

The Invalidating Causes of Salat (Mubtilat)

The following causes render *salat* invalid:

1. Speech. Its minimum is anything composed of two letters, even if they are meaningless and of a single letter if it makes sense (such as the word **ق** which is a verb in the imperative case of the root *waqa*).

The *salat* will not become *batil* by uttering a single letter which has no meaning and by an involuntary sound comprising many letters.

The Hanafis and the Hanbalis do not differentiate between intentional speech and anything spoken by mistake in respect of its being a cause that invalidates *salat*.

The Imamis, Shafi'is and Malikis observe: *Salat* is not invalidated by anything spoken by mistake provided it is short and does not vitiate the form of the *salat*.

The Imamis and the Malikis are of the opinion that *salat* is not invalidated by clearing the throat, irrespective of whether it is done due to necessity or not. The other schools consider it a cause that invalidates *salat* if done needlessly but not otherwise, such as for clearing one's voice for better phonation or for signalling the imam to correct himself.

The schools concur that it is valid to supplicate during *salat*, seeking blessing and forgiveness from Allah, *subhanahu*, except that the Hanafis and the Hanbalis restrict this supplication to what has been mentioned in the Qur'an and the Sunnah, or that which is sought only from God, such as *rizq* (provision) and *barakah*.

To recite *tasbih* (*subhan Allah*) to indicate that one is performing *salat*, or to guide the imam, or to correct his mistake, is not considered as a speech that invalidates *salat*.

The four Sunni schools state: Included in speech that invalidates *salat* is the returning of *salam*. Hence if someone says *salam* to a person who is praying and he returns the *salam* verbally, the *salat* becomes invalid. However, there is no harm if the *salam* is returned by a gesture.

The Imamis observe: It is *wajib* for the *musalli* to return a salutation which contains the word '*salam*' with a similar salutation, though not any other salutation such as 'good morning', etc. They also specify that the form of the salutation being returned should be exactly like the initial salutation without any difference. Hence the reply of '*salam 'alaykum*' will be the same without *alif* and *lam*, and the reply of '*al-salam 'alaykum*' will be with the *alif* and *lam*.

2. Every action which destroys the form of the *salat* invalidates it. The schools concur that the form is destroyed by any act which gives an onlooker the impression that the person performing that act is not praying.

3. There is a consensus regarding eating and drinking though they differ regarding the quantity that invalidates *salat*.

The Imamis observe: Eating and drinking invalidate *salat* if they distort the form of *salat* or violate any of its conditions, such as continuity, etc.

The Hanafis observe: Every form of eating and drinking invalidates *salat* irrespective of the quantity consumed, even if it is one sesame seed or a drop of water and regardless of whether it is done intentionally or otherwise.

The Shafi'i's state: Any food or drink which reaches the stomach of a *musalli*, irrespective of its being a small or a large quantity, invalidates *salat* if the *musalli* does so intentionally and with the knowledge of its being *haram*. But if done out of ignorance or forgetfulness, a small quantity will not invalidate *salat*, though a large quantity will.

According to the Hanbalis, a large quantity will invalidate *salat*, whether consumed intentionally or by mistake, and a small quantity only if consumed intentionally, not otherwise.

4. The occurrence of any minor or major *hadath*, which causes the *wudu'* or the *ghusl* to break, will also invalidate *salat* in the opinion of all the schools except the Hanafis, who observe: It will invalidate *salat* if it occurs before the last *qu'ud* (sitting) by a duration equal to *tashahhud*, and if it occurs after it and before *taslim*, the *salat* will not become invalid.

5. The schools concur that laughter invalidates *salat*, though the Hanafis apply to it the same rule that they apply to *hadath*, as mentioned above.

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Considering the importance of the causes that invalidate *salat* and their number and diversity, and considering that each school has its own opinion which at times concurs or differs with the opinions of other schools, it would be appropriate to give a summary of these causes in accordance with the opinion of each school separately.

The Shafi'is observe: The causes invalidating *salat* are: *hadath*, which necessitates the performance of *wudu'* or *ghusl*; speech; crying; groaning, in certain situations; inordinate movement(S), a doubt concerning *niyyah*; indecision concerning discontinuing the *salat* while continuing to perform it; shifting one's *niyyah* from one *salat* to another, except where it is an obligatory *salat*, for it is valid to change one's *niyyah* to that of a supererogatory *salat* in order to perform the obligatory *salat* with *jama'ah*; exposure of the *'awrah* when one is capable of covering it; nakedness, as soon as a covering becomes available; the presence of *najasah* to an inexcusable extent, when one does not speedily remove it from himself; the repetition of *takbirat al-ihram*; intentional omission of a *ruk'n*; praying in *jama'ah* behind an imam who is not fit for *imamah* due to his *kufr*, etc; performing an additional *ruk'n* intentionally; the reaching of any food or drink to the stomach; turning away with the chest from the *qiblah*; and wrongly performing a *ruk'n* involving movement before other acts.

The Malikis say: *Salat* is invalidated by: omitting a *ruk'n*, intentionally or by mistake, if the *musalli*, thinking that his *salat* is correct, does not remember having omitted it until after *taslim* and the passage of an inordinate duration; intentionally performing an additional *ruk'n*, such as *ruku'* or *sujud*; performing *tashahhud* out of place while sitting; laughter, both intentional and otherwise; eating and drinking intentionally; speaking intentionally and not for correcting the imam; vomiting, if intentional; puffing intentionally with the mouth; occurrence of anything that causes *wudu'* to break; exposure of the *'awrah* or any part of it; *najasah* falling on the *musalli*; inordinate movement; performing four additional *rak'ahs* in a four-*rak'ah salat* knowingly or by mistake; doing *sujud* before *taslim*; inadvertent omission of three *masnun* acts from among the *sunan* of *salat* and then failing to perform *sujud al-sahw*.

The Hanbalis state: The causes that invalidate *salat* are: any inordinate movement; the presence of *najasah* to an inexcusable extent; turning one's back to the *qiblah*; incidence of any *hadath* breaking the *wudu'*; intentional exposure of the *'awrah*; reclining heavily on a support without any excuse; returning to perform the first *tashahhud* after starting the *qira'ah*, provided the *musalli* is aware and conscious of it; performing an additional *ruk'n* intentionally; intentionally changing the sequence of the *arkan*; mispronunciation that results in a change of meaning despite being capable of proper pronunciation; intending to disrupt the *salat* or indecision regarding it; a doubt regarding *takbirat al-ihram*; laughter, speech, both intentional or otherwise; saying *taslim* intentionally before the imam; eating and drinking, even if due to forgetfulness or ignorance; needlessly clearing the throat; any puffing that may be construed as phonation of two letters; and weeping if not out of the fear of God.

According to the Hanafis, the causes that invalidate *salat* are: speech, whether intentional, by mistake, or due to ignorance; any supplication (*du'a'*) not out of the Qur'an or Sunnah; any inordinate movement; turning the chest away from the *qiblah*; eating and drinking; clearing the throat without reason; saying "*uff*" (i.e. 'fie; or 'ugh'; an expression of anger or displeasure); groaning; saying "Ah!" (*ta'awwuh*); weeping loudly; saying "*al-hamdulillah*" on sneezing; saying "*Inna lillah...*" on hearing some bad news and "*al-hamdulillah*" on hearing some pleasing news; saying "*subhan Allah*" or "*la ililha illallah*" as an expression of surprise; availability of water for one praying with *tayammum*; the rising of the sun for one offering the

morning prayer or its crossing the meridian for one performing *salat al-‘id*; the falling off of a bandage from one who attains recovery; wilful occurrence of *hadath*, but if the *hadath* is involuntary it will not invalidate the *salat*, though one will have to perform *wudu’* again and recommence the *salat* from where he had left it. [1](#)

The Imamis observe: The causes that render *salat* invalid are: ostentation (*riya’*); uncertainty in *niyyah*; performing any act of *salat* while having made up one’s mind to discontinue it; changing one’s intent from a preceding *salat* to a subsequent *salat*, such as from *zuhr* to ‘*asr*. However, the transition from ‘*asr* to *zuhr* prayer is permissible; hence if a person makes the *niyyah* of performing ‘*asr* prayer with the idea that he has performed the *zuhr* prayer and remembers during it that he has not performed the prayer, it is valid for him to shift his *niyyah* to offering the *zuhr* prayer. Similarly, it is permissible to shift from the *niyyah* of *jama’ah* to *niyyah* of performing it individually; but the opposite is not valid. However, it is valid for a person performing an obligatory *salat* individually to change his *niyyah* to that of a supererogatory *salat* in order to perform the obligatory *salat* with *jama’ah*. *Salat* is also invalidated by an additional *takbirat al-ihram*. Hence if one says *takbirah* for a *salat* and then repeats it, the *salat* becomes invalid and a third *takbirah* will be necessary. Again if he says *takbirah* for the fourth time, the *salat* will become invalid and a fifth *takbirah* will be necessary; thus every even *takbirah* results in the *salat* becoming *batil* due to the addition of a *rukun*, and becomes valid again by every odd *takbirah*.

Among the causes that invalidate *salat* is the incidence of *najasah* to an extent not excusable, when the *musalli* is unable to remove it without any inordinate movement that may vitiate the form of the *salat*. The availability of water during *salat* for a person praying with *tayammum* invalidates both the *tayammum* and *salat*, provided it becomes available before performing the *ruku’* of the first *rak’ah*; if later, he will complete the *salat* which will be valid. *Salat* will also be invalidated by: the absence of certain conditions, such as the covering and the lawfulness of a particular location; the occurrence of a *hadath*; intentional deviation with the whole body from the *qiblah* either to the right or the left or any other direction in between; speaking voluntarily and weeping on account of one’s worldly woes; laughter; any act that destroys the form of *salat*; eating and drinking; the intentional addition or omission of a part; and the omission, intentional or otherwise, of a *rukun* from among the five *arkan*. The five *arkan* are: *niyyah*, *takbirat al-ihram*, *qiyam*, *ruku’* and the two *sajdahs* of every *rak’ah*.

Crossing over in Front of the Musalli

The schools concur that someone’s passing from in front of the *musalli* does not invalidate the *salat*, but they differ regarding its impermissibility.

The Imamis state: It is neither impermissible for a person to pass from in front of the *musalli*, nor for the latter (to pray in such a place). But it is *mustahabb* for the *musalli* to place before him an ‘obstruction’ if there is no barrier before him to prevent passers. The ‘obstruction’ can be a stick, a rope, a pile of earth, etc. which the *musalli* may place before him as a mark of veneration for *salat*, which signifies

detachment from the creation and attention towards the Creator.

The Malikis, Hanafis and Hanbalis observe: It is *haram* to cross over in front of a *musalli* in any circumstance, irrespective of whether he has placed an obstruction or not. Rather, the Hanafis and the Malikis add: It is *haram* for the *musalli* to create interference for passers-by if he can keep out of their way.

According to the Shafi'is, it is *haram* to cross over in front of the *musalli* if he has not placed an obstruction, and if he has done so, it is neither *haram* nor *makruh*.

1. This is a summary from 'al-Fiqh 'ala' al-madhahib al-'arba'ah.

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