

88728 - When it is obligatory to listen attentively to recitation of the Quran?

the question

What is the ruling if we are sitting in a large gathering in which Quran is being read, and my friend and I are sitting apart from the others who are present, and chatting together; If we are in a car or bus, and the driver is listening to Quran or is reciting it, and we are not taking part in what he is reciting, or we are in a room and there is someone there who is praying one of the prayers in which Quran is to be recited out loud, or is reading Quran out loud; Or in any other situation in a place where Quran is being recited and we are not taking part in it, must we listen attentively until the reciter finishes, and does the verse apply to us?.

Detailed answer

The scholars differed concerning the ruling on listening attentively to recitation of Quran outside of prayer. There are two opinions:

1 – The first view is that it is obligatory. This is the view of the Hanafis, and some of them regarded it as an individual obligation, whilst others said that it is a communal obligation. They quoted as evidence the verse in which Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“So, when the Quran is recited, listen to it, and be silent that you may receive mercy” [al-A’raaf 7:204]

It says in al-Mawsoo’ah al-Fiqhiyyah (4/86):

Listening to recitation of Quran when it is recited outside of prayer is obligatory if there is no legitimate shar’i excuse for not listening.

The Hanafis differed with regard to this obligation: is it an individual obligation or a communal obligation?

Ibn 'Aabideen said: The basic principle is that listening to Quran is a communal obligation, because it is establishing its right to be listened to and not ignored, which is achieved by some listening attentively, as is the case with returning salaams (i.e., it is sufficient for some members of a group to return the greeting).

Al-Hamawi narrated that his teacher, the prominent judge Yahya who is better known as Minqaarizaadah, said that listening to the Quran is an individual obligation.

Yes, the verse in Soorat al-A'raaf, "So, when the Quran is recited, listen to it, and be silent that you may receive mercy" was revealed to abrogate the permission to speak during prayer, but what counts is the general meaning of the words, not the specific reason for its revelation, and the general meaning includes recitation of Quran both during prayer and otherwise. End quote.

2 - The second view is that it is mustahabb and recommended. They interpreted the verse in Soorat al-A'raaf as referring to recitation in prayer only. Outside of prayer it is recommended and mustahabb. This is the view of the majority of scholars.

Ibn Katheer says in Tafseer al-Quran il-'Azeem (2/372):

'Ali ibn Abi Talhah narrated from Ibn 'Abbaas concerning the verse (interpretation of the meaning):

"So, when the Quran is recited, listen to it, and be silent that you may receive mercy"

[al-A'raaf 7:204]:

i.e., in the obligatory prayer. Something similar was narrated from 'Abd-Allah ibn al-Mughaffal. Ibn Jareer said: Humayd ibn Mas'adah told us, Bishr ibn al-Mufaddal told us, al-Jareeri told us, that Talhah ibn 'Ubayd-Allah ibn Kurayz said: I saw 'Ubayd ibn 'Umayr and 'Ata' ibn Abi Rabaah talking whilst the storyteller was speaking, and I said: Why don't you

listen to the reminder, lest you be subject to the warning? They looked at me, then they went back to their conversation. I repeated it, and they looked at me, then they went back to their conversation. I said it a third time and they looked at me and said: That is only in prayer: “So, when the Quran is recited, listen to it, and be silent that you may receive mercy”

[al-A'raaf 7:204].

This is how it was narrated by more than one person from Mujaahid. 'Abd al-Razzaaq narrated from al-Thawri from Layth that Mujaahid said: There is nothing wrong with speaking if a man recites Quran other than in prayer.

Something similar was stated by Sa'eed ibn Jubayr, al-Dahhaak, Ibraheem al-Nakha'i, Qataadah, al-Sha'bi, al-Saddi and 'Abd al-Rahmaan ibn Zayd ibn Aslam, that what is meant (in the verse) is in prayer.

This was the view favoured by Ibn Jareer, that what is meant is listening attentively in prayer and during the khutbah, as it says in the ahaadeeth which enjoin listening attentively behind the imam and during the khutbah. End quote.

It seems that this view is the correct one, because in order for a thing to be obligatory, clear evidence is required, otherwise obliging the people to adhere to that will cause undue hardship without any evidence for it.

Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymeen (may Allah have mercy on him) was asked, as it says in Liqaa'at al-Baab il-Maftooh (no. 197/ question no. 26):

There was a group of people travelling by car, and one of them put on a tape of Quran; should they all listen to this tape, and is anyone who speaks whilst the tape is playing sinning thereby?

The answer was:

Imam Ahmad (may Allah have mercy on him) said concerning this verse: This applies to prayer. He said: They were unanimously agreed that this applies to prayer. Based on this, if I am next to a person who is reciting Quran out loud, but I am reciting tasbeeh and saying laa ilaaha ill-Allah, then I do not have to listen to him, rather that applies to prayer only.

But I say to the brother who put the tape on: Do not put it on when people are not paying attention, because the least that may be said about that is that it is like those of whom Allah says (interpretation of the meaning): “And those who disbelieve say: ‘Listen not to this Quran, and make noise in the midst of its (recitation) that you may overcome’” [Fussilat 41:26]. If you see that your brothers do not want to listen, and they are busy talking to one another, then do not put the tape on. If you want to listen to it, then there are small headphones that you can put in your ears, and you can listen to it by yourself. End quote.

It says in al-Muntaqa fi Fataawa al-Fawzaan (3/question no. 437):

Sometimes I spend a lot of time in the kitchen, to prepare food for my husband, and I want to make good use of my time, so I listen to the Holy Quran either on the radio or on tapes. Is this action of mine correct or should I not do that, because Allah says (interpretation of the meaning): “So, when the Quran is recited, listen to it, and be silent that you may receive mercy”[al-A’raaf 7:204]?

The answer is: There is nothing wrong with listening to the Holy Quran on the radio or on tapes when one is working, and that does not go against the words “So, when the Quran is recited, listen to it, and be silent”, because listening attentively is required as much as one is able to do, and the one who puts on the tape should listen attentively to the Quran as much as he can. End quote.

Favouring the view that it is mustahabb does not mean that one may be careless and deliberately fail to listen attentively to the words of Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, when they are recited. Keenness to listen attentively should be the basic principle that is established in the life of the Muslim, and he should not do otherwise except in the case of work or need.

Al-Nawawi said in al-Tabyaan fi Adaab Hamalat al-Quran (92):

Something that attention must be paid to and which should be affirmed is respecting the Quran in cases where some of the negligent may be heedless about it in gatherings where Quran is recited, such as not laughing, chatting or talking during the recitation, except in cases of necessity; obeying the words of Allah, “So, when the Quran is recited, listen to it, and be silent that you may receive mercy”; and following the example that was narrated from Ibn Abi Dawood from Ibn ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with him), that when the Quran was recited he would not talk until the recitation ended. End quote.

Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen (may Allah have mercy on him) said in Liqaa’aat al-Baab il-Maftooh (no. 146, question no. 9): It is not good manners to ignore the Book of Allah when it is being recited, even if it is on a tape.” End quote.

And Allah knows best.