

5.3 Music and Media

OBJECTIVES:

- Reflect on time as the greatest asset that Allah (swt) has given us in this world and the choices we can make to use this time to improve ourselves, reach perfection, and move closer to Him
- Explore music and songs, gaming, movies, and TV shows, as well as digital media as forms of entertainment that are often misused and can have many negative spiritual and physical effects
- Outline the features that can make music *ḥarām* and discuss how these guidelines can help us determine what is *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām* in terms of weddings as well as music and dance classes
- Discuss guidelines on what *ḥarām* elements to avoid in video games, TV shows, and digital media



Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) said:

The feet of a servant of Allah (swt) will not move a step on the Resurrection Day until they are asked about four things: their life, how they spent it, their youth, and how they used it.¹

In the past, we have talked about our purpose in life: *qurb ilāhi*, or closeness to Allah (swt). A major aspect of reaching this purpose is how we use our time. Time is the greatest asset that Allah (swt) has given us in this world in order to improve ourselves, reach perfection, and move closer to Him.

The Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) have taught us that our time should be split into three components. Imām ‘Alī (‘a) has said, “For a believer, there are three portions of time: a portion in which they converse with their Lord, a portion in which they seek their livelihood, and a portion dedicated to their *ḥalāl* pleasures that help them improve.”²



REFLECTION ACTIVITY:

PART A: What does this ḥadīth tell us about how we should spend our time?

Do you think you divide your time equally among these three things?

PART B: Why does the Imām (‘a) mention pleasure or entertainment as one of the portions of time? Is this something necessary? What are some examples of *ḥalāl* entertainment or pleasure?

ENTERTAINMENT: RULES AND GUIDELINES

As we can see from the above ḥadīth, entertainment is an important part of life. We all need some time to rest and recuperate so that we can continue engaging in other important activities, such as worship and earning a livelihood. Many types of entertainment are permissible in Islam. Activities such as playing sports, being in nature, socializing with family and friends, and travelling are all permissible in and of themselves.

However, there are some forms of entertainment about which we need to be extra careful. This is because, in today’s world, these forms of entertainment are being misused and can have many negative spiritual and physical effects on us. These include: music and songs, gaming, movies, and TV shows, as well as digital media use. In this lesson, we will look at some of the guidelines and rules that Islam sets for us in this regard. These rules are in place to protect us from the many possible harmful effects of these types of entertainment.

1 *Ghurar Al-Akḥbār*, Ḥadīth #923

2 *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Ḥadīth #378

MUSIC, SONGS, AND DANCING

There are a lot of questions surrounding music, and which forms of music are permissible and ḥarām. Listening to ḥarām music is a definite sin in Islam. Perhaps some of the wisdom behind Allah’s ruling on this issue can be due to the several bad effects music has on the person who listens to it. Ultimately, we must remember that Allah’s rulings are made to ensure that we live our lives in a way that we are able to reach our true potential, and He seeks to free us through teaching us what is good for us! Later in this lesson, we will look at the rules we can apply to determine which music is ḥarām. For now, we will briefly look at some of the reasons *why* music is ḥarām in Islam.

SOME REASONS WHY MUSIC CAN BE ḤARĀM

1. Ḥarām songs and singing can cause inappropriate desires to enter a person’s heart, and this can lead to other sins. Both the singer and the one who listens attentively to it become negligent towards Allah (swt) and are more inclined toward immoral deeds.
2. Music can distract us from the reality of our lives. This deadens the heart, making it difficult for us to pay attention in our prayers and enjoy the spirituality of supplications.
3. Ḥarām music almost always comes along with promoting a ḥarām lifestyle.



THINK ALOUD: Do we know why the Fajr ṣalāh is two rak’ahs and not three or four?

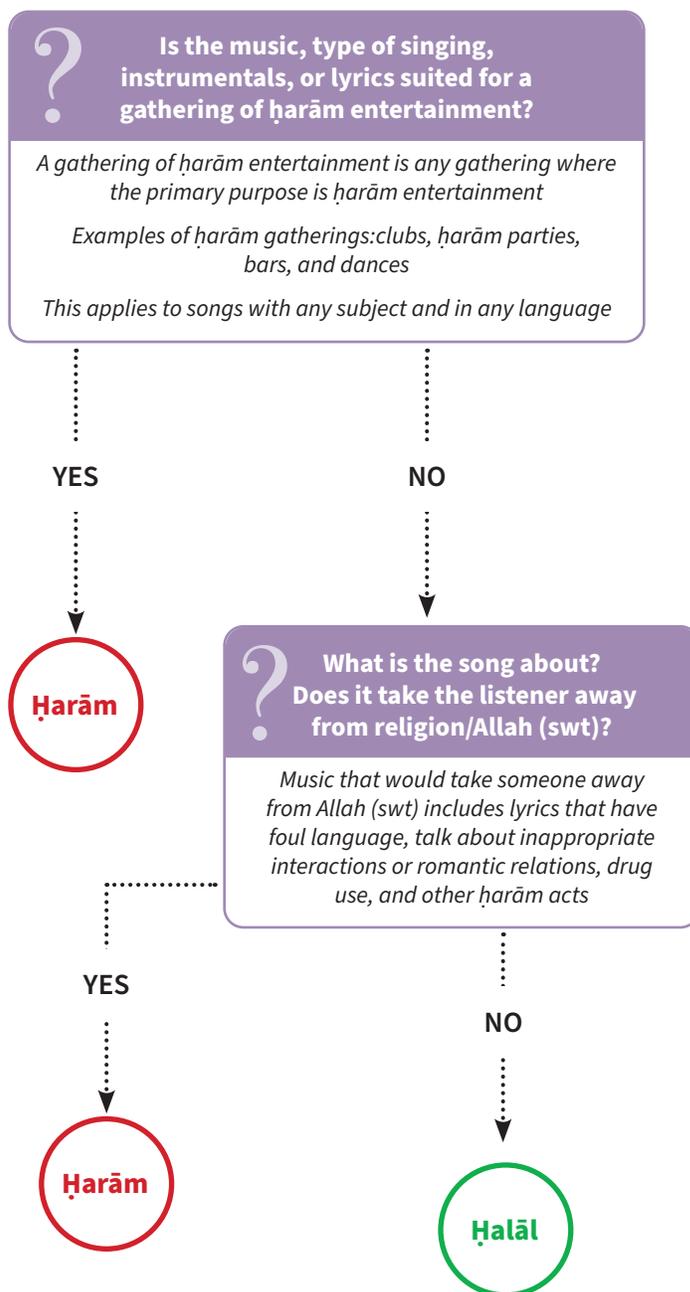
Although we have listed some reasons for why music can be ḥarām, we will never know the *complete* wisdom behind most of Allah’s rulings. However, we still have to follow the rulings, since we know that Allah (swt) is the All-Knowledgeable, All-Powerful, All-Loving, and All-Wise, and therefore, His rulings are in our best interest. For example, we do not know why Fajr is two rak’ahs instead of three or four. If, one day, we wanted to pray three rak’ahs because we have the energy to, this would invalidate our prayer. In the same way, we cannot use the excuse that we think that ḥarām music does not affect us. We know that Allah (swt) has made these rulings for a reason.

Sometimes, rulings are black and white; for example, Fajr is two rak’ahs, eating pork is ḥarām, etc. For other rulings, however, Islam gives boundaries, but the application of these rulings is our responsibility.

WHAT MAKES MUSIC AND SONGS ḤARĀM?



The following guidelines can be followed in order to determine if a song is ḥarām:



Activity 5.3a: What differentiates ḥarām music from ḥalāl music?

Complete the compare and contrast Venn diagram below with the distinct features of ḥarām music and then provide the features, by contrast, that would make some music ḥalāl. Are there any overlaps in their features?

ḤARĀM MUSIC

ḤALĀL MUSIC

WHAT IF I CAN'T TELL IF A SONG IS ḤARĀM?

We are responsible for learning all of the rulings concerning ḥalāl and ḥarām music, as well as any rulings that apply to our lives. This is wājib upon us. If we do our responsibility of finding out the rulings, but we *honestly* cannot tell whether it is ḥarām or ḥalāl still, then we can listen to it.

Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq has said, “A house in which there is ghinā (ḥarām singing) is not safe from calamity; supplications in that house are not answered; and no angels enter such a house.”³

Imām al-Hādī (‘a) has also said, “If a person listens to someone, he is worshipping him. If that person speaks for Allah, then the person is worshipping Allah, but if that person speaks for Shayṭān, then that person is worshipping Shayṭān.”

GATHERINGS WITH MUSIC

Listening to ḥarām music during any gathering is ḥarām. This prohibition applies to weddings as well. If we are at a wedding and ḥarām music starts playing, we should enjoin good by advising the host to change the music, if possible. If that is not possible, we should leave the gathering.

What about places where music is playing in the background, like at the mall? If you are not *actively listening* to a song, then you have not committed a sin.



DANCING

Dancing is generally discouraged in Islam, and most forms of it (such as the type of dancing that takes place in ḥarām gatherings of entertainment) are prohibited. Also, if it occurs in a mixed gathering of males and females then it is definitely forbidden.

MUSIC AND DANCE CLASSES AT SCHOOL

It is part of the curriculum at some schools to learn music and dancing. It is important to remember the following points in this regard:

- If the musical instrument is one that is not primarily used for sinful gatherings, then learning this instrument is permissible
- If the type of singing is one that is not primarily for sinful gatherings, then it is permissible to take part in this class
- However, if the type of music or the singing is one that is primarily or usually used in sinful gatherings, then it is not permissible to take part in this class
- It is generally not permissible to take part in dance classes



THINK, PAIR, SHARE:

Think... What are some polite ways that you could remove yourself from situations where you may be actively exposed to ḥarām music?

Pair... Come up with three scenarios where you may be placed in the difficult position of having to leave a place with ḥarām music. Then, practice extricating yourself from those scenarios with a partner.

Share! Be ready to share with the class!

VIDEO GAMES

Video games are a common form of entertainment. Playing video games in and of itself is permissible and can be a good way of bonding with friends, improving hand-eye coordination, and engaging in ḥalāl entertainment.



As with all things, though, it needs to be done in moderation. Playing video games excessively can have harmful effects on our life. Firstly, it can cause us to neglect our important duties in relation to our families, studies, and religion. The hours spent playing video games may mean we are not helping our parents with chores, doing our homework or assignments, or offering our ṣalāh on time. This is the first sign that we should cut back on the time we spend playing video games.

Video games can have severe impacts on our health. With the new advancements of technology people are spending more and more time in front of screens. Whether it is our smartphones, tvs, playstations or other gaming devices the effect on our mental and physical health is the same. Quickly, we don't realize how much time we are actually sitting in front of the screen which leaves us disconnected with nature. The impact on our physical health is now beginning to show itself. As many children and adults are leaving sports and physical activity and replacing it with gaming and screen time, the effects according to The National Library of Medicine are detrimental. A 2010 study showed a significant correlation between gaming and depression, anxiety, sleep issues, as well as physical illness.⁴

Just like any screen time, consistent gaming can lead to a wide range of mental, physical and spiritual defects. It is best to be able to control the amount of time you spend gaming, and if you cannot control it, it is best to stay away from it as it has the potential to cause many issues within our lives.

Gaming can also become an addiction. There are some signs that a person may be addicted to gaming, such as:

- Losing control over gaming
- Feeling guilty about gaming, but still engaging in gaming for extended periods
- Prioritizing gaming to the extent that it takes precedence over other interest and activities
- Continuing to game despite its negative effects on their studies, family relationships, or social life

If a person feels they may be suffering from addiction to gaming, they should seek help from their parents or other trusted support people. It is also important to remember the following points regarding gaming:

- Games that include inappropriate or arousing visual scenes are not permissible to play. If playing a game leads to indecent thoughts, then playing this game is not permissible, even if the scenes are animated.
- Games that revolve around ḥarām themes, such as excessive violence, drug use, and inappropriate relations are not allowed.
- Many games contain ḥarām music. Listening to this music is not permissible.
- Gaming typically comes along with a social component, where groups of gamers will play together. It is extremely important to remember that many times we do not know the person who is on the other end of the game. We need to keep ourselves and our families safe. If we do know the others that we are playing with, we need to be cautious of using harmful or aggressive language, bullying, and staying away from other harmful effects of gaming with a social media component. We should not follow high profile gamers on social media as they often have inappropriate themes and language.

4 Zamani, E., Chashmi, M., & Hedayati, N. (2009). *Effect of addiction to computer games on physical and mental health of female and male students of Guidance School in city of Isfahan*. *Addiction & health*. Retrieved June 11, 2022, from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3905489/>

MOVIES AND TV SHOWS

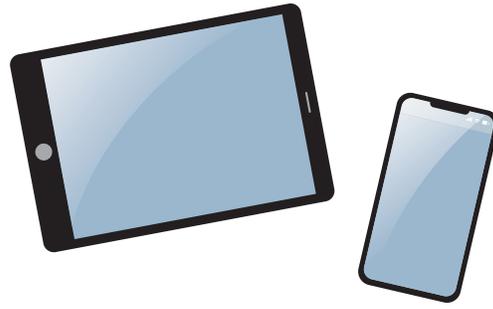
Movies and TV shows are another common form of entertainment in today's society. Some shows and movies are beneficial, while others may have negative effects on our spirituality and psychology. When watching TV or movies, we need to remember the following:

- The content should not include inappropriate scenes, such as people in a state of undress, wearing revealing clothing, or committing indecent acts. We should remember that hijāb and Islamic modest conduct are Islamic duties, and include guarding our gaze. Guarding our gaze includes not watching inappropriate scenes or scenes that lead to inappropriate thoughts.
- The content should not revolve around inappropriate themes, such as inappropriate relationships, drug use, or other negative behaviors. Some shows do not necessarily have explicit content, but the plot and theme centers around inappropriate relationships or other inappropriate behaviors. Watching these shows is not allowed.

It is also important to exercise moderation when it comes to watching movies and shows. “Binging” on a show for hours is not healthy or beneficial and may lead to negative effects in our lives.



QUICK WRITE: All of the media listed in this lesson (music, video games, television, and digital media) are associated with addiction. Take a few minutes to answer the following question: What harms do addictions cause in our lives and what are some ways that we can protect ourselves from developing unhealthy and addictive media habits?



DIGITAL MEDIA (SMALL-SCREEN ENTERTAINMENT)

Smartphones and devices have become a major part of life. We can use them for many beneficial things, such as listening to words of inspiration from scholars of the religion, keeping in touch with family and friends, and obtaining information about the world around us. However, smartphones also pose dangers to our health. Excessive use of devices can lead to many psychological and spiritual problems, including reduced attention spans, impaired ability to concentrate, procrastination, and social withdrawal. As with other things, we need to be moderate in our use of devices. The following tips may help us reduce the amount of time spent on devices:

- Set a “device-free” time-period for a couple of hours each day. During this time, do not use devices at all.
- Adjust app preferences constantly triggered by notifications.
- Reduce the number of applications on devices. Keep only the necessary and very beneficial ones.
- When at home, use computers and other large-screen devices that are less private to allow for adult supervision

In addition to exercising moderation, we also need to remember the following:

- As discussed above, watching inappropriate scenes is ḥarām and has many negative effects on our spirituality. Just because someone forwards a clip, or an advertisement appears on our video feed, we do not need to watch it. We should be very selective about what we open or watch.
- We should not engage in inappropriate communication with anyone, and we should be very careful in communicating with members of the opposite gender. Just like it is not permissible to be in a private room with someone from the opposite gender when there is a chance of ḥarām occurring at the moment or in the future, it is also impermissible to be in a private chat. We have discussed this in further detail in the lessons on hijāb.

