

Drawing Attention to some Mistakes made in Prayer

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Many people fall into errors that go against the correct understanding of prayer either knowingly or unknowingly – and the sweetest of the two is bitter!!

So I felt that I should dedicate this last chapter to warning against some of these mistakes in order to advise the ummah and acting on the statement of the Prophet (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*): **“None of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself [of good].”** [1]

First: Reaching the Imaam while he is Bowing

Whoever joins the prayaner congregation while the Imaam is bowing, he must say the initial takbeer (i.e. *Allaahu Akbar*) whilst standing up with his back straight and being completely relaxed. Then he should make another takbeer to transition into the bowing position.

As for making takbeer when one has his back crooked and whilst already moving into the bowing position, this is not allowed at all. In fact, it may be a cause for his prayer to be nullified.

Imaam Ibn Qudaamah said in *al-Mughnee* (1/544): “A person that comes late to prayer must make the opening takbeer while his back erect. If he does it after having completely bent his back to go into the bowing position or whilst in the process of bending his back to bow, it is not valid, since he has done it in other than its proper place...” [2]

Second: Excessive Moving

Moving around (while praying) in itself – due to some need or emergency – is not prohibited in the Religion. However, moving around (in prayer) without a need for it or due to no valid reason is not permissible. This is based on the Messenger of Allaah’s statement: **“Be relaxed in prayer.”** [3]

Third: Straightening the Rows

Imaam Muslim reported in his *Saheeh* that the Prophet (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said: **“Straighten (your rows) and do not be divided, lest your hearts should become divided.”**

Al-Bukhaaree reported in his *Saheeh* that the Prophet (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said: **“Either you straighten your rows or Allaah will cause disparity to occur between your faces.”**

And it is reported in *Saheeh Muslim* that he (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said: **“Straightening the rows is from the completeness of prayer.”**

And in *Saheeh Al-Bukhaaree*: **“Verily, establishing the row (evenly) is from the perfection of prayer.”**

Many people contradict these *ahaadeeth*, and so you see them standing in prayer with huge amounts of space between the foot of one person and the foot of the person praying next to him in the row. This is in spite of what the Messenger of Allaah (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said: **“Tighten the rows, for indeed the Devil stands in the gaps.”**[4] And he (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said: **“Tighten your rows and bring them close together. And line the necks up evenly across from one another. For I swear by the One in whose Hand my soul is, I see the devils entering through the gaps in the rows as if they were small sheep.”** [5]

So this small gap that exists between the foot of one person and the foot of the other is a place for the devil, which he uses to play around and bother the children of Adam that oppose the Sunnah of their Prophet (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*).

Surprisingly, some people reject this type of ruling based on their mere logical reasoning, claiming that: “This Devil can also enter through (the spaces) in between our feet and ourselves!!”

We say: No, because the issue, primarily, is a matter of the Unseen and therefore there is no room in it for the human intellect except for that of understanding and comprehending. As for thrusting oneself headfirst into these matters (of the Unseen) and trying to unravel its hidden secrets, then no...since Allaah says: **“But no, by your Lord, they can have no Faith, until they make you (O Muhammad) judge in all disputes between them, and find in themselves no resistance against your decisions, and accept (them) with full submission.”** [Surah An-Nisaa: 65]

Fourth: The Second Congregation and those beyond that

Many business people and their customers, as well those similar to them, take praying in congregation lightly due to their assumption that any congregation they catch in the masjid is valid. Such a belief causes them to become lenient with and belittle the first congregation.

It is no secret to any of the people of knowledge that the numerous *ahaadeeth* on the virtue of praying in congregation apply to only the first congregation, which is the one established by the main Imaam of the masjid or his deputy. If this was not this case and these *ahaadeeth* applied to any congregation, there would be no increased merit for arriving early to prayer and catching the congregation. This would mean that anyone who is able to catch any of the congregations would then be achieving the same virtue,[6] and this is not true!

Imaam Ash-Shaafi'ee said in his book *al-Umm* (1/180): “If a masjid has a regularly employed Imaam, and a man or some men come to the masjid and find that they have missed the prayer (in congregation), they should pray individually (i.e. separately). I do not like that they should pray in a congregation in it. However, if they do it, their praying in congregation in the masjid is valid.” [7]

He, may Allaah have mercy on him, then said: “I believe that the reason why some of them (i.e. the scholars) considered it disliked was due to the fact that it causes division and dissuades a person from praying behind the Imaam leading the congregation. This

will cause a disparity between this person and the one who goes to the masjid during the proper time of the (first) congregation. So when the prayer finishes, they enter the masjid and pray. So this consists of differing between the people and dividing the ranks, and both of these things are detestable.”

In his notes to *Sunan At-Tirmidhee* (1/431-432), the great scholar and Muhaddith, Shaikh Ahmad Shaakir quoted the above words of Imaam Ash-Shaafi’ee then commented on them, saying:

“The opinion that Ash-Shaafi’ee derived on this issue based on this understanding is correct and proper. He is stating it based on sharp perception, precise understanding, and an effective intellect of the spirit and objectives of Islaam. The first, most honorable and most significant objective of Islaam is to unify the ranks of the Muslims, connect their hearts towards one goal – which is uplifting the Word of Allaah – and unify the ranks of the Muslims in working towards this goal. So the spiritual significance in this is their congregating to pray and their lining up in rows for that purpose first, as the Messenger of Allaah (*sallAllaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) said: **‘Either you straighten your rows or Allaah will cause disparity to occur between your faces.’** [8]

This is an intricate point that cannot be derived except by those whose intellect Allaah has enlightened with understanding of the Religion, such as Ash-Shaafi’ee and those like him.

The Muslims have seen with their own eyes and touched with their own hands the ill-effects of divided congregations and unstable rows in prayer has had on them, except for those who have lost their sense of feeling or been blinded.

If you enter many of the masaajid of the Muslims (today), you will find people refraining from praying in congregation, claiming the Sunnah as they think, then establishing other congregations for themselves, thinking that they are establishing the prayer better than anyone else! If they were truthful in their claim, they would bear the sin of what they missed out on from their original prayer. So there is no benefit in the good that they think they are doing when they condemn others for leaving off the voluntary and recommended prayers!!

And you will see other people staying away from the masaajid of the Muslims and then getting other masaajid for themselves, thus causing harm and division to the unity and splitting the ranks of the Muslims. We ask Allaah to grant us protection and success, and we ask Him to guide us to unify our ranks. Verily, He hears the supplication.” [End of Ahmad Shaakir’s words]

Fifth: Saying: “Our Lord to You belongs the Praise [and Thanks] whilst Praying

Several different versions of what one should say after saying: “*Sami’Allaahu Liman Hamidah*” have been reported in the texts. Amongst them are:

“*Rabbaanaa Lakal-Hamd*”

“*Allaahumma, Rabbaanaa wa Lakal-Hamd*”

“*Rabbaanaa Lakal-Hamd, Hamdan Katheeran Tayyiban Mubaarakan feeh...*”

And so on. [9]

None of these version contain the addition “*wash-Shukr*” (and Thanks), which some people add on from their own selves. So it is an innovation in the Religion for which Allaah has sent down no authority.

If the door to the likes of such additions were left open, a person would say: “*Rabbaanaa Lakal-Hamd wal-Fadl*”, another would say: “*Rabbaanaa Lakal-Hamd wal-‘Adhamah*”, while a third would say: “*Rabbaanaa Lakal-Hamd wal-Majd*” and so on and so forth!! And all of these are newly invented matters...

Sixth: Racing with the Imaam

Some people race and compete with their Imaams in certain parts of the prayer, such as:

1. Hastening to say the Ameen in Surah Al-Faatihah: Before the Imaam even finishes reciting “*wa lad-Daalleen*”, the people rush to say Ameen!! This is not permissible due to the Prophet’s statement: “**...and when he says: ‘*wa laad-Daalleen*’, say: ‘*Aameen*.’**” [10] Meaning: Say it after he finishes reciting it. Due to this rushing of theirs, they deprive themselves of the virtue of forgiveness that has been mentioned in the Prophet’s statement: “**...so whoever’s Ameen coincides with the Ameen of the angels, his past sins will be forgiven.**” [11]

2. Among them are those who race with the Imaam in raising their heads before he does. We have been warned about doing this in the Sunnah of Allaah’s Messenger (*sallAllaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*), where he said: “**Should not each of you fear, if he raises his head before the Imaam, that Allaah will make his head (like that of) the head of a donkey or that Allaah will make his appearance (like that of) the appearance of a donkey?!**” [12]

3. They also compete with the Imaam in going down to prostrate from the bowing position before making sure that the Imaam has begun prostrating.

Al-Bukhaaree (690) and Muslim (474) reported from Al-Baraa bin ‘Aazib (*radyAllaahu ‘anh*) that: “**When the Messenger of Allaah would say: ‘*Sami’Allaahu liman Hamidah*’, none of us would bend his back forward until the Prophet went down into prostration (first). Then we would go down into prostration after him.**”

Seventh: Rushing and Hurrying to Catch the *Rukoo’* or the Tashahhud and so on

This is clear opposition to the Prophet’s (*sallAllaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) statement: “**When the prayer is established, do not come to it while you are hastening. Rather, come to it, while walking and in a state of calmness. So whatever you catch, pray it (in congregation) and whatever you missed, complete it.**”

In another narration, it states: “**And do not rush...**” [13]

So the foundation is that one must be calm and tranquil and not in a rush.

Eighth: Not Using a Sutra when Praying

The basis for this is the Prophet’s (*sallAllaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) statement: “**Do not pray**

except in front of a *Sutrah*. And do not let anyone pass in front of you. But if someone persists (on passing), then fight him, for he has the (devil) companion with him.” [14]

In another hadeeth, the Prophet (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said: “When one of you prays, he should pray towards a *Sutrah* and draw near to it, so as to not let the Devil cut off his prayer.” [15]

In a hadeeth reported by Imaam Muslim, it is mentioned that the (minimum) height of the *sutrah* should be like that of a saddle step,[16] which is almost one-third of a forearm’s length. The *sutrah* is not required to be made out of something solid as some of the common folk think, nor is substituting it by drawing a line (on the ground) valid as some people do!! Such an action is mentioned in some *ahaadeeth*, which are not authentic. The foundation is that one should draw near to the *sutrah* and pray close to it as much as one is able to – with three forearms length being the farthest limit one can stand away from it.

It should also be noted that “the *sutrah* of the Imaam serves as a *sutrah* for those praying behind him.”[17] So when following in prayer, no *sutrah* is required for the congregation other than the *sutrah* of their Imaam.

Ninth: Praying in between Pillars

Qurrah (*radyyAllaahu 'anhu*) reported: “We were forbidden and shunned from forming rows between pillars during the lifetime of Allaah’s Messenger (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*).” [18]

‘Abdul-Hameed bin Mahmood reported: “I once prayed with Anas bin Maalik on the day of Jumu’ah (Friday) and we were pushed towards the pillars. So some of us moved up (in front of it) and some of us moved back (behind it). (Afterward) Anas said: ‘We would avoid this during the lifetime of the Messenger of Allaah (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*).’” [19]

Therefore, the foundation is to avoid praying between pillars and to be cautious about them unless the masjid is too constricted for its occupants due to its small size or the large amount of people praying in it. In such a situation, it would be permissible due to the sake of necessity and urgency.

People should be made aware of this issue, as well as similar issues, with knowledge, soft invitation and open discussion in a manner that is best so as to ensure the best result. It should not be done with harshness, hostility, rigidity and rude speech.

Tenth: Covering the Mouth when Praying

The Prophet (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) prohibited a man from covering his mouth (during prayer).[20] In the *Fataawaa* of Shaikh Ibn Baaz (pg. 83), may Allaah have mercy on him, he stated: “It is disliked to put a covering on the lower part of the face when praying, unless one has a reason for doing so.”

Therefore, what some people do during the Fajr or other prayers such as covering their mouths without any valid reason or excuse is not permissible. It falls under the realm of wearing garments that are prohibited.

As for the fabricated excuse that some people use, claiming that they do it because its cold, this has no basis!!

Eleventh: Raising the Eyes to the Sky during Prayer

This opposes the Sunnah from two perspectives:

1. The foundation with regard to the one praying is that he must position his eyes towards the area where he will be prostrating.
2. The one who raises his eyes to the sky while praying is subject to the punishment found in the Prophet's (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) statement: **“Does not each of you fear that if he raises his head (to the sky) during prayer his eyesight will not be returned to him?”** [21]

This also includes turning one's eyes – or neck, and this is worse – from side to side, left and right, whether due to a reason or for no reason at all!! The Prophet (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) was asked about this, and he replied: **“It is a larceny that the Devil has pilfered away from the prayer of the servant.”** [22]

Twelfth: Some Rulings that Apply to one who comes Late to Prayer

What should a person do if he enters a masjid when the 'Ishaa Prayer has been called but yet he hasn't prayed the Maghrib Prayer due to a valid reason?! [23]

Answer: This person should follow the Imaam that is praying 'Ishaa whilst intending to perform the Maghrib Prayer. So when the Imaam gets up to perform the fourth rak'ah, this person should intend to split away from the Imaam. Therefore, he should remain seated, say the *tashahhud* and finish praying alone.[24]

Thirteenth: Some of the Rulings of the Prostration for Forgetfulness

Al-Bukhaaree and Muslim reported from Abu Hurairah (*radyAllaahu 'anhu*) that the Messenger of Allaah (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said: “When one of you gets up to pray, the Devil comes to him and confuses him to the point that he doesn't know how many (*rak'aat*) he prayed. So when one of you encounters that, he should perform two prostrations while sitting.”

At-Tirmidhee (398), Ibn Maajah (1209), and Ahmad (1/190) reported that 'Abdur-Rahmaan bin 'Awf (*radyAllaahu 'anhu*) said: “I heard the Prophet (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) say: ‘When one of you becomes forgetful while praying such that he cant remember if he prayed one (*rak'ah*) or two, he should build upon one. And if he doesn't remember if he prayed two (*rak'ahs*) or three, he should build upon two. And if he doesn't remember if he prayed three (*rak'ahs*) or four, he should build upon three. And he should perform two prostrations before saying Salaam.” [25]

Imaam Al-Baghawee said in *Sharh-us-Sunnah* (3/283): “This hadeeth consists of two rulings:

1. If he has doubts in his prayer and doesn't know how many *rak'aat* he prayed, he should investigate. So either he becomes resolved on how many he has prayed or he goes

by the lower amount.

2. The place in which to perform the prostration of forgetfulness is before the Salaam.

As for the first point, a majority of the scholars hold that one should build upon the lowest number and then do the prostrations of forgetfulness.

As for the place in which the prostration of forgetfulness takes place, there are varying narrations reported concerning it...”

Imaam Al-Haazimee said in *al-'Itibaar fin-Naasikh wal-Mansookh min al-Athaar* (pg. 85), clarifying the most dominant view: “The middle path is for us to say that: The *ahaadeeth* that state one should prostrate before Salaam and those that state it should be done after it are all established and authentic. There exists a form of contradiction in them and it is not possible give some of these narrations precedence over others based on an authentic narration...The most correct option is to take these *ahaadeeth* with flexibility and the permissibility of both views.”

I say: As for a person who suffers from devilish whisperings, the following narration from *al-Muwatta* should be mentioned to him:

A man once told Al-Qaasim bin Muhammad: “I have doubts while in my prayer and that is very hard on me!” So he replied: “Continue in your prayer, for these (whisperings) will never leave from you even to the point that if you were to finish praying, you would say: I didn’t complete my prayer!”

Another person suffering from this type of whispering once complained to Imaam Ahmad, so he said to him: “Do not let this be part of your thoughts. Turn your attention away from it.” [26]

Fourteenth: Making up Missed Prayers

Allaah says: “**Verily, the prayer is prescribed for the believers at set times.**” [Surah An-Nisaa: 103]

Imaam Mujaahid said: “This means that they are scheduled at obligatory times, which Allaah has set for them.” [27]

The Prophet (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said: “**Whoever sleeps over (the time of) prayer or forgets it, should pray it when he remembers. There is no expiation for him except this.**” [28]

This is the state of someone who has missed a prayer or several prayers due to some reason that is beyond his control. Allaah says: “**Allaah does not burden a soul with more than it could bear.**” [Surah Al-Baqarah: 286]

And the Prophet (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said: “**There is no neglect in sleep. Neglect is only found in one who doesn’t pray until the time for the next prayer comes in.**” [29]

So if this is the state of someone, he should perform the prayer he missed immediately

before the reason for which he missed it expires, such as waking up after sleeping or remembering after having forgotten...and so on and so forth. He should also perform the prayers he missed in sequential order according to their time-frames – the first one first, then the next one and so on.

“As for the one who deliberately leaves off praying without any (valid) excuse, whether due to disregard or laziness, to the point that the time for the prayer has passed, it is not valid for him to make it up nor is the burden of responsibility uplifted from him. This is due to the fact that there is no valid proof which indicates that he is mandated to make it up or restore it or that one’s duty is fulfilled by making it up after its time has passed.” [30]

So if this is someone’s condition, he should perform as many voluntary and supererogatory prayers as he can without specifying a particular time for doing them since the Prophet (*sallAllaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) said: **“Verily, the first thing that people will be held accountable for on the Day of Judgement from actions is the prayer. Our Lord will say to His Angels, even though He knows best: ‘Look into the prayer of My servant. Is it complete or deficient?’ If it is complete, it will be recorded for him as being complete. But if it is deficient in any way, He will say: ‘See if My servant has any voluntary prayers?’ So if he has voluntary prayers to his credit, He will say: ‘Compensate My servant’s obligatory (prayers) with the voluntary ones. Then his actions will be judged based on that.”** [31]

Some people follow each obligatory prayer by performing a prayer that they missed. For example, they pray Dhuhr and then afterward, another Dhuhr that they missed previously, and the same with ‘Asr. This has no basis in the noble Sunnah, nor is there any valid proof known for it at all.

This is similar to what some people do like recording the number of prayers that they missed throughout the past years (!!), then performing them while subtracting the number they pray from the total. This is also from the newly-invented matters.

Footnotes:

[1] Reported by Al-Bukhaaree and Muslim from Anas; The addition mentioned in brackets is from An-Nasaa’ee as stated in *Silsilat-ul-Ahaadeeth as-Saheehah* (73)

[2] Refer to *al-Qawl-ul-Mubeen fee Akhtaa-il-Musalleen* (pg. 264)

[3] Reported by Muslim

[4] Reported by Ahmad from Anas bin Maalik; Refer to *Saheeh al-Jaami’-us-Sagheer* (3454)

[5] Reported by Ahmad and Abu Dawood from Anas; Refer to *Saheeh al-Jaami’-us-Sagheer* (3455)

[6] This is why Imaam Wakee’ bin Al-Jarraah, the teacher of Imaam Ash-Shaafi’ee, said: “Whoever treats the opening takbeer lightly (i.e. by not being present for it in the

congregation), then wipe your hands clean from him.” Refer to *Hilyat-ul-Awliyaa* (8/370) of Abu Nu’aim Al-Asbahaanee.

[7] Meaning: Their prayer is valid even though they have opposed the authentic Sunnah and the Prophet’s guidance.

[8] Reported by Al-Bukhaaree

[9] You can find all of these in my book “*Sharh Saheeh al-Kalim at-Tayyib*” (pg. 75)

[10] Reported by Abu Dawood and Ibn Maajah from Abu Hurairah; Refer to *Saheeh-ul-Jaami’-us-Sagheer* (2359)

[11] See *Silsilat-ul-Ahaadeeth as-Saheehah* (1236)

[12] Reported by Al-Bukhaaree and Muslim from Abu Hurairah

[13] Reported by Al-Bukhaaree and Muslim from Abu Hurairah

[14] Reported by Ibn Khuzaimah; Refer to *Sifatu Salaat-in-Nabee* (pg. 82)

[15] See *Silsilat-ul-Ahaadeeth as-Saheehah* (1373)

[16] **Translator’s Note:** A piece of wood used as a stepping ground to mount a camel’s saddle. See *an-Nihaayah* of Ibnul-Atheer (pg. 29 of the Dar Ibn al-Jawzee Edition)

[17] This is the chapter heading designated by Imaam Al-Bukhaaree in his *Saheeh* (1/571)

[18] Reported by Ibn Maajah and Ibn Hibbaan; See “*Misbaah-uz-Zujaajah*” (1/191) of Al-Busairee

[19] Reported by At-Tirmidhee, Abu Dawood, and An-Nasaa’ee; Refer to my treatise “*Tawfeeq-ul-Baaree fee Hukmis-Salaat baina-Sawaaree.*”

[20] Reported by Abu Dawood, At-Tirmidhee, and Ahmad; Refer to *Saheeh al-Jaami’-us-Sagheer* (3886)

[21] Reported by Muslim

[22] Reported by Al-Bukhaaree

[23] This happens a lot when one is combining prayers

[24] Refer to the first issue of the magazine *al-Asalah* (pg. 49) from the verdicts of Imaam Al-Albaanee

[25] *Silsilat-ul-Ahaadeeth as-Saheehah* (1356)

[26] Refer to “*Mawaarid-ul-Amaan al-Muntaqaa bin Igthaathat-il-Lahfaan*” (pg. 226)

written by me.

[27] *Ma'aalim-ut-Tanzeel* (2/282)

[28] Reported by Al-Bukhaaree (597) and Muslim (684) from Anas bin Maalik

[29] Reported by Muslim (681) from Abu Qataadah

[30] Refer to "*an-Nusoos ash-Shar'eeyah ath-Thaabitah fee Hukmi Qadaa-is-Salawaat-il-Faa'itah*" (pg. 172) of Shaikh Muhammad Naseeb Ar-Rifaa'ee, may Allaah have mercy on him and forgive him.

[31] Reported by Abu Dawood (864), At-Tirmidhee (413), An-Nasaa'ee (1/232) and Ahmad (4/103), and it is an authentic hadeeth based on supporting narrations.

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