

The Concept of Competition and Award in Islam

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Abstract

This article attempts to analyse the relationship between competitions, awards and gambling. Briefly, competitions without awards are allowed as long as they do not violate any Islamic principles. While in general, competitions with awards are also allowed on condition that they fulfil certain criteria. However, this will depend on the source of the sponsorship of the award. Competitions with awards are allowed when the source of those awards come from the input of non-participants. However, if they are collected from participants themselves, certain guidelines should be followed in order to avoid gambling.

Introduction

Nowadays, games are not only viewed as a hobby to pass time, or as a "remedy" for health purposes, but sometimes, it is also used as an industry for profit-making wherein participants receive valuable awards. These awards are sponsored, at times, by specific organisations, but other times it comes from the money collected from the participants themselves. In the latter situation, a certain degree of gambling is involved since the participant has to deposit money for the competition in which he wishes to participate. So, when he loses the competition, he loses his money, but when he wins, he will profit by gaining money deposited by the other participants.

The question that this research therefore tries to explore is whether this kind of competition whereby participants have to pay to compete is allowed in Islam. If it is, what are then the guidelines to be followed to avoid gambling?

1. Definition

1.1 Definition of Competition

"Competition" in the Arabic language is “*al-musābaqah*”, or “*al-sabq*”, which means "to be ahead in a race (competition) and other similar situations." However, “*al-sabq*” also refers to "that which is sought after by participants in a competition."¹

The word “*al-musābaqah*” and its related component words thus, carry the meaning of "competition" in the English language. "Competition" refers to the activity of "doing something with the goal of outperforming others or winning something."²

From this definition, it could be summarised that the scope of "activity" in competition is wide. This activity can be mental or physical, and can include special abilities. These abilities are found in humans, animals and machines.

1.2 Definition and Concept of Gambling

It is well known to Muslims that gambling is forbidden in Islam. This is based on the command of Allah s.w.t. which states:

يا أيها الذين آمنوا إنما الخمر والميسر والأنصاب والأزلام رجس من عمل الشيطان فاجتنبوه لعلكم
تفلحون إنما يريد الشيطان أن يوقع بينكم العداوة والبغضاء في الخمر والميسر ويصدكم عن ذكر الله
وعن الصلاة فهل أنتم منتهون³

¹ See: Ibn Manẓūr, Abū al-Faḍl Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, (Beirut: Dār al-Ṣādir, n.d.) 10/151.

² See: Sykes, J.B., ed., *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, 7th ed., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982).

³ al-Qur’ān, 5:90-91.

“O ye who believe! Intoxicants and gambling, sacrificing to stones and (divination by) arrows are an abomination of Satan’s handiwork. Eschew such (abomination) that ye may prosper. Satan’s plan is (but) to excite enmity and hatred between you, with intoxicants and gambling and hinder you from the remembrance of Allah and from prayer. Will ye not then abstain?”

Other than the word “*al-maysir*”, which is used in the above-mentioned verse, "gambling" in Arabic language is also referred to as “*al-qimār*”. Al-Qal’ajī has defined it "as any game that allows the winner to take the bet items from the one(s) who lost."⁴ Ibn Manẓūr says that “*qamara*” is equivalent to “*rahana*”.⁵ It also has the meaning of “*al-murāhanah*”, that is “*al-mukhāṭarah*”, which is "the taking of risk."⁶ Ibn Fāris again says that “*al-muqāmīr*” (the person who gambles) will gain extra wealth or will lose some. In other words, the gambler, whether he increases his wealth or loses some of it, will not remain in the same situation constantly.⁷

The Muslim jurists have not given direct and clear definitions of gambling. However, in their writings, it can be concluded that the main criteria for gambling are as follows:⁸

⁴ Qal’ajī, Muḥammad Rawwās and Ḥāmid Ṣādiq Qunaybī, *Mu’jam Lughah al-Fuqahā’*, 3rd ed., (Beirut: Dār al-Nafā’is, 1988), 369.

⁵ Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, 5/115.

⁶ Ibid., 13/189.

⁷ Ibn Fāris, Abu Ḥassan Aḥmad, *Mu’jam Maqāyīs al-Lughah*, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Maktabah al-Khanjī, 1981), 5/26.

⁸ See Ibn Nuḡaym, Zayn al-Dīn, *al-Baḥr al-Rā’iq Sharḥ Kanz al-Daqā’iq*, 3rd ed., (Beirut: Dār al-Ma’rifah, 1993), 7/91, 8/554, Ibn ‘Ābidīn, Muḥammad Amīn, *Ḥāshiyah Radd al-Mukhtār*, (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1992), 5/257, 6/403, Ibn ‘Ab al-Barr, Abū ‘Umar bin Yūsuf bin ‘Ad Allāh, *al-Tamhīd*, (Morocco: Wizārah ‘Umūm al-Awqāf wa al-Shu’ūn al-Islāmiyyah, 1387H), 13/12, al-Shayrāzi, Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm bin ‘Alī, *al-Muhadhdhab fī Fiqh al-Imām al-Shāfi’ī*, (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, n.d.), 2/325, al-Anṣārī, Zakariyya bin Muḥammad bin Aḥmad, *Fath al-Wahhāb*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1418H), 2/340, al-Bahūtī, Manẓūr bin Yūnus bin Idrīs, *Kashshāf al-Qinā’ ‘an Matan al-Iqnā’*, (Beirut, Dār al-Fikr, 1982), 3/272.

- 1) The source of the prize is comes from the items (e.g. money) deposited or bet by all participants.
- 2) Every participant has to take a risk: either he will win in the competition or he will lose. Thus, one of the participants, when he wins, will gain all that were bet by the others, but when he loses, loses all that he has bet.

In the above-mentioned criteria, the jurists do not differentiate between competitions that involve participants' special abilities and skills, or those that depend only on luck. There is also no difference between competitions that involve betting, whether for a large or small amount (of money) or other items. In all situations, when both the criteria are met, these situations are considered "gambling" which is prohibited under Islamic law.

It is necessary to caution that in some cases nowadays, 'bet' money deposited are collected from the participants without their awareness that they are betting. It is done with slogans and terminology using words such as "participation money", "competition fee", etc. In other cases, the deposit is collected indirectly, for example, through the payment of a phone call for those who are interested to participate in a given competition. In all of the above situations, if the source of the prize comes from the input of all participants, it would be considered "gambling".

As mentioned in the above-quoted verse, gambling has been prohibited because it can cause animosity and hatred between people. It also causes man to forget Allah s.w.t.

and his responsibility to Him and humanity. In some situations those who gamble lose their property, and become emotionally frustrated.⁹ Gambling can also cause a person who has high ideals to overlook the legal means set by Allah s.w.t. to achieve success. The reality of gambling is that only a few will reap the benefits, while a larger number will always be in a state of failure, and will suffer loss of property. The only ones who are sure to gain any profits are the organisers. "Profits that are gained on an illegal basis" can be interpreted as "the wealth of others obtained through wrongful means."¹⁰

2. Original Ruling on Competitions

According to the jurists, the original ruling on "competitions" was that it is permissible.¹¹ This is based on the command of Allah s.w.t.:

وأعدوا لهم ما استطعتم من قوة ومن رباط الخيل ترهبون به عدو الله وعدوكم¹²

“Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war, to strike terror into (the hearts of) the enemies, of Allah and your enemies”

Al-Māwardī explains that the instruction to prepare for war is "not complete without training and competition."¹³ Thus, training and competitions are definitely permissible and encouraged.

⁹ See: al-Qurṭubī, Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad bin Aḥmad, *al-Jāmi‘ li Aḥkām al-Qur’ān*, (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, 1939), 6/291, al-Ṭabarī, Muḥammad bin Jarīr, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl Ay al-Qur’ān*, 2nd ed., (Cairo: Maṭba‘ah Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1951), 2/358.

¹⁰ See: <http://www.qaradawi.net/site/topics/>

¹¹ See: al-Kāsānī, ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Abū Bakr bin Mas‘ūd, *Badā’i‘ al-Ṣanā’i‘ fī Tartīb al-Sharā’i‘*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, n.d.), 6/206, al-Ḥaṭṭāb, Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad bin Muḥammad bin ‘Abd al-Rahmān, *Mawāhib al-Jalīl li Sharḥ Mukhtaṣar Khalīl*, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1992), 5/390, al-Māwardī, Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī bin Muḥammad bin Ḥabīb, *al-Hāwī al-Kabīr*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1994), 15/180, Ibn Qudāmāh, ‘Abd Allāh bin Aḥmad, *al-Mughnī*, (Beirut, Dār al-Fikr, 1984), 11/128.

¹² al-Qur’ān, 8 : 60.

¹³ al-Māwardī, *al-Hāwī al-Kabīr*, 15/180.

In another verse, Allah s.w.t. commands, through the story of the brothers of the Prophet Yūsuf a.s.:

قالوا يا أبانا إنا ذهبنا نستبق وتركنا يوسفَ عند متاعنا فأكله الذئب¹⁴

“They said: O our father! We went racing with one another, and left Yūsuf with our things and the wolf devoured him.”

In the explanation of the meaning of the word “racing” above, some jurists say that it refers to archery, while others say that it refers to racing (running). However, what is important here is that the incident (competition) related by the brothers of Yūsuf a.s., was not disagreed upon by their father who was also a prophet. Hence, because competition was permissible then, it is permissible now, since there is no evidence that subsequently nullifies it.¹⁵

Among the traditions of the Prophet s.a.w. clarifying that competitions are permissible, is the following:

روي عن ابن عمر أنه قال : أجرى النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم ما ضم من الخيل من الحفياء إلى ثنية الوداع ، وأجرى ما لم يضم من الثنية إلى مسجد بني زريق¹⁶

It is reported that Ibn ‘Umar said: “The Prophet s.a.w. organised competition among skinny horses from al-Hifyā’ to Thaniyyah al-Widā’, and among muscular horses from Thaniyyah al-Widā’ to the mosque of Banī Zurayq.”¹⁷

¹⁴ al-Qur’ān, 12 : 17.

¹⁵ See: al-Māwardī, *al-Hāwī al-Kabīr*, 15/180.

¹⁶ al-Bukhārī, Abū ‘Abd Allah Muḥammad bin Ismā‘il, “*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*”, in *Fath al-Bārī*, Aḥmad bin ‘Alī bin Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1989), 6/71, Abū Dāwud, Sulaimān bin al-Ash‘ath, *Sunan Abī Dāwud*, (Hims: Dārul Ḥadīth, 1973), 3/64.

¹⁷ The distance between al-Hifyā’ and Thaniyyah al-Widā’ is six or seven miles, whereas between al-Thaniyyah and the Mosque of Banī Zurayq is approximately one mile. See: Ibn Qudāmah, *al-Mughnī*, 11/128.

In another saying, ‘Āishah r.a. related this story:

أُهَا كَانَتْ مَعَ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فِي سَفَرٍ فَسَابَقْتُهُ فَسَبَقْتُهُ عَلَى رَجُلِي ، فَلَمَّا حَمَلْتُ اللَّحْمَ
سَابَقْتُهُ فَسَبَقَنِي ، فَقَالَ : هَذِهِ بِتِلْكَ السَّبَقَةِ¹⁸

“On one occasion I (‘Ā’ishah) was with the Prophet s.a.w. on a journey. We raced and I won. Then, on another occasion, this time I was fatter, we raced again and he won. He said: this one with that one.”

The aforementioned sayings of the Prophet s.a.w. clearly indicate that competitions are permissible. This is so because the Prophet s.a.w. himself was involved in racing with ‘Āishah r.a. The Prophet s.a.w. himself also organised horse racing as was translated in his earlier sayings.

Ibn Qudāmah also explains that Muslim jurists agree that in principle, competitions are allowed.¹⁹

3. Types of Competitions that are Permissible

Competitions can be divided into two categories: competitions without awards, and competitions that provide awards to the winner. The first category is permissible as it is not restricted to a particular type of competition. In other words, it includes all kinds of competitions, whether these involve humans in racing, or animals, or any other forms, are permissible²⁰ provided they do not transgress the principles of Islamic law.

¹⁸ Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, 3/65-66, Ibn Mājah, Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad bin Yazīd, *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, (n.p.: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Kutub al-‘Arabiyyah, n.d.),1/636.

¹⁹ Ibn Qudāmah, *al-Mughnī*, 11/128.

²⁰ See: Ibid.

However, on competitions that involve awards, the jurists differ in their opinions on the types of competitions that are permissible. The majority of the jurists, among them Mālikī and Ḥanafī scholars, are of the opinion that competitions involving awards are allowed in three types only: archery, horse racing and camel racing.²¹ However, the jurists of the Ḥanafī school of thought also add another type: racing by humans (running).²²

Among the evidence that is singled out by the jurists is the saying of the Prophet s.a.w. narrated by Abu Hurayrah r.a. The Prophet s.a.w. had said:

لا سبق إلا في خف أو حافر أو نصل²³

“There is no award (in a competition), except in a horse race, camel race or archery.”

This saying clearly says that competitions that provide awards are not permissible, except in the types mentioned earlier. Ibn Qudāmah adds that, expertise in the three categories is necessary for the preparation of a strong armed force. Therefore, all out efforts should be made to achieve this, including competitions, which are permissible and encouraged.²⁴

²¹ See: al-Ḥaṭṭāb, *Mawāhib al-Jalīl*, 3/390, al-Māwardī, *al-Hāwī al-Kabīr*, 15/183, Ibn Qudāmah, *Ibid*, 11/129.

²² al-Kāsānī, *Badā’i‘ al-Ṣanā’i‘*, 6/206.

²³ Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, 3/63-64, al-Tarmidhī Al-Tarmadhi says that the status of this saying is “*hasan*”. al-Tarmidhī, Abū ‘Īsā Muḥammad bin ‘Īsā, *Sunan al-Tarmidhī*, (Cairo: Maṭba‘ah Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1962), 4/205.

²⁴ Ibn Qudamah. *Al-Mughnī*, 11/128-129.

In his explanation of the above saying, al-Ḥaṭṭāb adds that games and competitions can cause inattentiveness. Due to that, it is discouraged, except in the three categories of competitions above, because of its great contribution for the preparation of *jihād*.²⁵

Another saying of the Prophet s.a.w., which also serves as a basis for this interpretation is:

كل ما يلهو به الرجل المسلم باطل إلا رميه بقوسه وتأديبه فرسه وملاعبته أهله فإنهم من الحق²⁶

“Anything that causes a Muslim to become oblivious is prohibited, except when practising his archery or training his horse, or playing (games) with his family. All these are part of righteousness.”

al-Kāsānī says that this saying shows that the original ruling regarding games is that it is forbidden, except in the various types of competitions mentioned before. Games between husband and wife are permissible, because they contribute to the strengthening of the relationship between the two.²⁷

The jurists of the Ḥanafī school of thought bring in another type of game which is racing (running by humans) based on the afore-mentioned saying that the Prophet s.a.w. used to race against ‘Āishah r.a.²⁸

On other types of competitions such as fencing, war-ship racing, wrestling and others, the jurists differ in their ruling on these. Some jurists permit them, while others do

²⁵ al-Ḥaṭṭāb, *Mawāhib al-Jalī*, 3/390.

²⁶ al-Tarmidhī said that status of this *ḥadith* is "*ḥasan ṣaḥīḥ*", al-Tarmidhī, *Sunan al-Tarmidhī*, 4/174, Abū Dāwud, *Sunan Abī Dāwud*, 3/28-29.

²⁷ al-Kāsānī, *Badā’i’ al-Ṣanā’i’*, 6/206.

²⁸ Ibid.

not. As for those who permit them, the reason cited is that these kinds of competitions contribute to the development of *jihād* team. While those who do not permit them are of the opinion that these competitions do not contribute much to the said objective.²⁹

From the above discussion, it can be observed that the jurists are very cautious in giving their views concerning competitions in which the winner is presented with an award. This is due to the evidence, which on the face of it, show that only some types of competitions are definitely permissible in Islam.

However, when the evidence is carefully analysed, and when considering the situation in the time of the Prophet,³⁰ the ruling to allow only a few types of competition with resultant awards becomes understandable. Priority was given to the development of physical strength in order to prepare a strong *jihād* team. If too many kinds of competitions are allowed together with their variations, people can be easily absorbed into them, as stated by al-Ḥaṭṭāb.³¹ Hence, only competitions that contribute to the said goal are allowed such as archery, horse riding and camel racing.

A corollary from the earlier quotation of the Prophet s.a.w. is the relationship between "forbidden competition" and "slackness". The quotation gives the basis for the prohibition of this type of competition: it prevents people from concentrating on more important matters and promotes "slackness".

²⁹ See: al-Shayrāzī, *al-Muhadhdhab*, 1/414.

³⁰ The conflict and warfare between Muslims in Mādīnah and non-Muslim, particularly Quraysh in Mecca.

³¹ al-Ḥaṭṭāb, *Mawāhib al-Jalī*, 3/390.

However, when there is benefit from games and competitions, they are permitted. On this basis some jurists have allowed some types of competitions such as racing (running) since they are mentioned in the saying of the Prophet s.a.w., as narrated by Abū Hurayrah earlier. In addition, competition between husband and wife, along with games, and the training of horses have already been allowed through other traditions of the Prophet s.a.w. This is a general view that the saying of the Prophet, which permits three types of competitions only, does not contain the meaning of “*al-ḥaṣr*” (restricted to a few only). If this is the case, then it is definite that other types of competitions should not be allowed. The three types of competitions in the afore-mentioned saying of the Prophet s.a.w. serve as confirmation of the importance of those competitions to the present situation.

Thus, what can be concluded here is that all types of games and competitions, even if it involves awards, are permissible when the following conditions are met:

- 1) Games and competitions that do not go beyond the principles of Islamic law.
- 2) Games and competitions that can bring benefits, which are encouraged by Islam such as games that strengthen the relationship between members of the community and the members the family.
- 3) Games and competitions that do not contribute to slackness. In other words, games and competitions which do not cause a person to be negligent in his duty as a slave of Allah s.w.t., a worker, a head of the family, and so on.

- 4) Games and competitions that do not interfere with the importance, and needs, of the affairs of state. For example, in a war situation, a competition that does not contribute positively to a state's armed force can be prohibited.

4. Competitions and Awards

As mentioned in the introduction, competitions nowadays do not take place just to pass time. They have become an industry with large profits and highly valued awards. These awards are sometimes sponsored by certain organisations or otherwise obtained from the fees paid by the participants. The question at hand is whether this is allowed by Islamic law; whether it is a type of gambling; or otherwise.

4.1 Awards Sponsored by Outsiders

"Outsiders" here implies those who do not themselves participate in the competition. These are the organisers who present the award to the winner at the end of the competition. They can be either the Head of the state (*al-Imām* or *al-Khalīfah*),³² organisations, or individuals.

In general, the jurists are of the opinion that it is allowed for the head of the state to sponsor awards in competitions, irrespective of whether the source of that particular award is from the *bayt al-māl* (treasury) or from his own wealth.³³ This is because of the wisdom behind having an award that encourages participants to be more diligent in their

³² or his representatives.

³³ See: al-Kāsānī, *al-Badā'i' al-Ṣanā'i'*, 6/206, al-Māwardī, *al-Ḥāwī al-Kabīr*, 15/189, Ibn Qudāmah, *al-Mughnī*, 11/131.

acquisition of various skills through competition (for the purpose of *jihad*).³⁴ This is not considered gambling, since the award does not come from the participants' contribution to compete.

For awards sponsored by others who are not the Heads of state, or participants, the majority of the jurists are of the opinion that it is permissible also. This decision is based on the afore-mentioned reasons.³⁵ However, al-Māwardī³⁶ and Ibn Qudāmah³⁷ further explain that Imam Mālik is of the opinion that it is not permissible, except in the cases when the Head of the state is the sponsor of the award. This is so, because competitions which are allowed in Muslim states, by its Head of state, have a strong relationship with the preparation for military readiness, since preparation for military readiness is the responsibility of the Head of the state and not the responsibility of organisations or individuals. Al-Māwardī and Ibn Qudāmah however reject the above decision for the following reasons:³⁸

Firstly, the sponsoring of awards by outsiders other than the Head of the state, can also contribute to the preparation of a strong military force. Thus, this activity should be allowed.

Secondly, whatever is permissible to be spent by the Head of the state from *Bayt al-Māl*, for the public's interest, should also be allowed and encouraged in non-

³⁴ Ibn Qudāmah, Ibid.

³⁵ See: al-Kāsānī, *al-Badā'i' al-Ṣanā'i'*, 6/206, al-Māwardī, *al-Ḥāwī al-Kabīr*, 15/189, Ibn Qudāmah, Ibid.

³⁶ al-Māwardī, Ibid.

³⁷ Ibn Qudāmah, *al-Mughnī*, 11/131.

³⁸ al-Māwardī, *al-Ḥāwī al-Kabīr*, 15/189, Ibn Qudāmah, Ibid.

government organisations or individuals. It should not be prohibited for them to use their own resources for the same purpose. Furthermore, if their contributions to build mosques and roads are allowed and encouraged, why should this contribution by them be prohibited.

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that the jurists are of the same opinion that it is allowed for the Head of the state to sponsor prizes in competitions. A slight difference exists however, between Mālik and the rest of the jurists, concerning awards sponsored by others who are not the Head of the state. It can be observed that Mālik's view, not permitting sponsorship by others is based on the relationship between competition and the preparation of readiness for *jihād*, which is the responsibility only of the Head of the state. However, from the previous discussions it is clear that the types of competitions that are permissible are not only those that provide benefit to a sector of *jihād*. Included also are those types that fulfil all the above-mentioned conditions. As such, the basis of Mālik's view does not fit, since the scope in which permissibility is granted is wider than his. In addition, the answers given by al-Māwardī and Ibn Qudāmah are strong and acceptable.

In conclusion, it can be said that the sponsoring of awards is permissible, irrespective of whether they originate from the Head of the state, organisations, or individuals, as long as they do not come from the participants themselves.

4.2 Awards Sponsored by Participants

When analysing this problem, two different set-ups emerge. Firstly, awards that are sponsored by one or some of the participants, and secondly, awards that are sponsored by all the participants.

4.2.1 Awards Sponsored by One or Some of the Participants

Different situations can be described: If there are two participants taking part in a competition and only one of them sponsors an award, the other participant (who does not contribute anything toward the award) can take that award if he wins the competition. However in this case, the jurists will differ in their opinion according to the following:

The jurists of the Ḥanafī,³⁹ Shāfi‘ī⁴⁰ and Ḥanbalī⁴¹ schools of thought view that it is permissible. This is so, because there are no elements of gambling involved. Those participants who do not contribute anything to the competition, whether one individual or more, are assumed *muḥallil*.⁴² When gambling, every participant makes some sort of "sponsorship" which could end up either in gain or loss. In this situation, only the sponsor who is also a participant, will be at risk, whereas the other participant, who does not contribute anything, will gain when he wins, but will not lose anything if he fails.

These same jurists also argue that if the sponsoring of an award by the Head of the state is allowed, then participants should also be allowed to sponsor awards using

³⁹ al-Kāsānī, *al-Badā’i‘ al-Ṣanā’i‘*, 6/206.

⁴⁰ al-Māwardī, *al-Ḥawī al-Kabīr*, 15/198, al-Shayrādhī, *al-Muḥadhdhab*, 1/414.

⁴¹ Ibn Qudāmah, *al-Mughnī*, 11/131.

⁴² In general, *muḥallil* is the participant who, with his participation, changes the ruling on competitions from that of prohibition to that of permissibility.

their own wealth. The reason for this is that these participants are the ones who will reap the benefits of the competition themselves (for instance with proper training to improve their skills) compared to the Head of the state who only presents awards to others.⁴³ All parties are encouraged to do good, and therefore the sponsoring of awards should not be restricted to the Head of the state only.

In general, Mālikī jurists agree with the above view that permits the sponsoring of awards by an individual or a number of participants themselves. However, if the sponsor himself wins the award, he is not allowed to keep it. If the competition is only between two parties, the award should be distributed as charity to the audience. However, if the competition comprises of big number of participants, the award should be handed to the winner from the participants who were not involved in sponsoring the award.⁴⁴ This is so, due to the presence of an element of gambling in relation to the sponsor. He would be gambling his luck between winning and gaining; and failing and losing.

From the above discussion it can be concluded that the strongest evidence lies with the majority of the jurists: Participants who do not sponsor awards are thus safe from getting involved in gambling. However, the condition set by Mālikī jurists should be given further serious attention, in order to clear the winner, who is also a sponsor, from being involved in any type of gambling. In this situation, it is suggested that the award should be in the form of rotational materials that will not become the property of the winner. They will remain with him until the next competition.

⁴³ Ibn Qudāmah, *al-Mughnī*, 11/131.

⁴⁴ al-Ḥattāb, *Mawāhib al-Jalīl*, 3/391.

It should be remembered that the above discussion is relevant only to a situation in which only one, or a few participants are involved in the sponsoring of the award. In other words, a the large number of them do not contribute to the award.

4.2.2 An Award Contributed by all Participants

In this situation, all participants become sponsors of an award in a given competition. That award then becomes the property of the winner. The sponsoring of such an award could be either by a direct or indirect means, as has been discussed earlier. One portion of this money is used by the organiser for the award, while another portion is used for the organising of the competition, and for other expenses.

According to Ḥanafī,⁴⁵ Shāfi‘ī,⁴⁶ a majority of Ḥanbalī⁴⁷ and a few Mālikī jurists,⁴⁸ such kinds of competitions are prohibited, except when there is a *muḥallil* among the participants. Al-Māwardī stresses that the presence of one *muḥallil* among one hundred participants is sufficient for the exclusion of any element of gambling in the competition. In other words, a large number of participants do not necessitate a large number of *muḥallil*.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ al-Kāsānī, *al-Badā’i‘ al-Ṣanā’i‘*, 6/206, Ibn ‘Ābidīn, *Ḥāshiah Ibn ‘Ābidīn*, 6/403.

⁴⁶ al-Māwardī, *al-Ḥawī al-Kabīr*, 15/192.

⁴⁷ Ibn Qudāmah, *al-Mughnī*, 11/136.

⁴⁸ al-Mawwāq, Muḥammad bin Yūsuf bin Abī al-Qāsim, *al-Tāj wa al-Iklīl li Mukhtaṣar al Khalīl*, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1992), 3/391.

⁴⁹ al-Māwardī, *al-Ḥawī al-Kabīr*, 15/197.

Other evidence for the above that has been presented is the saying of the Prophet s.a.w., narrated by Abū Hurayrah:

من أدخل فرسا بين فرسين وهو لا يؤمن أن يسبق ، فليس بقمار ، ومن أدخل فرسا بين فرسين وقد آمن أن يسبق فهو قمار⁵⁰

“Whoever enters a horse among two horses in a competition and there is no guarantee which horse will win, then this is not considered as gambling. On the other hand, if a horse is entered in a competition between two horses, and there is a guarantee that one of them will win, then that is considered as gambling.”

Ibn Qudāmah clarifies that when a *muḥallil* does not possess strength that matches that of the participants who sponsor the award, then surely the competition will be won by one of them. This kind of situation will lead to gambling, because the sponsors of the award will not be prevented from trying their luck (among themselves), of either winning or losing. However, when a *muḥallil* possesses equal strength, it can be assumed that the award to be won by one of the sponsors is not guaranteed since there is a possibility for the *muḥallil* can outperform them.⁵¹

In another saying, it has been narrated by Ibn ‘Umar that:

أن النبي الله صلى الله عليه وسلم سابق بين الخيل وجعل بينهما سبقا ، وجعل بينهما محلا⁵²

“The Prophet s.a.w. once held a horse race and promised an award for the winner, and he placed between them a *muḥallil*.”

⁵⁰ Abū Dāwud, *Sunan Abī Dāwud* 3/66-67, Ibn Mājah, *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, 2/960.

⁵¹ See: al-Māwardī, *al-Ḥāwī al-Kabīr*, 15/192, Ibn Qudāmah, *al-Mughnī*, 11/137.

⁵² Ibn Ḥibbān, Muḥammad, *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Hibbān*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Muassasah al-Risālah, 1993), 10/543.

The afore-mentioned two sayings clearly state that competitions that involve the sponsors of awards by the participants are not permissible, except with the presence of a *muḥallil*.

Logically, competitions in which the source of awards comes from all participants are prohibited due to the existence of the element of gambling. However, when there is a *muḥallil* that possesses equal strength as the participants who sponsor the award, then the elements of gambling disappears as the award could possibly be won by the *muḥallil*, and not only by any other participant.⁵³

Some jurists who permit the sponsoring of awards by participants with the presence of a *muḥallil* lay the condition that if the competition is won by the *muḥallil*, then he will gain everything that was sponsored (by other participants), but when it is won by any of the sponsors of the award, then he is only entitled to take the part that he himself has contributed.⁵⁴

Most of Mālikī scholars view that the sponsors of awards by all participants is not allowed, even with the existence of a *muḥallil*.⁵⁵ This view is based on the evidence that, in general, gambling is prohibited as commanded by Allah s.w.t. in the seventh verse, chapter al-Mā'idah, as stated earlier. Their opinion is also based on the saying of the Prophet s.a.w. as narrated by Ibn Mas'ūd:

⁵³ See: al-Māwardī, *al-Ḥāwī al-Kabīr*, 15/192, Ibn Qudāmah, *al-Mughnī*, 11/137.

⁵⁴ See: al-Muṭī'ī, Muḥammad Najīb, *Takmilah al-Majmū'*, (Jeddah: Maktabah al-Irshād, n.d.), 14/141.

⁵⁵ al-Mawwāq, *al-Tāj wa al-Iklīl*, 3/391, al-Dasūqī, Shām al-Dīn Muḥammad 'Arafah, *Ḥāshiyah al-Dusūqī 'Alā al-Sharḥ al-Kabīr*, (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, n.d.), 2/45.

الخيّل ثلاثة ، ففرس للرحمن وفرس للإنسان وفرس للشيطان ... وأما فرس الشيطان فالذي يُقامر أو يُراهن عليه⁵⁶

“The horse is of three kinds: a horse for al-Raḥmān (God), one for man, and one for the devil.....as far as the horse of the devil is concerned, it is the one on which a bet is placed.”

The Prophet s.a.w. also says:

من حلف فقال في حلفه باللات والعزّى فليقل لا إله إلا الله ومن قال لصاحبه تعال أقامرك فليتصدق⁵⁷

“Whoever takes an oath and says “By the gods *al-Lāt* and *al-Uzzā*,⁵⁸ he should say: “There is no god but Allah”; and whoever says to his friend that he wants to make a bet with him, should be penalised by paying charity.”

The two sayings above clearly show that it is prohibited to bet and gamble. If it is permitted with the presence of a *muḥallil*, then it must have been mentioned clearly by the Prophet s.a.w.

While some other jurists are of the opinion that the sponsoring of awards by all participants is permitted even without a *muḥallil*. This view is held by Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn al-Qayyim and others.⁵⁹

Among the reasons given is the story that is narrated by ‘Abd Allāh bin al-Ḥārith:

صارع النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم أبا ركانة في الجاهلية وكان شديدا فقال شاة بشاة فصرعه رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم ...⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Ibn Ḥanbal, Aḥmad, *Musnad al-Imām Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal*, (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1993), 1/494.

⁵⁷ al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 11/536.

⁵⁸ Names of two idols worshipped during the period of ignorance (*jāhiliyyah*).

⁵⁹ See: Ibn Taymiyyah, Aḥmad bin ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm, *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, (Rabat: Maktabah al-Ma‘ārif, n.d.) 28/22.

⁶⁰ The prophet s.a.w. had defeated him three times and finally he returned the goat to him. See: Ibn al-Rāshīd, Mu‘ammar, *al-Jāmi‘*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1403H), 11/427.

“The Prophet s.a.w. once had an intense wrestle with Abū Rukānah in the days of ignorance (*jāhiliyyah*), then he called out “a sheep for a sheep”. The Prophet s.a.w. then defeated him...”

The above saying shows that the sheep that have been bet by both parties became the award in the competition between the Prophet s.a.w. and Rukānah. This indicates clearly that it is permissible.

They also bring forward another reason to strengthen their view that to bet, in general, is permissible. Anas r.a. narrated that the Prophet s.a.w. did “bet” on a horse.⁶¹ It has also been narrated by ‘Imrān bin Ḥuṣayn r.a. that the Prophet s.a.w. said:

لا جَلَبَ ولا جَنْبَ ، زاد يحيى في حديثه : في الرهان⁶²

"There should be no *jalab*⁶³ and *janab*.⁶⁴ Yaḥyā (the narrator) added in his version: in betting"

In the above saying, the Prophet s.a.w. prohibits two elements in betting, not the betting itself.

Then in another story, al-Tarmidhī narrates that the tribe of Quraysh challenged Abū Bakr r.a. to bet on the fact that Allah s.w.t. has proclaimed that Rome will achieve victory over the Persians in only a few years time.⁶⁵ This challenge was accepted by Abū

⁶¹ al-Dārimī, ‘Abd Allāh bin ‘Abd al-Rahmān Abū Muḥammad, *Sunan al-Dārimī*, (n.p.: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah, n.d.), 2/212.

⁶² Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, 3/67-68.

⁶³ al-Khaṭṭābī says that “*jalab*” is an act of raising voice in order to make the horse run faster. al-Khaṭṭābī, *Ma‘ālim al-Sunan*, 3/67.

⁶⁴ “*Jalab*” is an act of replacing a horse in a competition when it became tired, with a fresh one. Ibid.

⁶⁵ See: al-Qur’ān, 30 : 2.

Bakr.⁶⁶ This is another example of evidence that betting is permissible. In addition, they argue that there is no single piece of evidence that compels the presence of a *muḥallil*.

It could be observed from the above discussion that most of the jurists are of the opinion that competitions which involve the sponsoring of awards by the participants themselves are not allowed, except with the presence of a *muḥallil*, while some other jurists, among them, Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn al-Qayyim, have permitted this even without a *muḥallil*. A number of jurists, however, most of them from the Mālikī school of thought, are of the view that it is not permissible even with the existence of a *muḥallil*.

Those who out-rightly permit it, even without a *muḥallil*, base their argument on the story of the Prophet's s.a.w. betting with Rukānah and also the story of Abū Bakr's challenge with Quraysh. However, this evidence cannot fully support the argument since the narrator who narrated the incident between the Prophet s.a.w. and Rukānah mentioned that it occurred during the days of ignorance (*jāhiliyyah*).

In the story of Abu Bakr's betting, the narrator himself, Niyār bin al-Mukarram al-Aslamī has mentioned clearly that it occurred before betting was prohibited.⁶⁷ Ibn al-Qayyim argues that the story of the victory of Rome took place in the same year as the treaty of Ḥudaybiyyah, which shows that it did not occur in the early years of Islam.⁶⁸ However, this argument can be refuted by saying that the time that should be considered

⁶⁶ al-Tarmidhī, *Sunan al-Tarmidhī*, 5/344-345.

⁶⁷ See: al-Tarmidhī, *Sunan al-Tarmidhī*, 5/344-345.

⁶⁸ Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, Abū 'Abd Allāh, *al-Furūsiyyah*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, n.d.), 20.

is the time of its occurrence which is before it was prohibited and not the time when Rome actually achieved victory in the few years after the revelation of the verse. In this situation, even though betting was practised, it was done on the basis that the contract and commitment was agreed upon before it was prohibited. This situation can be considered as an exceptional case to safeguard Muslims from being accused of breaking their promises.

Other sayings of the Prophet s.a.w. which in general allow betting without stipulating the need for a *muḥallil*, cannot be considered as strong evidence to support this view. This is so because there are many other sayings used by the majority of jurists, which specify them.

The evidence presented by those who do not allow the sponsoring of awards by all participants, even with a *muḥallil*, is also not free from weakness. The saying narrated by Ibn Mas'ūd regarding the three types of horses are weak, because one of the narrators in the chain, Sharīk bin 'Abd Allāh al-Nakha'ī, is considered weak in memory (*sū' al-ḥifẓ*).⁶⁹ Furthermore, the general proof concerning the prohibition of gambling, such as appears in the ninth verse of chapter al-Mā'idah, and also the saying regarding the demand for charity of those who invite friends, do not contradict the permissibility of betting with the presence of a *muḥallil*. They can be practised simultaneously. In other words, it can be said that based on general evidence, betting is prohibited. However, based on the specified evidence, it is allowed when there is a *muḥallil*.

⁶⁹ See: al-Dhahabī, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad bin Aḥmad bin 'Uthmān, *Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā'*, 7th ed. (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 1990), 8/202,216.

On the other hand, the sayings relied upon by the majority of jurists regarding the permissibility of betting with a *muḥallil* are not actually free from criticism. The saying narrated by Abū Hurayrah concerning the permissibility of competitions when it involves a horse that possesses strength equal to the other horse in the competition, is weak because in the chain of narrators, there is the narration of Sufyān bin Ḥusayn from al-Zuhrī.⁷⁰ A similar saying narrated by Ibn ‘Umar is also weak because in its chain is ‘Āṣim bin ‘Umar, who was known for having a very weak memorising capability.⁷¹

However, the rational reason given by most of the jurists and its relationship with the concept of gambling is quite strong. As such, the view of the jurists, in general, is more appropriate, and more practical to be applied. Nevertheless, more detailed explanations should be given in order to fit in with the purpose of competitions and the wisdom behind the permissibility of the sponsoring of awards.

What can be deduced from the above discussion is that the concept of award sponsoring is permissible in order to encourage more people to support competitions and as a result more people will obtain benefits from the competition. Hence, the sponsoring of the award can be considered as *ṣadaqah* (give away in charity) and as “*amal salih*” (a good deed) towards the achievement of the respective objective. As such, the sponsoring of an award is permissible when the award comes from the Head of the state or others

⁷⁰ *al-Muḥaddithūn* (the scholars of the sayings of the Prophet s.a.w.) say that this chain is weak. See: Ibid, 7/302.

⁷¹ See: Ibid, 7/181.

who do not participate in the competition, because there are no elements of gambling in such a competition.

Such opportunity to contribute should be opened also to the participants themselves. However, in this situation, an element of gambling is present, which is the taking of risk by those participants between gaining and losing. This is the matter that needs analysis for the exclusion of the elements of gambling from competitions. Hence, it is suggested that the following measures be taken:

- i) That parties who do not provide sponsorship participate in competitions. This is the participant who is classified by the majority of jurists as *muḥallil*. However, the line that is drawn by the jurists is that a *muḥallil* should possess strength equal to that of the other participants.⁷²
- ii) When the *muḥallil* wins, he has a right to the award contributed by all the participants. This is because he is free from the element of gambling. The risk here is between his ability to win and gain advantage, and in his failure he does not suffer any loss (because he is not a sponsor of the award).
- iii) When any of the sponsors of the award wins, the view of some of the Mālikī, who are of the opinion that he is not entitled to the award is more appropriate to be applied.⁷³ In this way, it is good for him as it will free him from the element of gambling. In this situation, the risk is only between bearing the “loss” (which in reality is charity) as a result of his failure, or he does not gain

⁷² See: al-Māwardī, *al-Ḥāwī al-Kabīr*, 15/192.

⁷³ al-Mawwāq, *al-Tāj wa al-Iklīl*, 3/391.

anything when he wins. This kind of risk definitely cannot be considered as gambling.

- iv) If the participant who is also the sponsor wishes to have the award he won, it is suggested that the award should be on rotational basis. In so doing, he does not own the award. On the contrary, he only keeps it for a certain period and he has to return it to the organisers of the competition at the end of the said period. This is possible if the nature of the competition itself is periodical and repetitive.
- v) If all the above conditions are fulfilled, particularly the third one, then the view of al-Māwardī that allows the participation of a *muḥallil* in a group of one hundred participants, who are also the sponsors of the award, can be applied. The benefit here is possibly to encourage participants to improve their skills in order to be able to challenge a tough champion or possibly to attract his attention to participate. If the third condition is not fulfilled, the presence of a *muḥallil* is only an excuse to permit gambling. Should it be permitted, then the issuance of numbers, free of charge, to a few individuals (who are considered as *muḥallil*) will render gambling by lottery permissible. Such an excuse should not be allowed, just as *muḥallil* is prohibited to be an excuse for a person to re-marry his ex-wife after three divorces have been given. It is also prohibited based on the procedure of *sadd al-dharai'*.

- vi) There should be transparency when organising competitions. In addition, the source of the award must be clear and its content and specifications have to be made known.⁷⁴

Conclusion

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that the jurists view competitions, which do not involve awards, permissible. However, they differ in their opinion on competitions where awards are involved. When all the views are analysed and discussed, it can be summarised that, in general, the original ruling is that of prohibition, except the various types of competitions that have been permitted, in brief, those that bring benefit and have been accepted by Islamic law. When this permission has been the basis for exemption, then it can not be extended further, except that which is needed only. Therefore, all conditions that have been suggested in this paper should be given serious consideration.

When competitions involve awards, then the primary question in the evaluation of its ruling is to know whether there is an element of gambling or not. From what has been discussed, gambling is based on two principles. They are the award that consists of the bets that has been placed by all participants, and every participant who is involved will not be free from the probability of either winning or losing.

The concept of award sponsoring in competitions is more characterised as charity and contributions, which is encourages and which are beneficial. This should not be as a

⁷⁴ See: al-Māwardī, *al-Ḥāwī al-Kabīr*, 15/192, Ibn Qudāmah, *al-Mughnī*, 11/132.

one of the means to increase wealth or to become rich. On this basis, the sponsoring of award from the Head of the state or those who are not involved in the competition are allowed.

However, when the sponsors of awards comprise individuals who are involved in the competition, if they are not careful, will fall into the category of being involved in gambling. This is because of the risk of increasing or losing the bet. It has been explained by the jurists that in such a situation many guidelines have been drawn up to avoid such competitions where elements of gambling are present.

Finally, it is hoped that this study gives a clear picture of the concept of competition and award in Islam. It is wished that this would serve as guidelines to those who plan to participate in competitions. In addition, those competitions that do not fulfil these conditions mentioned earlier can be modified so that they can fulfil the conditions set by Islamic law.

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