to highlight the flaws in his reasoning in the light of the following arguments:

Firstly, if you look deep enough, you will find a difference of opinion in everything in Islam. Such differences will either be real or imaginary, or it may be on something as minor as saying ameen loudly or softly in salaah to something as major as whether dealing in interest (riba) is allowed or not? The point is that whatever fatwa (ruling) you are looking for, you will find it. A fatwa doesn't necessarily denote permissibility, just a Halaal Logo doesn't necessarily mean that the item is suitable for Muslim consumption.

Just as one finds “backdoor” doctors performing illegal abortions, dodgy accountants declaring their clients bankrupt to avoid paying their debts and greedy pharmacists claiming from the Medical Aid for soap and shampoo, one will also find “backdoor” scholars validating marriages of three talaqs, legalizing prostitution, showing you how to “halaalise” your gambling winnings, and even cheat the Almighty off His 2 ½% annual zakaat (alms)!

Some call them “scholars for dollars,” those on the payroll, whilst others say it more humorously: “Grand Muftis – you give them a grand (R1000-), they give you any fatwah.” The corrupt generally sniff such scholars out to justify their evil. Like how we have the followers of the Rahman in this world, we also have followers of shaitan; some will follow the genuine ‘ulema, whilst some will follow the sell-outs. If one such backdoor scholar, now matter how well-dressed or intelligent he may be - tells you that marrying your sister and drinking urine is allowed, would you do it? So, having a ruling

allowing music in the modern sense does not necessarily make it permissible. There is consensus on the prohibition of music in general, but there exists a difference on the extent of how much is allowed. However, the boundaries of this “extent” have often been abused.

Human intelligence or logic can be used for you or against you. Iblees, the most intelligent creature on the planet till today, was debased for using his “logic” when he was asked to bow to Adam. He reasoned that since he was made from fire and Adam of dust, he was more superior. His logic earned him the eternal curse of the Almighty. That is why in Islam, we believe that Wahy (divine revelation) is above intelligence and any thing that has a “justification” is not necessarily correct if it conflicts with the Qur’an and Sunnah. So, please Zain, review that fatwah.

Secondly, differences can exist in matters in fiqh (jurisprudence), but there can be no difference of opinion in matters of permissible and impermissible (halaal/haram). Both are clear, and if one is in doubt, then we adopt the path of caution as per the command of our Noble Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him): “Da’ ma yureebuka ila ma yureebuk...” (Abandon that which is doubtful for that which is not doubtful.)

Two Muslims can perform salaah differently, but they can not eat different chickens. One can not say that his certifying body is Hanafi, and the other is Shafi. There is no Shafi or Hanafi chicken. It is either halaal or haram. For that matter, you can not get halaal music or haram music, or halaal liquor or haram liquor. Music is not a jurisprudential issue, it’s a fundamental issue. It is not allowed in the modern concert form we have today, accompanied by sound effects, disco lights, rubbing shoulders with the opposite sex, the audience standing on their chairs “ooohing” and “aaahing” and making use of all the musical instruments under the sun like the guitar, the piano, percussion instruments and synthesizers. It is bad enough committing a sin in private, but leading millions in sin only adds millions of evil in your own record. Do you want to be remembered as the Pied Piper of Hamlet or the Saint of Salvation?

Thirdly, everyone wants to do some good for humanity, but there is a correct way of doing the good, and the incorrect way of doing it. Our government, for example, in their quest to raise the percentage of literacy in this country, introduced the OBE system, but what was the result other than more illiteracy. In order to eradicate AIDS, they made condoms freely available, but they only succeeded in creating a culture of more illegitimate sex. In order to please our daughters, we allow them to date multiple boys in order to find her “prince charming,” but we only create a mindset of “casual relationship” within her own marriage which generally contributes in her own divorce.

No doubt there is a need to dispel the myth of “terrorism” from Islam and give comfort to a troubled world, but does music and concerts really achieve this aim? Did “Islamic” music stop the USA from invading Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya, modify its foreign policy and make its huge media apparatus sympathetic to the Muslims? No. Let us scratch where it itches. Islam has very different solutions to all these problems. In fact, prescribing music as a solution to terrorism is like having a huge concert in the middle of Palestine hoping that the Israelis will feel the Palestinians sorry and retreat!

Fourthly, by attaching the name of the Almighty to anything doesn't make it permissible. A person mentioning the name of the Almighty before slaughtering swine does not make it halaal and a playboy fornicating with his mistress in a luxury hotel whilst taking the name of the Almighty does not make her his wife! So taking the name of the Almighty to the accompaniment of music does not legalise it!

Quite the contrary, this is the worst type of disrespect and sacrilege to our Creator. We are mixing the most pure and glorified Name with the most impure sound, and still expect to be inspired and guided? It is like a perfumed person sleeping in a sewerage pipe, expecting the filth in the sewerage to miraculously become soji or sweetmeats due to his perfume. Can this ever happen?

Fiddling With the Sacred Texts

The true scholars have satisfactorily answered all the arguments of those who attempt to legalise music, but I wish to just give two examples of the nature of such arguments to realize how shallow they really are.

The most common of these arguments sounds convincing, but is, in fact, the weakest. Many of those who justify proper music claim that the word Ghina (music) doesn't explicitly appear in the Qur'an, so it is allowed. This is like saying that Islam equals the explicit words of the Qur'an only, so there is no need to take recourse to the implied meaning of the Qur'an, the sayings of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him), his Companions and the analogy of the jurists (fuqaha), in order to gain the full picture. Islam is not only the Qur'an, it's a combination of many other aspects, just like our Sunday braai is not only the meat, we need the salads, the baked beans and the coke too. Understand this well.

Even if we accept this argument, where is it explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an that the deceased should be carried in a bier or transported in a hearse, that our Masjids should have carpets, a dome and a minaret, that we should not consume dagga or puff on the hookah, or attend secular Muslim Schools. You will find a dozens of examples that Muslims regard as part of Islam, but is not mentioned in the Qur'an. So let us forget this argument and gain a better insight in the usool (principles) of Islam.

The second common argument is that once Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him), after hearing the melodious recitation of the Qur'an of Sayyadina Abu Musa Al-Asha'ari, told him: “Verily you have been given from the flutes of the family of David.”

In today's times, it would be equivalent to telling a person: “You have a voice of a nightingale.” Does this mean a person has become a bird? A vain person is generally referred to as a “peacock,” so did this person automatically grow purple and green feathers on his back? Sayyadina Abu Musa is not documented to have possessed a flute in his life, so how can we imply the permissibility of all musical instruments from a figure of speech?

Many people regularly meddle with their tax returns and get away with it, let us not feel we can also meddle with Islam and get away with it. If something is forbidden, let us

say that we are weak and one day we will reform. Let us not justify it and play X and O with the Almighty, unless if we have the capacity of bribing an angel to represent us in front of the Almighty on the day of Judgment and get away with murder. So let us make a commitment to only listen to pure sounds that takes us closer to the Almighty, and not the whisperings of the devil.

Conclusion

One of the great miracles of the Qur'an and of dhikrullah (remembering the Almighty) is a feeling of warmth and serenity from deep within the heart. This feeling of peace does not need the aid of music or dancing to achieve. It is achieved by means of dignified concentration and grace in communicating with the Almighty. Music and dancing creates external exhilaration and sensuous excitement, not internal peace. Do not confuse the two feelings.