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Salat al-Jama'ah

The Muslims are one voice regarding *salat al-jama'ah* (congregational prayer) being a ceremony and symbol of Islam. It was performed perpetually by the Prophet (S) and by the Caliphs and the Imams after him. The schools differ as to whether it is *wajib* or *mustahabb*.

The Hanbalis state: It is *wajib* upon every person capable of it. But if he forsakes the *jama'ah* and prays individually, his *salat* will be valid, though he will have sinned.

The Imamis, Hanafis, Malikis and most Shafi'is observe: It is neither *wajib* individually (*'ayni*) nor collectively (*kifa'i*) but is an emphasized *mustahabb*.

According to the Imamis, the Shari'ah has ordained *jama'ah* only for *wajib*, not for *mustahabb* prayers, except *istisqa'* and *'idayn* prayers despite the absence of its conditions. The four schools consider it ordained for both *wajib* and *mustahabb* prayers.

Conditions for Jama'ah

The following conditions have been laid down for the validity of *jama'ah*:

1. Being a Muslim. There is a consensus about it.
2. Sanity. They concur regarding it.
3. According to the Imamis, the Malikis and the Hanbalis, in one of the two opinions narrated from Imam Ahmad, *'adalah* (i.e. 'justice' of the imam) is necessary. The Imamis cite as their evidence the Prophet's statement, "A woman will not act as an imam for a man, nor a *fajir* (a libertine) for a believer", the consensus of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a), as well as the reason that the *imamah* in *salat* is suggestive of leadership, and a *fasiq* is not competent to assume it under any circumstance. But they also observe: If a person were to trust someone and pray behind him, later coming to know that he is a *fasiq* person, it is not *wajib* upon him to repeat the prayer.

4. Being a male is necessary, and a woman cannot act as an imam for men, though other women can follow her as their imam according to all the schools except the Malikis who say: A woman cannot act as an imam even for women.

5. The Malikis, Hanafis and Hanbalis consider maturity as a requirement for the imam. The Shafi'is are of the opinion that it is valid to follow a child of discriminating age (*mumayyiz*). The Imamis have two opinions; in accordance with the first, maturity is necessary, and according to the second the *imamah* of an adolescent *mumayyiz* is valid.

6. As per consensus, the minimum number of persons required for *jama'ah* is two, one of them being the imam; this does not include the Friday prayer.

7. The *ma'mum* should not stand ahead of the imam, in the opinion of all the schools except the Malikis, who observe: The *salat* of the *ma'mum* will not be invalid even if he stands ahead of the imam.

8. The *jama'ah* should be conducted in a single place and there should be no partitions. The Imamis state: There should not be an unusual distance between the *ma'mum* and the imam without there being a connection through the continuity of the rows. The *jama'ah* is not valid if there exists between the imam and a male *ma'mum* an obstacle which prevents the latter from seeing the imam or seeing those ahead of him who see the imam. Women are excepted, and they can follow a male imam despite the presence of a partition provided the acts of the imam are not uncertain for them.

The Shafi'is observe: A distance of more than 300 cubits between the imam and the *ma'mum* is not objectionable provided there exists no obstacle.

The Hanafis are of the opinion that if a person whose house adjoins a mosque follows the imam from his house with only a wall separating them, his *salat* will be valid, provided the actions of the imam are known to him. But if the house and the mosque are separated by a road or stream, following the imam is not valid.

The Malikis state: The difference of place does not preclude the validity of following the imam; hence if the imam and the *ma'mum* are separated by a road, stream or wall, the *salat* will be valid as long as the *ma'mum* is capable of ascertaining the acts of the imam.

9. There is consensus that it is necessary for the *ma'mum* to make the *niyyah* of following the imam (*niyyat al-*iqtida'**).

10. The identity of the *salat* of the *ma'mum* and the imam. The schools concur that following the imam is not valid if the two *salats* differ in their *arkan* and *af'al* (acts) (such as the daily prayers as compared to the *salat* of funeral or *'id*), they differ regarding the remaining matters.

The Hanafis and the Malikis observe: It is not valid for a person offering *zuhr* prayer to follow one offering *'asr*, and for one offering *qada'* to follow someone offering *ada'*, and vice versa.

The Imamis and the Shafi'is consider all these as valid. The Hanbalis consider it invalid to offer *zuhr* prayer behind someone offering 'asr and vice versa, but they consider valid the offering of *zuhr* prayer as *qada'* behind someone performing it *ada'*.

11. The *qira'ah* of the imam should be perfect. Hence the schools concur that it is not valid for a person knowing *qira'ah* to follow one who does not know it, and if he does so his *salat* will be invalid. According to the Hanafis, the *salat* of both the imam and the *ma'mun* will be invalid; and they have a sound ground for holding the opinion that an illiterate person should follow, as far as it is possible, someone whose recital is correct, and it is not valid for him to pray singly where he can pray with a correct *qira'ah* by attending a *jama'ah*.

Following the Imam

There is consensus that one praying with *wudu'* can follow an imam who prays with *tayammum* and that it is obligatory for the *ma'mun* to follow the imam in the recital of the *adhkar* such as:

سبحان ربِّي العظيم، سبحان ربِّي الأعلى، سمع الله لمن حمده

They differ concerning following him in the *qira'ah*.

The Shafi'is observe: The *ma'mum* should follow the imam in the *salats* that are recited silently and not in those that are recited loudly, and it is *wajib* for him to recite *al-Fatihah* in all the *rak'ahs*.

The Hanafis state: He should not imitate the imam either in the *salats* where the *qira'ah* is silent nor in those where it is loud; rather, it has been narrated from Imam Abu Hanifah that the *qira'ah* of a *ma'mum* behind the imam is a sin (al-Nawawi, *Sharh al-Muhadhdhab*, vol. 3, p. 365).

According to the Malikis, the *ma'mum* should perform the *qira'ah* in the *salats* where it is silent, not in the *salats* where it is loud.

The Imamis do not consider it *wajib* (for the *ma'mum*) to perform *qira'ah* in the first two *rak'ahs*, but consider it *wajib* in the third *rak'ah* of *maghrib* prayer and the last two *rak'ahs* of the four-*rak'ah* prayers.

All the schools concur concerning the *wujub* of following the imam's actions by the *ma'mun*, but differ in their interpretation of the term 'following' (*mutaba'ah*).

The Imamis state: The meaning of *mutaba'ah* is that every act of the *ma'mum* should neither precede the corresponding act of the imam nor follow it after an inordinate delay; rather it should be either simultaneous or follow it with a small lag.

In the opinion of the Hanafis, *mutaba'ah* is achieved by performing simultaneously or immediately

afterwards or with some lag, the acts performed by the imam. Hence if the *ma'mum* performs *ruku'* after the imam has raised his head from the *ruku'* but before his going down for *sajdah*, he will be considered as having 'followed' the imam in the *ruku'*.

The Malikis say: The meaning of *mutaba'ah* is that every act of the *ma'mum* should take place after the corresponding act of the imam without preceding it or occurring simultaneously with it or following it after excessive delay, so that the *ma'mum* will perform *ruku'* before the imam has raised his head from it.

The Hanbalis are of the opinion that *mutaba'ah* implies that the *ma'mum* should neither precede the imam in any of the acts of *salat* nor delay any act after the imam has performed it. Hence the *ma'mum* should not enter *ruku'* after the imam has finished it, and the imam should not have ended the *ruku'* before the *ma'mum* has entered it.

Joining the Jama'ah in the Middle

If a person joins the *jama'ah* after the imam has finished one or more *rak'ahs*, the schools concur that he will make the *niyyah* for *jama'ah* and continue to perform it with the imam. But the question is whether he will consider the *rak'ahs* being performed along with the imam as the initial part of his *salat* or the end part of it. For example, if he performs only the last *rak'ah* of *maghrib* prayer with the imam, there remain two more *rak'ahs* which have to be performed; now, will the third *rak'ah* which he has performed with the imam be considered his third *rak'ah* as well with the first two *rak'ahs* remaining to be performed, or will it be considered his first *rak'ah*, with the second and the third *rak'ahs* remaining to be performed?

The Hanafis, Malikis and Hanbalis observe: The part of the *salat* which the *ma'mum* performs with the imam will be considered the end part of the former's *salat*. Therefore if he performs only the last *rak'ah* of *maghrib* prayer in *jama'ah*, it will be considered his last *rak'ah* as well, and he will perform after it a *rak'ah* in which he will recite *al-Fatihah* and another *surah*, followed by *tashahhud*, and in the next *rak'ah*, *al-Fatihah* and a *surah*. To put it briefly, in such a situation he will offer the third *rak'ah* before the first two *rak'ahs* by considering the part of his *salat* performed with the imam as the end part, and the part performed without the imam as the initial part.

The Shafi'is and the Imamis state: The part of the *salat* which the *ma'mum* performs with the imam will be considered the initial part of his *salat*, not the end part of it. Hence if he performs the last *rak'ah* of *maghrib* prayer with the imam, he will count it as his first *rak'ah* and will stand up for performing the second *rak'ah*, which will include *tashahhud*, and will follow it up with the third *rak'ah* that will be the end part of his *salat*.

Preference for the Imamah

The Hanafis say: If equally qualified men gather for *salat*, the person most learned in its rules will be preferred for leading it, followed by one with the best *qira'ah*, then the most pious, then the one whose

acceptance of Islam was earlier, then the eldest, then the superior in character, then the most handsome, then the noblest in respect of lineage, and then the most cleanly dressed, in that order. If they are all equal in respect of these qualities, the selection will be by casting lots among them.

The Malikis are of the opinion that the ruler or his deputy will lead the prayers, followed by the imam of the mosque, then the master of the house, then the one most learned in *hadith*, then the most just, then the one having the best *qira'ah*, then the most devout (*al-'a'bad*), then the one preceding others in his acceptance of Islam, then the one having the best lineage, then the one with the best character, and then the one who is best dressed, in that order. If they are equal in these respects, lots will be cast among them.

The Hanbalis observe: The most learned in *fiqh* (Islamic law) and having the best *qira'ah* will be preferred, followed by one who excels only in *qira'ah*; then comes the one who excels in the rules of *salat*, then the one who excels in *qira'ah* but does not know the *fiqh* of *salat*, then the most aged, then the person with the best lineage, then the one who has migrated earliest, then the most God-fearing (*al-atqa*), and then the most pious (*al-awra'*), in that order. If they are equal in these qualities, lots will be cast.

The Shafi'is prefer the ruler, and then the imam of the mosque, then the one most learned in *fiqh*, then the one having the best *qira'ah*, then the most ascetic (*al-azhad*), then the most pious (*al-awra'*), then the one who has migrated earliest, then the most eloquent, then the best in terms of lineage, then the best in character, then the cleanest in matters of dress, body and craft, then the one with the best voice, then the most handsome, and then a married person, in that order. In the event of their being equal in respect of these qualities, lots will be cast.

The Iramis state: If a number of persons are eager to lead the prayers for the sake of the *thawab* (spiritual reward) of *imamah* and not for any worldly purpose, the one whom the *ma'mums* prefer on the basis of the preferential qualities mentioned in the Shari'ah with a religious intent in mind and not with mundane intentions, will be the imam. But if they differ, it is better that a *faqih* be preferred, followed by one who has the best *qira'ah*, then the most eloquent, and then one who enjoys a preference in accordance with the Shari'ah.

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