**[Haram & halal](https://www.dawn.com/news/1742665/haram-halal)**

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THE lives of many Muslims are governed (mostly) by what they believe is allowed or forbidden in Islam. There is a wide array of such items: ranging from non-mehram men overhearing voices of women, to women wearing perfume, to the use of certain colours by men. The word forbidden (haram) is used in its most serious meaning: forbidden by God.

Of such things, which many consider haram, one is listening to or playing music. Some young men who have sung and played instruments have given up their musical careers for this reason. Some, such as Yousuf Islam (Cat Stevens) have returned to it and others have continued to avoid it. Many Muslims ban music in their homes and the more extreme ones have broken up musical instruments and cassettes and even destroyed shops that sell them.

The Holy Prophet (PBUH) is believed to have said: “God is beautiful and loves beauty” (Al-Mujam Al Ausat, 6,902). When the wires or keys of musical instruments are played, sounds of magical beauty are relayed to the human ear. With or without these sounds, the human voice can hum or sing, creating rhythms that can transpose the listener to a world of beauty, emotion and magic.

A similar effect on the human heart is created when one listens to beautiful Quranic recitation (qirah). God has created music, through the voice and instruments, just as He has created nature and beauty of the human form as well as that of other species.

Some scholars say that such beauty cannot be haram; others declare it so. If music gives expression to sublime feelings of the human soul, surely sounds from the sitar, harmonium, violin, piano, and other instruments could not be forbidden? Only if music encourages immoral emotions or prevents Muslims from performing their religious obligations would it be forbidden.

Many Muslims regard music and art as forbidden.

Another form of fine art claimed by many as forbidden is sculpturing or painting and drawing the human form. It is said that only inanimate objects can be drawn. This is based on a hadith in which the Holy Prophet is said to have torn out curtains on which pictures had been painted.

Consider the fact that these ahadith mention pictures in the form of “these” or “such” pictures, thus qualifying them: that they may be worshipped or used as idols. In the age when the Holy Quran was revealed, statues or pictures were used as the primary form of idol worship and this polytheism or shirk was the worst attribute of the people of Makkah.

It can be argued that drawing or sculpting, per se, have nowhere been forbidden in the Quran. Indeed, according to some interpretations, the Quran praises pictures and statues made on the orders of King Solomon (34:13). Several contemporary scholars are of the view that only those pictures of humans that are worshipped or depict nudity would not be allowed.

Moving from forms of art, we also find that some animals are considered haram. Consuming pork is haram, as clearly stated in the Quran. Some people have gone as far as to remove pictures of pigs from books.

Using it as one of the forms of studying the animal species is certainly not forbidden. It should be emphasised that only eating the animal is haram.

Dogs are also taken to be haram. They are considered impure (najis). Unfortunately, people have inculcated such hatred of dogs in their children that the latter pelt dogs with stones in streets.

In spite of dogs being the best friends and protectors of humans, keeping them as pets is unacceptable to many Muslims. Contemporary scholars such as Dr Khaled Abu el Fadel disagree. One must remember Surah Kahf, in which the dog of the friends (ashab) is particularly mentioned as he kept watch over them when they slept in the cave.

To declare anything haram or halal, it is necessary to look at the reasons for doing so. Has it been thus mentioned in the Quran and why? According to the eminent scholar Javed Ghamidi, in addition to things that are repugnant to human nature, such as lying, damaging or usurping property, killing and fornication, a few things such as alcohol and pork are stated as haram in the Quran.

These would be accepted as forbidden without question. However, if a hadith suggests that something was disliked by the Holy Prophet, its line of narration must be thoroughly researched and its context must be understood. It would still have conditions attached and would probably be the opinion of one scholar against that of another.

Decrees (fatwas) of religious scholars are only their opinions that must be reconciled with what is in the Quran, discussed and debated and reviewed rationally. Even then, a categorical ‘haram’ must be avoided. The Holy Prophet asked his followers not to add to Islamic injunctions. There is beauty in the world, created by a beautiful God and it must be enjoyed and not forsaken on the basis of rigid views.

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