

An Evening With SHAYKH MISHARY BIN RASHED ALAFASY

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Edited Translation by Abu Zayd

It was an unforgettable evening when this distinguished recitor of the Noble Qur'an visited the brothers and sisters of Ann Arbor, Michigan. The atmosphere was warm, cordial and informal. It was almost surreal to see a figure so popular and well-known in online videos and television channels, and to listen in person to a voice so familiar that it resounds in the far reaches of the world, from streetshops in Makkah to car stereos, home computers and cell phones across the United States and Europe. And yet, equally striking was his humble and modest demeanor. The shaykh announced at the outset that he was here merely to meet his brothers and sisters. He was clearly uncomfortable with formal speaking and shunned the stage to sit on the floor among the worshippers. After reciting verses from the Qur'an, he declined a request to give a lecture and opened the floor to hear from us and take our questions and comments.



Question: *Some recitors of the Qur'an recite according to particular melodies (maqamaat). What is the ruling on that?*

All praise is due to Allah, and blessings and salutations are upon our leader Muhammad.

First of all, let no one think that I am in this gathering to issue rulings or edicts (*fatawa*), for the matter of religious rulings has its own qualifications and scholars. But I will attempt to give an answer based on what I know. I was asked this same question on my website in the past and answered that the particular melodies (*maqamaat*) of the Qur'an are similar to the meters of Arabic poetry (*buhoor al-shi'r*), which are approximately 16 in number. Anyone who composes or recites poetry in Arabic on any measured scale, will inevitably correspond to one of these meters. Likewise is the matter of the *maqamaat* of the Qur'an. Anyone who recites the Qur'an with melodious recitation (*taghanni*), which we have been commanded to do, as the Prophet said, "He is not from us who does not recite the Qur'an with melody (*taghanni*);" so long as he observes the rules and

does it in a beautiful way will inevitably wind up corresponding to one of the *maqamaat*.

So anyone who composes any type of Arabic prose or poetry will wind up corresponding to one of the 16 known meters of Arabic poetry, while anyone who recites the Qur'an with any type of melody and rhythm will wind up corresponding to one of the *maqamaat* of the Qur'an. And Allah knows best.

Question: *How did you memorize the Qur'an and what were the stages and obstacles in your journey?*

This is a lengthy question that would consume an entire session or interview, and I would rather prefer if you ask me more specific questions.

Question: *Is there any recitation that pronounces the word "Ibrahim" as "Ibraham"?*

The recitor Ibn Aamir al-Dimishqi recited the word Ibrahim as Ibraham, while the rest of them pronounce it as it is known. Ibn Amir was

the oldest of the recitors by age, and learned directly from the great Companion Abul-Dardaa. He was actually born in the lifetime of the Prophet but never saw him.

Question from a sister: *I memorized the Qur'an without tajweed because I can't find a female teacher. Do you have any advice for me?*

Allah made the Noble Qur'an very easy to learn, as He said, "We have made the Qur'an easy to remember, so is there anyone who will do so?" So He made the memorization of the Qur'an fairly easy, even in the absence of a teacher. And this question is related to the previous one about my personal journey, because in the early stages I myself learned the Qur'an without a teacher. I initially memorized by way of cassette recordings, and then reviewed the memorization with the help of a friend. We would recite to each other.

But one thing I would add as advice would be to develop a program and schedule for memorization, with the use of specific charts and their likes. Memorization is easy but what is difficult is being consistent and persistent in the review after memorization.

Question: *What is the difference between the qira'at and ahruf of the Qur'an (This question was asked by the translator)?*

There are 10 readings and 7 ahruf of the Noble Qur'an. Their exact nature is a matter of great difference among the scholars. But what is well-known is that the 7 ahruf are a different matter from the 10 readings.

With regards to the seven ahruf, Ibn Mas'ud clarified that the matter of the ahruf is like the usage of the Arabs of the synonyms *aqbil*, *ta'alah*, and *halumma* for the Arabic command "come." The difference stems from the very word itself. Also, many Arabs utilize the words *inbataka* rather than *inqata'a* for the word "to cut off." But our current mushaf used this word only once, in the verse: *fala yubattikunna aazaan al-an'ami . . .* (al-Nisaa 4:119), while the

predominant usage is varying forms of the words *inqata'a* and *quti'a* in the verses. This is specifically with respect to the differences related to the ahruf.

The 10 readings conform to the Uthmanic mushaf and their differences represent the different pronunciations of the Arabs. The base of the words are the same, but there are differences in pronunciation or vowels or the tashkeel markings, an example being the difference between *fatathabbatu* [فَتَثَبَّتُوا] and *fatabayyanu* [فَتَبَيَّنُوا].¹ So these are the variations in the various words of the verses, and they are all from Allah. So, in this matter, we don't say that this recitation is more authentic than the other, because they are all from Allah and have been transmitted to us in a mutawatir manner.

So the 7 ahruf are a different matter and reached us only through one mushaf, that preserved by Uthman, while the rest were burned to prevent the confusion and discord.

The wisdom and purpose of all of this was facilitation for the people, since the Arab dialects and ways of pronunciation were quite different. For instance, Ibn Kathir al-Makki, who was from Makkah, in his dialect articulated vowels with absolute fatha. However, the further north you go geographically, you find the phenomenon of *imaalah* (a kind of angular or more curved articulation) in the pronunciation of the fatha vowel, to varying degrees. So you find in the variant readings what is called *imaalah kubraa* (the greater imaalah) and *imaalah sughraa* (the lesser imaalah), etc.

Question: *Are there some mistakes (ilhan) that are not permissible?*

¹ These are two valid differences in the variant readings of the same word in verse 6 of Surah al-Hujurat. Although the words appear very different, their base is the same in the compilation of Uthman which used a script without vowels or marks. If you remove the vowels and markings from the two words, they will be identical.

Basically, what has been forbidden are deviations or mistakes in articulation that violate the basic rules of pronunciation and change the meanings of the Qur'anic words. Examples include altering the vowels of the words, such as changing fatha to a kasrah, etc.

A man came to Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal and asked him this very same question (about mistakes in recitation). Imam Ahmad responded by asking the questioner his name. When the man replied that it was Muhammad, Imam Malik asked him, "Would you like that someone would call you "Mooohaaaamaaad?"

[Laughter]

Question: *What about exaggeration in some aspects of recitation?*

It is possible that one who exaggerates in melodious recitation and singing may fall into mistakes. This is also referred to as *ilhan*. But if one keeps the singing aspect of the recitation balanced with the rules and principles of tajweed, then that would prevent this from occurring. So, for a sound recitation there should be a balance between three elements: the rules and principles of tajweed, khushu' (concentration and spiritual devotion) and melody (*taghanni*).

Question: *Are there major and minor mistakes, such that when one is praying behind the imam, and the imam makes a mistake, the major ones must be corrected while the minor ones do not?*

With respects to mistakes in recitation of the imam, those that are minor don't warrant correction, like shortening the duration of madd or the ghunnah, or if someone does not articulate the ghunna, or doesn't double the meem or nun or doesn't articulate ikhfa or iqlab, etc. These are considered minor mistakes (*akhtaa' khafiyyah* or *lahn khafiyyah*) that a select few would recognize. Major mistakes are those that where you change a vowel or marking on a word, or forget an entire word. These would warrant correction.

Question: *What are the conditions for a follower to correct the Imam in recitation, for sometimes the imam may make mistakes in recitation but correcting him would cause confusion if the one who picks up the mistake is far away, etc.*

Correcting the imam has its manners and etiquettes, and confusion is something to be wary of since it has the potential to ruin one's prayer. It is not proper, for instance, for those who are far away from the imam to correct him.

It was the Prophet who used to advise his Companions, standing before the ranks of prayer, "Let those who possess maturity and wisdom stand closer to me."² So those closest to the imam, especially the huffaz (memorizers of the Qur'an) should correct the imam.

If sometimes there arises, for instance, general confusion between the imam and the followers, in the recitation after al-Fatiha, the imam should proceed to ruku' to ward off the confusion.

Question: *How about if the vowels are changed by the imam and the meaning is not changed?*

Changing the vowels would necessarily affect the meanings. But if such a situation arises, and the person is far away from the imam, and he remains silent to prevent confusion among the congregation, then there is no problem, insha'allah.

Q: *If the imam makes a mistake in Fatiha . . .*

You people appear to be very sensitive with respect to the imam . . .

[Laughter]

Q: *What is the best age for children to memorize the Qur'an?*

² Muslim 655, Tirmidhi 211, Abu Daud 577, Ahmad 4142, Darimi 1239, Nasa'i 798.

The dominant practice among the classical scholars was to memorize the Qur'an by the age of 8 or 9. Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, for instance, memorized the entire Qur'an by that age. Therefore, one can begin teaching children some time before that, the earlier the better. Some people have even started to teach their children as early as age 2 or 3 or 4.

Q: Do the different readings of the Qur'an have different rules of tajweed ?

They do have different rules, such as the duration of the madd and other matters. These differences are in the principles as well as the auxiliary branches of tajweed. But the basic principles are the same among them.

Q: What is the best method to teach our children the Qur'an?

It is important to set aside a specific time of the day that is most suitable, for instance the mornings or the earlier parts of the day. Equally important is organizing the study. One must also limit the amount so as not to overburden or tire the child. Memorization for the children is similar to muscle. Exercise brings strength. As the child advances in the process, the rate of memorization may increase, and he may be able to memorize several pages at a time. So the amount of material may be increased after several months. For instance, you can begin the lessons from half a page, then gradually increase them to three-quarters of a page and then full pages or more.

But you have to observe the capabilities of the child, because people differ in their abilities.

Q: What's your favorite surah?

All of the Qur'an is my favorite. [*Laughter*]

But many people particularly love to hear the stories of the Qur'an, like the story of Yusuf and Maryam and Musa, more so than the surahs related to commandments and so forth.

Q: Some Islamic schools teach children secular studies along with memorization. Do you think that interferes with the quality of their hifz, and do you think that during hifz no schooling should be allowed?

To the contrary, it is an excellent practice to include memorizing the Qur'an along with regular schooling. This further strengthens them and implants in the children love for the Qur'an, as they become attached to the Qur'an from their childhood.

Such individuals, as adults will have the Qur'an in their hearts even while working and running errands. That Qur'an they memorized in childhood will stir in their hearts in specific times and return them to the Qur'an.

This happened to me personally. I memorized some surahs in childhood, but it was later on, in the year 1990, that I experienced a deep inner calling that made me become serious with the memorization of the Qur'an.

Q: Is there a special duah for khushu? And who's your favorite Qari?

I don't recall a specific supplication for developing khushu (concentration) in prayer. But there are specific means and methods for that, like coming to prayer early and waiting for it patiently, making ablution for every prayer, supplicating between the Azan and Iqama, and reciting the Qur'an in general. All of these means prepare a believer to face his Lord in prayer, and allows him to attain a degree of khushu not attained by the one who rushes to catch the prayer after it started.

With regards to the second question, I basically memorized the Qur'an from the voice and tapes of Shaykh Ali Jaber, may Allah have mercy on him, and Shaykh Muhammad Ayub, may Allah preserve him. So these reciters are the closest to me, although all of them have good and blessing.

Q: Is there a specific way or methodology in choosing the passages of the Qur'an, such as

those related to punishment versus those related to mercy, for recitation in prayer?

I don't know of any specific methodology in choosing verses for prayer. But it is in the Sunnah that the Prophet and the Companions in Maghrib used to recite short surahs. In Isha prayer he would recite surahs such as al-Layl, al-Shams, al-Ghashiya, al-A'la and those of similar lengths. When Muadh bin Jabal lengthened the recitation in Isha, prompting the people to complain, the Prophet scolded him, "Are you an instigator O Muadh?" So lengthy recitation in the obligatory prayers is not from the Sunnah, except in Fajr where there is also a specific amount. This, however, is unlike the matter of Qiyam-ul-Layl and tahajjud prayers.

Q: A questioner asked for help in interpreting dreams.

I have no background in dream interpretation, as the confidantes of the Pharaoh said to him regarding his dream, "We do not know the interpretation of such dreams." (Surah Yusuf, verse 43)

[Laughter]

Q: How can one protect himself from yawning during recitation?

Firstly, you should begin the recitation with isti'adha (seeking refuge in Allah from the accursed Shaytan), and if the condition is severe, then rely on means of ruqya from the Shari'ah, like the mu'awidhatayn (Surahs al-Falaq and al-Nas), reciting Surah al-Fatiha seven times, Ayat-ul-Kursi (verse 255 of al-Baqarah), the ending verses of Surah al-Baqarah and specific supplications.

Q: A child asked the following question: Who is worse: Shaytan or the Pharaoh at the time of Musa?

Both of them are bad. [Laughter]

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After a lengthy conversation that included recitation of various passages and Islamic songs, a brother ended by reciting some verses of poetry compiled in honor of the Shaykh:

قَد جَاءَنَا فِي يَوْمِنَا هَذَا الْقَمَرُ
فَالصُّبْحُ يَفْرَحُ وَالْيَالِي وَالسَّحَرُ

وَالطَّيْرُ غَرَّدَ مِنْ أَغَارِيدِ الْهَوَى
فَرَحًا وَتَجِيلًا لِصَاحِبِنَا الْأَذْرُ

يَا شَيْخُ أَصْعَبَتِ الْفُئَادَ بَزُورَةَ
نَزْدَادُ فِيهَا مِنْ فَوَائِدِكَ الْكُثْرُ

يَا شَيْخُ لَا تَبْخُلْ عَلَيْنَا إِنَّا
قَوْمٌ أَضَاعُوا مَا لَدَيْهِمْ مِنْ عَيْرُ

أَطِيبَ مَسَامِعَنَا بِقَوْلِ صَادِقِ
أَخْرَجَ لَنَا تِلْكَ التَّالِيَّ وَالذَّرْرُ

أَسْمِعْ نَشِيدَكَ عَلِيًّا بِسَمَاعِنَا
وَ اتْلُوا كِتَابَ اللَّهِ فِي أَحْلَى الصُّورِ

يَا ابْنَ الْعَفَاسِي نِلْتَّ حُبَّ قُلُوبِنَا
نِلْتَّ الْعُلَى قَدْ كُنْتَ لِلْعَيْنِ نَظْرُ

إِنِّي سَأَلْتُ اللَّهَ أَنْ يَجْمَعَنَا مَعًا
فِي دَارِ عَدْنٍ إِنَّهَا خَيْرُ الْمَقَرِ

فَبِهَا نَرَا خَيْرُ الْأَنَامِ وَصَحْبِهِ
ذَلِكَ الَّذِي سَنَرَاهُ فِي خَيْرِ الصُّورِ

ثُمَّ الصَّلَاةَ عَلَى الْحَبِيبِ وَصَحْبِهِ
مَا دَارَتِ الشَّمْسُ وَمَا دَارَ الْقَمَرُ

Come upon us indeed is the very moon so bright
And daybreak rejoices and the night and first light

Oh the birds their celestial rhythms do acclaim

Blissful in veneration for our guest of rank and fame

O Shaykh your visit has touched the hearts the same
And from your enduring riches and blessings we gain

O Shaykh be not with us ungenerous for we
Are those who squandered what we have of decency

Do treat our faculties with words truthful and earnest
And produce for us those gems and pearls exquisite

Treat our ears to your heavenly rhythms
And recite Allah's Book in the sweetest fashions

O son of Afasy you attained the love of our hearts indeed
You acquired honor and have become a sight to see

I implore Allah to gather us in unison
In the eternal abode, the greatest station

Therein we shall see the Best of Creation and his allies
And them we shall behold in their finest profiles

And salutations upon the Beloved and his allies
So long as the sun revolves and the moon likewise.

