

## ARE WE NEGLECTING THE IMPORTANCE OF TAJWEED?

by Fatima Barkatulla

Listening to the Qur'an being recited correctly is enough to soften even the hardest of hearts and Muslims and non-Muslims alike find it a deeply moving experience even if they do not understand what is being said. We feel this even more in Ramadan when we are in the Taraweeh prayers and we can really feel the difference if we go to a mosque where the rules of Qur'an recitation are not being observed as they should.

Every single Muslim has to recite Qur'an in prayer but many of us do not realise that reciting the Qur'an correctly, observing the rules of recitation, is not an advanced science for expert reciters alone, rather it is an obligation upon each and every one of us whenever we recite the Qur'an.

### *What is Tajweed?*

The word Tajweed linguistically means 'proficiency' or 'doing something well'. It comes from the same root letters as the word 'Jayyid' in Arabic, meaning 'good'. When applied to the Qur'an, it means giving every letter of the Qur'an its rights and dues of characteristics and observing the rules that apply to those letters in different situations. We give the letters their rights by observing the essential characteristics of each letter that never leaves it. And we give them their dues by observing the characteristics of each letter that is present some of the time and not present at other times.

The Qur'an was revealed with Tajweed rules applied to it. In other words, when the angel Jibreel (upon him be peace) recited the words of Allah to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) he recited them in a certain way and he showed the Prophet (peace be upon him) the ways in which it was permissible to recite the Qur'an. So it is upon us to observe those rules so that we recite it in the way that

it was revealed.

At the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him) there was no need for people to study Tajweed because they talked with Tajweed so it was natural for them. When the Arabs started mixing with the non-Arabs as Islam spread, mistakes in Qur'an recitation started appearing, so the scholars had to record the rules. Now, because the everyday Arabic that Arabs speak has changed so much from the Classical Arabic with which the Qur'an was revealed, even Arabs have to study Tajweed.

### ***The purpose of Tajweed***

The Qur'an is the word of Allah, and its every syllable is from Allah. Its recitation must be taken very seriously. The purpose of the Science of Tajweed in essence is to make the reciter proficient in reciting the Qur'an, observing the correct pronunciation of every letter with the rulings and characteristics which apply to each letter, without any exaggeration or deficiency. And so through this the reciter can recite the Qur'an upon the way of the Prophet (peace be upon) who received it from Jibreel who received it from Allah (peace be upon) in the Classical Arabic dialect that it came down in.

Arabic letters each have a *Makhraj* - an exit or articulation point - in the mouth or throat from which they originate and they also each have *Sifaat* - attributes, or characteristics - particular to them. Knowing the *Makhraj* and *Sifaat* of each letter is an important part of Tajweed. Sometimes two letters have very similar exits which makes mixing them up easy. So if a person does not know the attributes of each letter there is a danger that he will change the meaning of the words in Qur'an recitation. Observing the rules of Tajweed in reciting protects the reciter from making mistakes in reciting the Qur'an.

### *The ruling of reading with Tajweed*

Muhammad bin Al-Jazaree, the great Qur'an and Hadith scholar 9th Hijri Century, says in his famous poem detailing the rules of Tajweed:

*"And applying Tajweed is an issue of absolute necessity, Whoever doesn't apply Tajweed to the Qur'an, then a sinner is he."*

Sheikh Zakariyyaa Al-Ansari (died in 926 H) said in explanation of this verse in his book *Sharh al-Muqaddimah al-Jazariyyaa*:

"It is required to observe all of the Arabic rules in that which changes it and ruins the meaning".

He regarded it an obligation to keep away from the major mistakes in reciting the Qur'an.

The scholars have divided the types of mistakes one might fall into when reciting the Qur'an into two types:

1. Clear mistakes: which usually change obvious things and change the meaning.
2. Unobvious (hidden) mistakes: for which one may need to study Tajweed rules.

The majority of scholars agree that applying the Tajweed rules of Qur'an such that the clear mistakes are avoided is an individual obligation (*fard 'ayn*) upon every Muslim who has memorised part of or all of the Qur'an. As for applying all of the rules of Tajweed and avoiding the unobvious mistakes then it is (*fard Kifaayah*) upon the Muslim ummah. That is, there must be some students of knowledge who have knowledge of that. This is because the Qur'an was revealed with the Tajweed rules applied to it and the Prophet (peace be upon him) recited it back to Jibreel in that way and the Companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him) read it in that way,

so it is an established Sunnah.

The clear mistakes must be avoided by all and to avoid them one must memorise and read attentively and have knowledge of some basic aspects of Tajweed. If a person falls into the clear mistakes, this is considered a sin and Ibn Taymiyyah regarded it undesirable for a student of knowledge (i.e. someone who knows Tajweed) to pray behind a person who makes clear mistakes in their Salah. As for the unobvious mistakes, then the ruling on them is lighter and the recitation of a person falling into this type of mistake is regarded as lacking in completeness but prayer behind such a person is sound. The list below shows what type of mistakes fall under each category.

### ***Clear mistakes***

Mistakes in words which are clear and inconspicuous, usually changing the meaning. Mistakes related to correct pronunciation of letters so that letters are not mixed up - scholars, and ordinary Muslims should avoid these. Some examples of clear mistakes are:

- Changing one letter into another, or a short vowel (*harakah*) into another, (changing *Fat'hah* into *Damma* or the letter *Qaaf* into *Kaaf* etc)
- Not observing the elongations (*madd*) at all - reciting them quickly as if there is no *madd* so that they turn into the length of a vowel.
- Making a *madd* letter out of a normal *harakah*.
- Stopping or starting at an incorrect place so that the meaning is spoilt. Like stopping at '*Laa ilaaha*' (There is no God), without completing '*illallaah*' (except Allah).

### ***Unobvious mistakes***

Mistakes which are to do with perfecting pronunciation and are not obvious - known only by those who have studied Tajweed rules or experts in this field. Ordinary Muslims may not know these or perceive these as mistakes.

Some examples of unobvious mistakes are:

- Not being totally exact with the elongation of letters: (Making the *madd* shorter or longer by a 1/2 or even 1/4 degree etc.)
- Not observing the attributes of each letter perfectly: (Slightly rolling the Raa', or exaggerating the 'N' sound in Noon etc.)
- Not observing the rules with which to pronounce letters when they are next to each other (like not merging certain letters that should be merged (*idghaam*) and not clearly pronouncing those which should be clearly pronounced (*ith-haar*) etc.)
- Making light letters sound heavy and heavy letters sound light (Except if by doing this you change a letter into another; in this case it would be an obvious mistake.)

The proofs that the scholars bring to show the obligation of Tajweed that it is an established Sunnah is that Allah says in the Qur'an, the meaning of which is:

'And recite the Qur'an (aloud) in a (slow and melodious) style (tarteela)' **(Surah Al Muzzammil, Verse 4)**

Ali ibn Abi Talib (may Allah be pleased with him) said in the explanation of this verse:

"at-Tarteel is Tajweed of the letters and knowing where to stop (correctly)".

And of the proofs also is that Allah says in the Qur'an, the meaning of which is:

'Those who We have given the Book to, give it its right in recitation (recite it as it should be recited)' **(Surah al Baqarah, verse 121)**

And of the rights of reciting correctly is reciting it the way it was revealed.

There are various ahadeeth also showing us the importance of Tajweed.

Umm Salamah was asked about the recitation of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and she described it as a recitation 'clearly-distinguished letter by letter'.

Sa'eed bin Mansoor relates in his Sunan that a man was reciting the Qur'an to Abdullah bin Mas'ood and he recited:

"*Innamas sadaqaatu lil fuqara-i wal masaakeen*", so Ibn mas'ood said: "This was not how the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) recited it to me!" So the man asked, "How did he read it to you, O Aba Abdir-Rahman?" So he said "*Lil Fuqaraaaa-i wal masaakeen*."

He elongated the word *Fuqaraa* and the knowledge of the different lengths of elongation (*mudood*) is also from the rules of Tajweed.

### ***Reciting the Qur'an melodiously***

1. The Prophet (peace be upon him) used to recite the Qur'an in slow, measured, rhythmic tones as Allah had instructed him, not hurriedly, but rather "he would recite a surah in such slow rhythmic tones that it would be longer than it would seem possible."
2. He would stop at the end of each verse.
3. He commanded people to recite in a beautiful voice in a pleasant melodious tone. He said "Beautify the Qur'an with your voices (for a fine voice increases the Qur'an in beauty)."
4. He said: " He who does not recite the Qur'an in a pleasant tone is not of us." Unfortunately all too often we find people reciting the Qur'an quickly and without changing their tone and without any feeling.
5. We should put all our efforts into reciting the Qur'an with as much feeling as we can! Have you ever prayed behind an Imam who

read with feeling? Well the Prophet (peace be upon him) said "Truly the one who has one of the finest voices among the people for reciting the Qur'an is the one whom you think fears Allah when you hear him recite."

6. And once when the Prophet (peace be upon him) complimented Abu Musa al-Ash'ari on the beauty of his recitation, Abu Musa said "Had I known you were there, I would have made my voice more pleasant and emotional for you."

Let us remember, that the Qur'an is the word of Allah. In it we find exhortations, warnings, glad-tidings, parables, stories of the past, commands and prohibitions. Verses to make us think, reflect, cry, fear, hope, love, fall down in prostration! How can we recite all of this without feeling!? When we recite a verse of Qur'an we should imagine that we are trying to feel and convey the full message behind that verse. Perhaps some of us don't feel confident. I believe that this lack of confidence comes partly from not knowing the rules of Tajweed correctly fearing that we will make mistakes and partly from not understanding the meaning of what we are reciting. So let us work hard to remove these two obstacles by learning Tajweed and working towards learning Arabic.

### ***Helpful Tips towards learning Tajweed***

- You must find a Qur'an teacher who has studied Tajweed to listen to your recitation and correct you. Tajweed cannot merely be learnt from books, because the movements of your mouth as well as the sounds are important and only a teacher can correct you and make sure you are applying the rules correctly. Sometimes local mosques will run classes. Qur'an recitation is a science which was passed down generation by generation through teachers not just books, with a direct line to the Prophet (peace be upon him).
- Find a book containing the rules of Tajweed and learn each rule little by little, applying it as you go along with the help of your teacher. There are many concise Arabic books and in English there

are some books as well as tapes to help. Look for books with some drawings showing you how to pronounce each letter.

- Listen to Qur'an tapes of reciters who recite very clearly, at a medium or slow speed (like Sheikh Hudhaify or Sheikh Muhammad Hosary) and try and notice them applying the different rules of Tajweed. Repeat after them while trying to apply the rules you've learnt. Try to copy their tone and melody as well and see how it changes as the meaning of what they're reciting changes.

- Tajweed website: There is an excellent Tajweed website I came across in English which details many aspects of Tajweed in a very clear way including a Question and Answer section:

<http://www.abouttajweed.com>

- Tajweed Mus-haf: You can get a new Mus-haf (copy of the Qur'an), called Mus-haf at-Tajweed, which has the rules of Tajweed incorporated in the text of the Qur'an in colour coding! This is very helpful as it prompts you as you go along. There is also a computer program you can buy which highlights Tajweed rules with recitation.

- Tajweed Poem: If you know Arabic you could memorise Ibn al-Jazaree's poem which contains all the rules of Tajweed. You can get the poem on tape sung as a nasheed in Arab countries. You might find memorising the rules easy in this way.

- Try and apply the rules you learn to the chapters you have already memorised and don't become lazy about reciting correctly. You might have to revise the chapters by looking back at them.

- Practice and repetition will make perfect insha'Allah: As Ibn al-Jazaree says in his poem about acquiring Tajweed:

*'And there is no obstacle between it (learning Tajweed) and leaving it, Except that a person must exercise his mouth with it!'*

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