

The Shia and the Prayer

Some young Sunnis criticize the Shia about what they call as “the confusion in prayer and lack of submission”.

In the congregational prayers, some of the Shia do not care for the rows and it does not impact them that there are always gaps left between the praying men. It is often noticed that the first row is not yet complete whereas there are great numbers of people offering the prayer behind the imam in the other rows without caring for the order of the first row.

It is also noticed among the Shia that some people come in and go out of the mosque during the prayer, passing between the praying ones. They often pass between a praying person and the place of his prostration in the direction of the qibla, which annuls the prayer according to the beliefs of the Sunni.

It is true that the prayer of the Sunni is more orderly than the Shia's. When you offer the prayer with the Sunni brothers, you see the imam, before beginning the prayer, turn towards the people coming to offer the prayer behind him and asks them to straighten out and form the rows saying to them, “*Be orderly (in your lines), may Allah have mercy on you! Impact your rows and do not leave gaps for Satan, because the impacting of rows is from (the conditions of) the prayer.*” Therefore, you see the praying ones press together until their shoulders and bodies stick together and see that they compete to fill the gaps. [1](#)

When the prayer is being offered, they do not permit anyone to pass in front of a praying one, even if the prayer is a recommended and not an obligatory one. They believe that according to some traditions narrated in their *sihah* (books of Hadith), that the prayer is annulled when someone passes in front of a praying one. In some of their traditions, it is said that the one, who passes in front of a praying one, is a devil who must be repelled and pushed away.

As for the Shia, they do not care for such things during their prayers. I offered prayers behind many Shia imams [2](#) most of whom were from the known religious authorities and in many countries, but I did not see anyone of them turn to the people, who had come to offer the prayer behind him, before the beginning of the prayer to ask them to regulate their lines or fill the gaps between them. I also saw no one, whether an imam or one who led the praying ones, prevent others from passing in front of a praying one.

I am convinced that the school of the Ahlul Bayt (as) does not say that the prayer becomes null when someone passes in front of a praying one. This is in accordance with neither reason nor traditions, because the things that annul the prayer are limited and known to the Shia and the Sunni, and certainly, the passing in front of a praying one is not one of them.

Al-Bukhari himself mentions in his *Sahih* that once it was mentioned to Aa'isha that a dog, a donkey and woman (when passing before a praying one) would annul the prayer. She denied that and said, “*You have compared us (women) to dogs and donkeys! By Allah, I saw the Messenger of Allah (S) offer the prayer while I was on the bed between him and the qibla...*”³

This is a strong proof and a convincing argument showing that the prayer is not annulled by the passing of man or animal between the praying person and the (direction of) *qibla* even to the Sunni.⁴

However, not everything permissible is worthy of recommendation or praise. If a Muslim is careful not to pass over the necks of praying people lest he treads on them while in prostration to Allah, it is a recommended, praiseworthy moral act that Islam prefers and civic sense acknowledges. It shows reverence and respect to the prayer and the one who is praying to his Lord, solemnly supplicating in a very high spiritual state. So is it not acceptable from anyone to interrupt a praying person's submissiveness and state of spirituality?

Do you not see that the Messenger of Allah (S) has prohibited to sit in the public ways where there is embarrassment for passers and especially women who feel shy and embarrassed to walk through a way where there are men sitting in?

Since we talk about and seek the truth in all our studies, and since we know that Allah does not feel shy of the truth, we say that the Shia should benefit from their Sunni brothers in this morality that gives praying ones sanctity and holiness as long as they are standing, bowing or prostrating before the Lord of the worlds.

Once, I said this to some imams of the Shia and they confessed their shortcoming in this regard, but one of them objected to me saying that these matters were superficial and the advantage lay in the essence. I replied, “These matters are not superficial, but they are systematic. These bring gravity and reverence and make others respect us. Surely, our religion is a religion of a system that loves orderliness and hates confusion. Allah says:

Attend constantly to prayers and to the middle prayer and stand up truly obedient to Allah.
(*Qur'an, 2:238*)

Surely Allah loves those who fight in His way in ranks as if they were a firm and compact wall.
(*Qur'an, 61:4*)

The Surah in which this verse is, has been called ‘the *surah of as-Saff* or rank’, since rank or order is

very important near Allah.

Perhaps, the problem of the Shia concerning the congregational prayer where some lack of seriousness and indifference is found is because throughout the history they have faced severe conditions. It was very difficult for them to offer congregational prayers behind Sunni imams who changed the rulings of prayer and used to abuse Imam Ali (as) and the Ahlul Bayt (as) in their prayers. On the other hand, they avoided offering the prayer in a special congregation, because this meant that they would be accused of being “*rawafidh*, rejecters” and this would lead to doing away with them.

Therefore, they often offered congregational prayers with the Sunni out of *taqiyya*⁵, then immediately left the place after the end of the prayer. Most of them might offer the prayer again when they would be in their houses.

We may conclude from this too that the dissenters of the Ahlul Bayt (as) have called themselves “*the people of the Sunnah and congregation*” because the majority of Muslims followed them and offered the prayer in their congregation, whereas the Shia offered their prayers behind their own imam, and thus they were minority, like a white spot in a black dress, after their appearing as a special sect.

After their having appeared as a special Islamic school adhering to the jurisprudence of the Ahlul Bayt (as), the Shia limited themselves to strictly pray behind a just, knowledgeable, abstinent imam in accordance with the religious texts in this regard on one hand and as a reaction to the Sunni, who were permitted to pray behind any good or corrupted man on the other hand.

This has also affected the congregational prayer of the Shia – so you see that when one of them comes into a mosque and does not know the imam of the congregational prayer, he offers the prayer individually in one of the mosque’s corners. It is because he does not know the imam, so he does not trust him (as to be a just person or not).

On the other side, the Sunni are wasteful in this concern in that they permit the prayer behind anyone whether good or bad, pious or impious, abstinent or corrupted. We have talked before about Abdullah ibn Umar who offered prayers behind Yazid ibn Mu’awiyah, Hajjaj ibn Yousuf Thaqafi and Najdah al-Khariji, and all of these three were openly corrupted and dissolute.

The same thing can be said about the Shia that some of them do not consider it permissible to offer prayer behind anyone except when he is known to the praying person himself, as a just and pious person. Some of the Shia are not satisfied to see tens of Muslims offer prayer behind so-and-so imam except when they themselves become certain of his justice and piety. Only then they would offer their prayer behind him.

All this is because of precaution in the religion and care to offer their prayer in the best way possible, so that Allah may accept it. It is as if the Shia think that their prayer shall not be accepted if it is offered behind an imam not known to them. It is as if Allah has ordered them to inquire very about the affairs of

religion in an accurate manner⁶ and as if they always think of this verse:

...and you deemed it an easy matter while with Allah it is grievous. (Qur'an 24: 15)

I believe that Islam is the religion of nature, and nature is the most moderate of affairs. Allah the Almighty says:

And thus We have made you a moderate (just) nation. (Qur'an, 2: 143)

The Messenger of Allah (S) says:

The best of affairs is the moderate one. There should be neither excess nor waste.

So the Sunni's belief which is much indifferent, to a degree that it permits the offering of the prayer behind every good or bad person is excessive. And, the Shia's belief is also excessive to a degree in that they do not permit the prayer except behind the just imam who is unique of his kind. It is wasteful of the opportunity to pray in congregation.

The true Islam stops in the middle between the two, in this concern. It does not agree with those who say it is permissible to follow a corrupt or the other side which stipulates for justice (honesty) of an imam who does not commit corruption openly. This is enough for others to offer the prayer behind him.

The Prophet (S) often recommended his companions and all Muslims by saying:

Make it easy and do not make it difficult. Give good news and do not alienate others from the religion.

Do not complicate it for yourself, lest Allah makes it more complicated for you, as He did for the children of Israel.

Since we are talking about excess here, it may be useful to mention what some Muslims do in excess. You may see some who when performing the *wudhu'*, move from this side to that side under the lamp while turning their hands and arms up and down to see if there is a needle-eye-spot untouched by water – in which case they repeat the *wudhu'* – again just because of doubt (although for the Shia, doubt does not annul certainty).

You see this also when they come to prayer and begin reciting the sura of al-Fatiha. Their tongues begin to stutter and they are unable to pronounce the words, and then they repeat "*walladh dhalleen*" four or five times, and this happens to them in every rak'at.

Once, I attended the congregational prayer with one of them, and then I regretted my praying behind him, because that prayer became boring in the way he offered it. Later on, I spoke to him frankly and mentioned to him before a group of other friends, the saying of an American man who had become Muslim and written a book. He had said in it, "*Praise be to Allah Who has made me know Islam before I knew Muslims.*" I added, "*If I had known this kind of Shia initially, I would have become alienated from*

them and not bothered myself with all the research.”

Certainly, Islam is the religion of ease, simplicity and leniency. I do not mean by this being indifferent to the rulings of the Sharia – God forbid! I myself disapprove of the schools that interpret the religion of Allah according to their own opinions. However, when you see that all excess and exaggeration that is from the human beings themselves, your soul may be alienated from the religion.⁷

You recite these sayings of Allah:

...and has not laid upon you any hardship in religion. (Qur'an, 22:78)

Allah desires ease for you, and He does not desire for you difficulty. (Qur'an, 2:185)

When you see the sayings and doings of such people who make the religion of Allah a nightmare with all hardships that an ordinary man cannot bear – it makes you doubt and suspect everything. It then paves the way for Satan to enter your heart.

The most dangerous disease is when a Muslim becomes so obsessive that he does not know how many rak'ats he offers, or he has offered them all or not, or when he has offered the prayer. Satan plays with him in every worship and ritual. This may exceed so much as to hinder the worship in their dealings and relations with people. Then one's life becomes unbearable hell, from which may Allah protect you and us.

^{1.} These things are true and real, but we see that the Sunni mosques are built very big and adorned with ornamentations and decorations and great monies from inside and outside their countries are spent on them, besides that their ulama too much breach and emphasize on these matters. However, we find that the Sunni do not care much for the matter of purity and impurity. We find this in their creeds and especially the Hanbali School.

Earlier I thought that wearing gold by Sunni men was permissible, because many of their men did that, but it appeared that all their creeds prohibited it. They invite to pray behind every good and bad man (as the imam in the prayer). You may find in the row of prayers a disbelieving, secular ruler and his mercenaries, and this is a very doing of Satan!

As for the Shia, they see that mosques are Allah's...and they are shelters for all Muslims, and that the building of a mosque is something spontaneous, simple, and with no constrictions. The Shia pay very much attention for mosques to be purified. Mosques for the Shia have many strict rulings that must be observed and they are often breached by the Shia ulama. Anyhow, this problem can be solved through a lecture or by hanging a poster on the wall.

Are we not invited to (make it easy and not difficult and not to make others alienate the religion)? How often I find Sunni youth, who do not go to mosques, for either they have been shocked and driven away or because of those difficult rituals! We the Shia, think that the important thing is the coming of people to mosques first, and then to educate about it and not to shout at people just because they pass in front of us. Let us deal with others through the Islamic morals and manners and not through disgusting nomadic fanaticism.

^{2.} “Imam” here refers to the one leading others in offering a prayer.

^{3.} Sahih al-Bukhari vol. 1 p. 137.

^{4.} This matter is like that of building a mosque or offering the prayers where there is a grave. The matter is based on the rule of “the preventing of excuses” for fear that it may be regarded as worshipping the one in the grave. Certainly, we have

not found until now even one Muslim who worshipped a grave in the last 1416 years (the book in Arabic was published in 1416 A.H.).

According to precautionary basis, some of the Sunni destroyed the graves of their saints or separated them with high fences. They and especially the Wahhabis criticized impudently the Shia for making graves inside the mosques. Once, one of my friends was in Hijaz. Some Sunni people from different Muslim countries gathered around him asking, “Why do you make the graves of your imams as mosques?!”

Importantly, since the passing in front of a praying one does not annul the prayer for the two sects (the Shia and the Sunni) and since they depend on Hadith, so this is refuted and they (the Wahhabis) have no right to impose it on any Muslim. In fact, they harm and accuse other Muslims of different accusations because of silly rulings.

This reminds me of an event where someone was committing an impermissible thing inside a mosque. He saw someone else spit on the ground of the mosque. He got up and beat him why he spat on the ground. The other one resisted and beat him up saying to him, “Is your committing of sin worse or my spitting on the ground?”

Would that they cared for purity – they will not prostrate on permissible things, refrain from wearing gold (by men), wearing foreign leather clothes (coming from non-Muslim countries), standing before Allah (during prayers) while their stomachs are filled with impermissible meat (of unlawfully slaughtered animals)...etc?.

[5.](#) Precautionary concealing of one’s real belief.

[6.](#) Since the Shia were exiled from the stage of the Muslims’ life, their fatwas are very strict and precautionary. For example, you see that they are very careful and strict to the precedents of the prayer such as purity, ghusl, and wudhu’ to a degree that you cannot see any of their mosques empty of men who are scrupulous about purity, recitation or the number of rak’as of the prayer. Some stipulate conditions for the imam of congregational prayer as if they are conditions of a high religious authority.

However, most of the recent ulama, including Ayatollah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadhlullah who criticize in his lectures this excessive strictness, consider the matter easy with no complications. This fact results from care, precaution, and perfection of deeds. But as for those who say “even though”...in any how the wudhu’ is performed, to offer the prayer led by a pious or impious person, to be indifferent to impurities that stain one’s body and clothes...to say ‘everything is alright’ and ‘everything is permissible’...it is a very serious matter that requires much pondering!

[7.](#) The Shia say that the imam (the leader of prayers) is to offer (as) the prayer of the weakest of the praying ones that means to pay attention to the old, weak, or sick persons.

Nevertheless, some people, and because of precaution often seek perfection in worships, wudhu’, and purity, especially when they read that their infallible imams (as) did not perform wudhu’ except with pure water, did not wear except permissible (well procured) clothes, and even did not carry a sword belt if it was from leather that was unknown whether or not the animal was legally slaughtered, and that when they stood before Allah, they would shake and change color...

Therefore, our jurisprudents see that such people are sick with scruple, and they often blame them for this. A scholar, who wants to do so (being excessive or scrupulous), is not to lead congregation or give a fatwa in these matters.

Our thought is the same about Sufis, Salafites (puritans) and others who have violated the right path. Whoever wants to practice such things has to practice them inside his house and away from people, because such things are from Satan, whereas our religion is a religion of ease and a civilized way of life for all humankind.

<https://www.al-islam.org/all-solutions-are-with-prophet-s-progeny-muhammad-al-tijani/shia-and-prayer#comment-0>