

تسوية الصفوف
في السنة المطهرة

**STRAIGHTENING THE LINES
FOR PRAYER**

ACCORDING TO THE *SUNNAH*

تأليف أبو خليل

BY ABU KHALIYL



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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Straightening the Lines for Prayer

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ISBN 1-886451-10-9

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Introduction

All praise is due to Allāh, whomever He gives guidance to, then none can misguide him, and whoever He leaves to stray, then none can guide him to the right way. I testify that there is none worthy of worship but Allāh, having no partners, and that Muḥammad is his servant and Messenger. O Allāh! Mention Muḥammad, and his wives, and his offspring, as you have mentioned Ibrāhīm and his family, indeed you are the praised, the glorified. About His Messenger Muḥammad, Allāh (ﷻ) said;

﴿ فليحذر الذين يخالفون عن أمره أن تصيبهم فتنة
أو يُصيبهم عذاب أليم ﴾

«...Let those who oppose his command be warned, lest some *fitnah* afflict them or they suffer a painful punishment.»(An-Nūr 24:63)

The Prophet (ﷺ) said;

«...And whoever opposes my command has been disgraced and made inferior... »¹

¹Part of a *ḥadīth* recorded by Aḥmad and others. Shaykh al-Albānī graded it *ṣaḥīḥ* in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Jām'ī aṣ-Ṣaghīr* no. 2831 (3rd. Ed.). See also *Irwā' al-Ghalīl* no. 1269 for its references. Ibn Rajab has written a booklet explaining the *ḥadīth* entitled *al-Hikam al-Jarīdah*. After this part of the text he comments; "This proves that might and honorable rank in this life and the hereafter is achieved by following the orders of Allāh's Messenger (ﷺ) through adherence to Allāh's commands...."

Indeed the establishment of prayer, as ordered in the Book and the *Sunnah*, cannot be properly fulfilled without knowing the manner in which the Messenger (ﷺ) taught its fulfillment. So we find the order, “Establish the prayer...” as it is found in numerous authentic narrations as a pillar of the religion, and as commanded in many *āyāt* of the *Qur’ān*. Then this topic, which we are presenting, was treated by the scholars of *ḥadīth* under the subheadings of their books in accordance with this. They list these texts under headings such as, “The Book of the *Athān*”, “The Book of the *Iqāmah*”. This categorization is among the subtle signs of their wisdom, for properly aligned rows are among the teachings of the Messenger (ﷺ) on how to answer the call to prayer. So the responsible person answers the call in the manner taught by Allāh’s Messenger, and the irresponsible disobeys his orders.

Now we find weakness and discord among the Muslims, enmity and hatred developing into wide rifts that seem impossible to bridge, and the *fitnah* promised for those who do not heed the order of Allāh’s Messenger (ﷺ).

The disregard for properly establishing the prayer appeared early in the community of Muḥammad, and it appeared in the form of the topic we are to discuss. When asked about the prayer and how closely it resembled that of the time of the Prophet (ﷺ), Anas (رضي الله عنه) replied;

“I have not found any change except that you do not straighten your rows properly.”¹

And nothing will save today’s members of this community,

¹Al-Bukhārī.

except the same religion which saved its earlier members.

The source for this booklet is an article previously published in the publication HUDAA. Aside from editing and additional reference support, the following are some of the subjects that have been added to the book in order to make it a more complete tool for the reader;

- The section about three people praying together;
- The sections dealing with women;
- Standing next to the *imām* when the lines are behind him;
- Bowing while outside of the line and then walking in that position to the line;
- Some questions related to the topics and their answers.

An attempt has been made to present these topics in a manner easily utilizable, without *fiqh* or *ḥadīth* discussion beyond what is necessary. We hope that this book will help the reader to better implement the orders of the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ), and that is the goal.

The Reason for this Subject

Ibn ‘Umar (رضي الله عنه) reported that Allāh’s Messenger (ﷺ) said,

«Establish your lines straight, for indeed the angels pray in lines. Align your shoulders, close the gaps, yield your hands to your brothers, and do not leave any gaps for *Shayṭān*. Whoever connects a line, Allāh maintains him, and whoever breaks a line, Allāh cuts him off.»¹

Yet anyone who has prayed with different groups of people will probably have experienced the following situation: When you line up for prayer, the person next to you prevents your feet from touching theirs. If you try to move closer to them, they move away, if you persist trouble will most likely erupt.

The Evidence for Standing with the Feet Four Fingers Width Apart?

Most people who stand away from their neighbor during group prayer do so simply out of custom. However, this behavior can be understood after examining the following statement of the famous Ḥanafī scholar Ibn ‘Ābidayn in his *fiqh* book *Hāshiyah*;

“And there should be between them [that is - the two feet of one person praying while standing] a distance of four fingers of the hand, because this is more conducive to *khushū‘*. This

¹Aḥmad, Abū Dāwūd, an-Nasāī and others. See *Saḥīḥ ul-Jāmi‘* no. 1187.

is what was reported from Ibn Naṣr ad-Dabūsī¹ - that he would do this - in *al-Kubrā*. **As for what is reported; that they would cling ankle to ankle, the meaning by that is in congregation, that is - one stands next to the other, and it is like this in *Fatāwā Samiraqand*.**²

The first part of the statement explains why the second part is not fulfilled by the average person following this *mathhab*. That is, if two people stand next to each other, while each of them only allows his feet to spread four fingers width apart, the result is that he cannot put his feet next to his neighbor's foot because his shoulders cover a wider distance than that covered by his two feet.

The second part of the quote shows that while praying in congregation - on the other hand - the ankle is to be put next to the ankle of the neighbor. It is reasonable to infer from these statements, that while praying in congregation, touching the ankle takes precedence over the method mentioned for standing when praying alone.

This is so, in light of the fact that we have also presented the "evidence" for a person standing with his feet four fingers distance apart - that is "it is more conducive to *khushū*" - according to the author quoted, as well as others.

¹Died in the year 430 H. He was a famous Ḥanafī scholar, author of *Taqwīm al-Adallah*. According to ath-Thahabī, he was the first to promote the idea of the virtue of the knowledge of the *khalaf*. See *as-Sīyar* no. 3993.

²*Radd al-Mukhtār 'alā ad-Durr al-Mukhtār Ḥāshiyatu Ibn 'Ābidayn (Ḥāshiyah Ibn 'Ābidayn)* p. 299 volume 1, published by *Dār Ihyā' at-Turāth al-'Arabī*, Beirut Lebanon. The brackets and bold face are for explanation and emphasis, they are not part of the text.

However, this reasoning does not constitute a “text” in the *Islāmic* religion. Additionally, as this work attempts to show, this reasoning in fact contradicts texts in the religion.

The Way of the Prophet’s (ﷺ) Followers is the Most Reasonable Way

Implementing this practice, violates numerous general and specific texts which govern how to stand in line for group prayers. Among the general texts, is the manner in which the companions prayed in the presence of the Prophet (ﷺ). Such manner is an evidence for the Muslims to follow, especially when he (ﷺ) said,

«...For surely I can see you from behind my back...»¹

And he said so after commanding the companions to correct their lines. Were they to have not followed his command properly, or if they were excessive, then he, being able to see them in that state, surely would have corrected them further. And this is the argument against those who claim that concern over this matter constitutes excessiveness.

Violating a General Principle in the Absence of Specific Exempting Texts

Moving away from the person next to you in congregation, requires doing an additional act, that is - to move away, where as were one to stand still when the person next to him put his foot

¹Al-Bukhārī.

next to his, he would be doing less, and less action is the rule in prayer unless there is an evidence otherwise! This is especially true in light of the texts as we will prove if Allāh allows, and this is not contradicted by the teachings of the Ḥanafī *mathhab*, as can be seen from the previous quote. To make that clear, there are two possible cases mentioned;

1. Praying alone, “...there should be between them [that is - the two feet of one person praying while standing] a distance of four fingers of the hand...” This point is merely an opinion, but for the sake of argument we can agree to it;

2. Praying in congregation; **“that they would cling ankle to ankle, ...that is - one stands next to the other...”** This point is confirmed by texts, therefore we must insist on it.

Therefore, according to Ibn ‘Abidayn, one of the foremost scholars of the Ḥanafī *mathhab*, and one of the foremost scholars who believed that the door to *ijtihād* was closed during his time, the Ḥanafī *mathhab* requires the people to stand ankle to ankle for congregational prayer, so it would not be fair to say that standing separately in congregational prayer is the behavior of the Ḥanafīs, since doing so contradicts the Ḥanafī *mathhab*.

The Command to Straighten the Rows and Close the Gaps, and that it is *Wājib*

The Prophet (ﷺ) said,

«**Make good your standing in the rows during prayer.**»¹

And;

«**Establish your lines [straight], and consolidate...**»²

Imām al-Baghawī comments on the word *tarāṣṣūw* [translated here as consolidate] saying,

“His saying «*tarāṣṣūw*» means to cling together until there are no gaps between you. As Allāh said,

﴿ **إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الَّذِينَ يُقَاتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِهِ صَفًّا كَأَنَّهُمْ بُيُوتٌ مَرْصُورٌ** ﴾

«**Surely Allāh loves those who fight in His cause in ranks as if they were a solidified [marṣūṣun] wall.**» (*aṣ-Ṣaff* 61:4)

Meaning they join together with each other. In this is the evidence that the *imām* should turn towards the people

¹ Aḥmad and Ibn Ḥibān. Authenticated by al-Albānī in *Ṣaḥīḥ ul-Jāmi* 'no. 195.

² Al-Bukhārī, Muslim and others. The word translated as “consolidate” is *tarāṣṣūw*, it is the plural command of the word *raṣṣa* which means to fit tightly together, press together, or to compress. In *an-Nihāyah* Ibn al-Āthīr explains its meaning in this context; “To cling together until there are no gaps between you...”

commanding them to straighten their lines.”¹

The Prophet (ﷺ) also said,

«Straighten your lines, for indeed straightening the lines is part of the completeness of the prayer.»²

About which Imām ash-Shawkānī noted,

“From this it is understood that straightening the lines is *wājib*.”³

And He (ﷺ) commanded,

«Close the gaps...»⁴

ORDERING THE ACTION BY WAY OF A VERB ACCOMPANIED BY THE *LĀM* OF COMMAND

Among the well known signs of an obligation or *wājib*, in *usūl ul-fiqh*, is when the commanding verb is preceded by the Arabic letter *lām*. This type of *lām* is known as *lām al-amr*, or the commanding *lām*. Whenever it is used, then we understand that the address is an obligation, unless it is accompanied by an act or saying which indicates that it is only recommended. In the following texts, such *lām* precedes the verb, letting us know that

¹ *Sharḥus-Sunnah*; ḥadīth no. 807. 1st ed., Pub. al-Maktāb al-Islāmī Beirut.

² Al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

³ *Nayl ul-Āwṭār*

⁴ Aḥmad, Abū Dāwūd, an-Nasāī and others. See *Saḥīḥ ul-Jāmi* ‘no. 1187.

the statement is a command:

«Establish your lines straight, [in one narration this follows; By Allāh either you establish your lines (straight),] or Allāh will cause dissension in your hearts.»¹

And;

«Straighten your lines or Allāh will cause dissension to appear upon your faces.»²

Imām an-Nawawī explains as follows,

“Meaning that anger, animosity and disagreement will appear in the hearts. As when it is said, ‘So and so’s face changed towards me.’ It means, ‘his face shows his dislike for me’. So their differing in their rows is an apparent type of dissension, and outwardly evident differences are the cause for inner dissension.”³

¹ Abū Dāwūd, Ibn Ḥibān. Authentic, see *Saḥīḥ at-Targhīb wat-Tarhīb* no. 512 and the addition is with Abū Dāwūd, see *Saḥīḥ ul-Jāmi* ‘no. 1191.

² Al-Bukhārī, Muslim and others.

³ *Sharḥ Muslim*

MENTIONING THE *LĀ* OF PROHIBITION

The *lā* of prohibition is called such because it means, “Do not do such and such”. In all such cases of prohibition (*nahī*), then it implies that the act is *ḥarām*, unless it is accompanied by an act or saying which indicates that it is only disliked.

The Prophet (ﷺ) said,

«Do not leave gaps for *Shayṭān*.»¹

«Do not differ, or your hearts will dissent.»²

«Do not make your chests irregular, or your hearts will dissent.»³

«Do not let your lines be irregular or your hearts will dissent.»⁴

Warnings

WARNING AGAINST THE GAPS

The Prophet (ﷺ) said,

«Beware of the gap.» Meaning in prayer.⁵

¹ Aḥmad, Abū Dāwūd, an-Nasā'ī and others. *Saḥīḥ ul-Jāmi* 'no. 1189.

² Muslim, Aḥmad, an-Nasā'ī and others.

³ Ibn Khuzaymah. See *Saḥīḥ at-Targhīb wat-Tarhīb* no. 513.

⁴ Abū Dāwūd, an-Nasā'ī and others. See *Saḥīḥ at-Targhīb wat-Tarhīb* no. 513.

⁵ At-Ṭabarānī in *al-Kabīr* and others, see *aṣ-Ṣaḥīḥah* no. 1757.

And;

«Whoever closes a gap, Allāh raises him in rank, and builds a house for him in Paradise.»¹

GAPS INVITE SHAYṬĀN

The Prophet (ﷺ) said,

«Straighten your lines, and align your shoulders, and yield your hands to your brothers, and close the gaps, for indeed *Shayṭān* comes between you through them, just as the small lamb does.»²

SEVERE WARNING OF BEING CUT OFF FROM ALLĀH

«Whoever connects a line, he is maintained by Allāh, and whoever breaks a line, Allāh cuts him off.»³

Such a severe warning would not be issued for a deed that is simply recommended.

¹Recorded by aṭ-Ṭabarānī in *al-Awsaṭ*, Ibn Mājah and others. Some versions do not contain the part about the house in Paradise. Al-Albānī graded the *ḥadīth ṣaḥīḥ*. See *Ṣaḥīḥ at-Targhīb wat-Tarhīb* no. 505.

²Aḥmad, aṭ-Ṭabarānī and others and it is *ṣaḥīḥ*. See *Ṣaḥīḥ at-Targhīb wat-Tarhīb* no. 491.

³See note for first *ḥadīth*.

The Behavior of The Companions

“STRAIGHTEN THE LINES” - EXPLAINED

Anas (رضي الله عنه) reported that in al-Madīnah he was asked whether he found anything to have changed from the time of the Prophet (ﷺ), to which he replied,

“I have not found any change except that you do not straighten your rows properly.”¹

It would be enough for us to understand his (رضي الله عنه) saying, *taqīmūna aṣ-suffūf* to mean simply, your lines are zig-zaged and you don't straighten them, or that “close the gaps” only means “do not leave too much space” i.e., some space is allowed, therefore insisting on standing ankle to ankle is excessive and overburdening on the people. But the following narration of Anas (رضي الله عنه) enlightens us to the true meaning of straightening the lines: “[After standing for prayer, before the *tabīr*, Allāh's Messenger (ﷺ) faced the people and said:]

«Straighten your lines and consolidate, for indeed I see you from behind my back.»² In one narration Anas added,

“I saw that one of us would connect his shoulder to the shoulder of his companion, and his heel to his heel, and if one were to do this today, one of you would flee as if he were an untameable

¹Al-Bukhārī.

²Two separate narrations from Al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

donkey.”¹

An-Nu‘mān bin Bashīr (رضي الله عنه) said,

“...So I saw a man clinging his shoulder to his companions shoulder, and his foot to his foot, and his ankle to his ankle.”²

So here is the order from Allāh’s Messenger (ﷺ), and here is the “how” it was implemented by his followers, therefore whoever follows his orders, does so as his followers did.

The Argument that Tightening the Lines Prevents Concentration

After all of what we have noted, some people insist that standing closely to another during prayer causes them to have distracting thoughts. Due to this problem they believe that their prayer is more apt to be accepted if they stand away from the person next to them. However this is a poor excuse, because ones’ lack of ability to concentrate during prayer is not a reason for him to encourage *Shayṭān* to enter the ranks. And, the Prophet (ﷺ) said,

⟨The best of you is the one with the friendliest shoulder in prayer.⟩³

¹ Reported by al-Mukhlis in *al-Fawā'id* and Abū Ya‘alā in his *Musnad*, Sa‘īd bin Manṣūr in his *Sunan* and al-Ismā‘īlī. See *Fath ul-Bārī*. It is authentic according to the conditions of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, see *aṣ-Ṣaḥīḥah* no. 31.

² Al-Bukhārī.

³ Abū Dāwūd and others. It is *ḥasan* according to al-Albānī, *Saḥīḥ ul-Jāmi‘* no. 3264. And the word translated as friendliest; is *laīn*, which means flexible, yielding. Ibn al-Āthīr commented on this word in this *ḥadīth*, saying it means;

Related Matters

THE OBLIGATION TO STRAIGHTEN THE LINES RESTS WITH THE *IMĀM*

Commenting on the *ḥadīth*;

‘Establish your lines [straight] and consolidate...’¹

Al-Baghawī said;

“...In this is the evidence that the *imām* should turn towards the people commanding them to straighten their lines.”²

Abū ‘Uthmān an-Nahdī said;

“I was among those whose feet were straightened by ‘Umar Bin al-Khaṭṭāb to form the line for prayer.”³

It is reported about ‘Umar (ﷺ);

“Tranquil, solemn, submissive.” (*An-Nihāyah*).

¹Al-Bukhārī, Muslim and others.

²*Sharḥus-Sunnah ḥadīth* no. 807. 1st ed., Pub. al-Maktāb al-Islāmī Beirut.

³Recorded by Ibn Abū Shaybah in *al-Muṣannaḥ* with an authentic chain of narrators; the chapter of what they say about straightening the lines, and this is his wording. Ibn Ḥazm quoted it without a chain and with the wording “whose feet were hit” instead of “whose feet were straightened” in *al-Muḥallā*, (issue no. 415) and he said that it was authentic. Ibn Ḥajar mentioned Ibn Ḥazm’s wording and his grade in *Fath al-Bārī* and he did not contradict him.

“That he would send some men to straighten the lines, when they returned he would say the *takbīr*.”¹

Similar reports are mentioned about ‘Uthmān and ‘Alī (ﷺ).²

Sūwayd Bin Ghafalah said;

“Bilāl would straighten out our shoulders and hit our feet to straighten the lines.”³

From these reports, as well as the *ḥadīths* mentioned earlier, it is obvious that the responsibility to straighten the lines is the duty of the *īmām* or those whom he appoints for that task, whether he be the one who says the call to prayer, as the case with Bilāl (ﷺ) or appointing others for that purpose as seen in the report mentioned above about ‘Umar (ﷺ), as well others. In such cases the *īmām* or those authorized to straighten the lines are to align the shoulders and feet in each of the lines. This aligning can include slight pushing of the shoulders back or

¹Recorded by Mālik, and others. It appears that the chain of narrators mentioned by Ibn Ḥazm is authentic. See *al-Muḥallā*, issue no. 415.

²See previous references and at-Tirmithī.

³Recorded by Ibn Ḥajar in *Maṭālib al-‘Āliyah*. He quotes the chain from *Musnad al-Musaddad* and it is authentic. See *ḥadīth* no. 398 of *Maṭālib al-‘Āliyah*, Riyadh, 1st ed., 1419H, with notes and cross-references by Naṣr Bin Muḥammad Bin ‘Abdul-‘Azīz Āl ‘Abdullāh who also graded the chain as *ṣaḥīḥ*. Ibn Ḥajar also mentions it in *Fath al-Bārī*, but with the wording “for the prayer” instead of “to straighten the line” at the end. There he said that Ibn Ḥazm said it is *ṣaḥīḥ* and he did not contradict him. The same wording is recorded by ‘Abdurrazzāq in his *Muṣannaḥ*, no. 2435. As for the application of this text, Suwayd Bin Ghafalah was not a companion, so this was during the time of ‘Umar (ﷺ).

forward, as well as slightly hitting the feet if necessary as mentioned in the report from Bilāl.¹

During the time of the Prophet (ﷺ) he would order them, and they would abide by his order. After him, the Khalifahs appointed someone to enforce their orders. In our time, if the *imām* orders the congregation to straighten and come close together, many ignore him. Then, unfortunately, someone who was not appointed by the *imām* begins to cause a distraction, ordering the people to move, and many of them do not listen to him either. So the command to straighten the lines rests with the *imām*, or those whom he appoints, and the follower's duty is to fulfill that as much as he himself is able.²

¹In the original publication of this booklet, Ibn Ḥazm's comment on the "hitting" was mentioned. He thought that they would not have hit anyone unless they left an obligation. Ibn Ḥajar responds to him saying; "It is possible that they instituted a punishment (*ta'zīr*) for abandoning a *Sunnah*." The above discussion seems to be the more appropriate, that is - the feet were hit in a way intended to move them here or there, not as a means of inflicting pain for punishment, and Allāh knows best. For Ibn Ḥazm's discussion see *al-Muḥallā*, issue no. 415; for Ibn Ḥajar's comments, see *Fath al-Bārī*, the chapter of the sin of the one who does not complete the line in the book of the *athān*.

²"As much as he is able" does not include stepping on the feet of one's neighbor in order to prevent him from moving away, or pulling him closer **after he has obviously moved away** as some excessive people do!

WHEN TWO ARE PRAYING...

Ibn ‘Abbāss (رضي الله عنه) mentioned joining the Prophet (ﷺ) for the night prayer while he was praying alone;

“...And I stood on his left side. He drew me to his right and prayed...”¹

‘Abdurrazzāq reports from Ibn Jurayj who said,

“I said to ‘Aṭā’, ‘The man who prays with another man, where does he stand?’ He said, ‘Along his right.’ I said, ‘He comes parallel to him until he aligns with him, neither of them is further back than the other?’ He said, ‘Yes.’ I said, “Do you like that he be equal with him until there is no gap between them?’ He said, ‘Yes.’”²

¹Al-Bukhārī and others. Here it is worth noting the chapter heading of al-Bukhārī, “To stand at the right side of the *īmām*, equally parallel to him, when their are two.” Here he lists the *ḥadīth* quoted.

² Recorded by Abdurrazzāq in his *Muṣanaf* no. 3870 and his chain is authentic. Ibn Ḥajr referenced this quote in *Fatḥ ul-Bārī - Kitāb al-Aḥḥādīn*, the chapter; To stand at the right side of the *īmām*, equally parallel to him, when their are two.

WHEN THREE ARE PRAYING

Ibn Rushid said¹;

“The majority of scholars agree that it is *sunnah* for one individual to stand at the right of the *imām* as this is confirmed from the *ḥadīth* of Ibn ‘Abbāss and others. And that if there are three besides the *imām*, then they stand behind him. They differ when there are two other than the *imām*. Mālik and ash-Shāf‘ī say that they stand behind the *imām*. Abū Ḥanīfah, his companions, and the scholars of Kufah say that the *imām* should stand between them....”

He explains the reasoning for this second position to be from a *ḥadīth* reported from Ibn Mas‘ūd;

“That he prayed with ‘Alqamah and al-Aswad, so he stood between them.”²

Imām an-Nawawī comments,

“This is the *mathhab* of Ibn Mas‘ūd and his companions, and the scholars differ with them on this, from those among the companions until

¹*Bidāyat al-Mujtahid*, 1:286, (edited by Mājid al-Ḥamwī) Dār Ibn Ḥazm, first ed.

²This report is found with Muslim. Some other compilers narrate it to the Prophet (ﷺ). But that it is an action of Ibn Mas‘ūd only is the endorsed view. Most of the scholars consider this text to have been abrogated.

today. They say, when there are two men with an *imām*, they form one line behind him...”¹

In az-Zaylaṭī’s *Naṣb ar-Rayyah*, he said about Ibn Mas‘ūd;

“...He forgot how two are to stand behind the *imām*...”

The commentator said;

“This is also not one of the things that he forgot...as Ibn Sirīn mentioned, that was because the *masjid* was too small [Recorded by al-Bayhaqī]...and it is reported by Aḥmad...[from al-Aswād]...’so we prayed behind him, he took my hand, and the hand of my uncle, he put one of us on his right, and the other on his left. So we formed one line **behind** him.’ This report proves that Ibn Mas‘ūd prayed between al-Aswād and ‘Alqamah but he was ahead of them, and they were behind him. So according to this there is no contradiction between his view and that of the majority. And Allāh knows best.”²

The commentator has done a noble job for the honor of the great companion Ibn Mas‘ūd, may Allāh reward him for his effort. But we must note his error in this case. As for the

¹*Sharḥ Muslim*; The book of *Masjids*, the chapter on the Recommendation to place the hands on the knees while bowing...”

²*Naṣb ar-Rāyah* report no. 1712 (published by Mu’sasatir-Rayyān Beirut 11st. Ed. 1418 H.)

statement in the narration in question; “we formed one line **behind** him”, it is in the *Musnad*; from Ya‘qūb; from his father; from ‘Abdur-Raḥmān Bin al-Aswād an-Nakhī; from his father... this is the only version with this wording. All of the others contradict it. Aḥmad himself did not seem to consider that wording to be authentic; ‘Abdullāh the son Imām Aḥmad asked him if a boy and a man pray with an *imām* where does the boy pray? Imām Aḥmad replied,

“The *imām* stands in the middle of them, as was done by ‘Abdullāh [Ibn Mas‘ūd] with ‘Alqamah and al-Aswad, and he claimed that the Prophet (ﷺ) stood between them and **not behind** them.”¹

It is clear from Imām Aḥmad’s statement that he believed that Ibn Mas‘ūd used to stand in the middle, not in front of them. So he did not give credence to this strange version of the report, which contradicts the other versions, including that of Muslim, that he “stood between them” not in front of them. So here Imām Aḥmad’s preference is that when there is a man and a boy with the *imām*, the three are in one line, “As ‘Abdullāh did...”.

This view however, is contradicted by the majority of the scholars - as an-Nawawī has stated - who agree in acting according to the report from Anas (رضي الله عنه);

“...So he lined myself and the orphan behind him (رضي الله عنه), and the old lady stood behind us...”²

¹ *Masā’il al-Imām Aḥmad*, as reported by his son ‘Abdullāh, no. 416 (Pub. Maktab al-Islāmī, Beirut 3rd. Ed. 1408 H.)

² Recorded by al-Bukhārī, Muslim and others. See al-Bukhari; book of the

WHEN TWO ARE PRAYING AND ONE ARRIVES

Jābir Bin ‘Abdullāh mentioned praying with Allāh’s Messenger (ﷺ) one time;

“...So I stood at his left, then he took me by my hand and made me stand at his right. Jabir Bin Ṣakhr came to stand at the left of Allāh’s Messenger. He took both of us by our hands and pushed us back until we stood behind him.”¹

FOLLOWING THE *IMĀM* IN BOWING BEFORE ENTERING THE LINE

There is a considerable amount of debate among the scholars over the meaning of the *ḥadīth* of Abū Bakarah, that he reached the Prophet (ﷺ) while he was bowing, so he bowed before reaching the line. That was mentioned to the Prophet (ﷺ) so he said;

**«May Allāh increase your love for doing good.
But do not repeat that.»**

This *ḥadīth* is recorded by al-Bukhārī as well as others.

The difference among the scholars is over the meaning of **«do not repeat that»**. Interpretations may be divided into the following;

characteristics of the prayer, the chapter of *wuḍūʿ* for boys.

¹Recorded by Muslim, Abū Dāwūd and others.

1. It means not to bow outside of the line, then move up while bowing.
2. It means not to bow outside of the line because prayer outside of the line is not allowed.
3. It means do not rush into the prayer.

Shaykh Muḥammad Nāsir ad-Dīn al-Albānī has a lengthy discussion regarding this topic. In summary he says;

“This prohibition does not deal with the *rak'ah* nor the bowing outside of the line, rather it deals with the rushing which defies tranquility and dignity as is clear in the preceding *ḥadīth* of Abū Hurayrah.¹ So Imām ash-Shāfī, may Allāh have mercy upon him explained it;

“His saying, **<do not repeat that>**, is like his saying, **<do not come to the prayer hastily>**.”

This was mentioned by al-Bayhaqī in his *Sunan* (2:90)²

Then there is a report from Abū Hurayrah (رضي الله عنه) saying that the Prophet (ﷺ) said;

“When one of you comes to the prayer, he should not bow outside of the line until he takes his place in the line.”

¹ That is the agreed upon *ḥadīth*; **<When you come to the prayer, do not come to it hastily, come to it with tranquility and dignity.>**

² Additionally there are other narrations of this *ḥadīth* that show the companion was rushing and disturbing others. For these versions, as well as the quote, see *aṣ-Ṣaḥīḥah* nos. 229 & 230.

This is an unauthentic report.¹ Additionally, there are authentic reports from the companions that contradict this narration. ‘Aṭā’ reports that he heard Ibn az-Zubayr on the *minbar* saying;

“When one of you enters the *masjid* and the people are in the bowing position, then let him bow when he enters, then move up while bowing until he enters the line, for indeed that is the *Sunnah*.” ‘Aṭā’ added, “And I saw him doing that.” Ibn Jurayj said, “And I saw ‘Aṭā’ doing that.”²

Al-Bayhaqī records the following;

“Abū Bakr aṣ-Ṣidīq and Zayd Bin Thābit entered the *masjid* and the *imām* was bowing, so they

¹ All of the versions of this report come through Muḥammad ‘Ajlān who, although a trustworthy narrator, he is known for being mixed up when it comes to *ḥadīths* from Abū Hurayrah, as in this case. Additionally all of its chains contain ‘Amr Bin ‘Alī al-Maqdimī the *mudallis*, and his *tadlīs* is sometimes clothed in “I heard...” A similar narration and chain that does not contain him says, “Do not say the *takbīr* until you reach the line” rather than “do not bow until you reach the line”. For a complete explanation see *aḍ-Ḍa‘īfah* no. 981 by al-Albānī.

² Recorded by aṭ-Ṭabarānī, al-Ḥākim, and al-Bayhaqī referenced it from him. Al-Ḥākim graded it *ṣaḥīḥ* according to the criteria of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, and ath-Ṭahabī agreed to that. Al-Albānī endorsed this view. See *aṣ-Ṣaḥīḥah* nos. 229 & 230. It is clear from Shaykh al-Albānī’s discussion that he considers the text to hold the merit of a *Sunnah* of the Prophet (ﷺ) since it is called, “the *Sunnah*” and that was not rejected by those present, and it was acted upon by a number of the companions as follows.

bowed, then they moved up while they were bowing until they joined the line.”¹

He also recorded that;

“Zayd Bin Thābit entered the *masjid* and the *imām* was bowing, so he walked to his place in the line while he was bowing. He said the *takbīr*, then bowed, then moved slowly while bowing until he reached the line.”²

Zayd Bin Wahab said;

“I left with ‘Abdullāh - meaning Ibn Mas‘ūd - from his house to the *masjid*. When we got into the *masjid* the *imām* was bowing. So ‘Abdullāh said the *takbīr* and bowed, I bowed with him. Then we walked while bowing until we reached the line when the people were raising their heads. When the *imām* finished the prayer, I stood thinking that I had not caught it [the *rak‘ah*]. ‘Abdullāh took my hand and sat me down saying, ‘You caught it.’”³

¹ Al-Albānī graded it *ḥasan*, although there is a deficiency in its chain, it is here being used to support the other reports that Zayd did this. See previous reference.

² Al-Albānī graded it *ṣaḥīḥ*. See previous note.

³ Recorded by Ibn Abū Shaybah, aṭ-Ṭabarānī and others. Al-Albānī graded it *ṣaḥīḥ*. See previous references.

Abū Dāwūd said;

“I heard Aḥmad being asked about a man who bows outside of the line, then walks until he enters the line, and the *imām* has raised up before he reaches the line? He said ‘He performed the *rak‘ah*. But if he were to pray behind the line alone he repeats the prayer.’”¹

PRAYING ALONE BEHIND THE LINE

The last part of the quote from Imām Aḥmad brings us to the next point. There are numerous reports forbidding one to pray alone behind the line.² The following is an example; ‘Alī bin Shaybān said,

“We prayed behind him - meaning the Prophet (ﷺ) - so the Prophet of Allāh (ﷺ) finished the prayer. He saw a man praying alone behind the line. The Prophet of Allāh (ﷺ) waited until he finished his prayer then he said to him,

‘Repeat your prayer, for there is no prayer for the one alone behind the line.’”³

¹*Masā’il Imām Aḥmad.*

²This prohibition is for men only, as indicated from the previous discussion regarding women. Some scholars have used the case of women to argue that prayer behind the line is allowed for men also. This argument is refuted by Ibn Ḥajr in *Fath al-Bārī* in the chapter of bowing outside of the line in the book of *Athān*, and he quotes some of what Ibn Khuzaymah said in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* after *ḥadīth* no. 1570.

³Ibn Khuzaymah 1569 see *Irwā’ ul-Ghalīl* no. 541 where al-Albānī graded it authentic.

PULLING SOMEONE BACK TO FORM A LINE

There is no authentic evidence for pulling a person from the line ahead to form a new line when the prayer has begun already and one is late. Rather the *ḥadīths* utilized for this action are very weak or fabricated. One of them is reported by aṭ-Ṭabarānī,

“When one of you tries to get into a line and it is complete, then let him pull a man back to stand next to him.”

And the other reported by Ibn al-‘Arābī and others,

“Why didn’t you enter the line, or pull someone to pray with you?! Repeat your prayer.”

Both of these narrations are weak, even though (to the shock of some people) they are widely implemented.¹

WHAT SHOULD ONE DO IN THIS CASE?

Since it is confirmed that the reports on commanding one to pull another back are not authentic, then it is not allowed for one to do it, rather it is obligatory for him to close any gaps in the lines, and if not, then he prays alone and his prayer would be correct, for he has done all he can correctly do, and followed that which is legislated, and Allāh has said;

¹This issue is explained by Muḥammad Nāṣrud-Dīn al-Albānī in his book *Silsilat al-Aḥādīth ad-Da‘īfah* no. 921 & 922, see also *Irwā’ ul-Ghalīl* no. 541.

﴿ لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا ﴾

«Allāh does not burden a soul beyond its ability.» (*al-Baqarah* 2:286)¹

PRAYING NEXT TO THE *IMĀM* WHO IS LEADING A CONGREGATION

Sometimes we find that a person comes to the congregational prayer, without finding a place to enter the line, so he stands next to the *imām*. In order to indicate the permissibility of praying next to the *imām* when the congregation is behind him - due to some necessity to do so - al-Bukhārī named a chapter of his *Ṣaḥīḥ*;

“Standing next to the *imām* due to a reason.”

Ibn Khuzaymah named a chapter of his *Ṣaḥīḥ*;

“The permission for the follower to pray on the right [side] of the *imām* when the lines are behind them”

Then he narrates a *ḥadīth* from Sālim Bin ‘Ubayd about the Prophet (ﷺ) praying during his illness next to Abū Bakr who was leading the prayer. In it he said;

¹This is the view of Shaykh Muḥammad Bin Ṣāliḥ al-‘Uthaymīn (*Mukhtārāt min Fatāwā fīṣ-Ṣalāh* p. 59-62), his teacher Shaykh ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān Bin Naṣr as-Sa’dī (*al-Munāẓarāt al-Fiqhiyah* p. 32-34), and Shaykh Muḥammad Nāṣr ad-Dīn al-Albānī, as well as Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyah, see the previous footnote.

“Then he came to the prayer, so he sat at the side of Abū Bakr. Abū Bakr went to move back, so he stopped him until he finished the prayer.”¹

A similar *ḥadīth* is recorded by al-Bukhārī from ‘Ā’ishah (رضي الله عنها);

“Abū Bakr wanted to move back, but the Prophet (ﷺ) motioned to him to keep his place. Then he was brought until he sat by his side.” Al-A‘mash was asked; “The Prophet (ﷺ) prayed and Abū Bakr prayed, and the people were following Abū Bakr for the prayer?” He nodded yes with his head. Al-Bukhārī added; “It was recorded by Abū Dāwūd... Abū Mu‘āwiyah added from al-A‘mash; “He was sitting at the left of Abū Bakr, so Abū Bakr was praying while standing.”²

Ibn Ḥajar explains that the Prophet (ﷺ) sat on the left of Abū Bakr, “and this is the place for the *imām*”, as explained in another version of the *ḥadīth*;

¹Chapter 56 in the book of the Followers standing behind the *imām*, *ḥadīth* no. 1541. This report was also recorded by an-Nasā’ī and Ibn Mājah. It’s chain was graded *ṣaḥīḥ* by al-A‘zamī and al-Albānī made no additional comment. (Pub. al-Maktab al-Islāmī Beirut, 2nd. ed. 1412 H.)

²Al-Bukhārī, the chapter of the condition of a sick person attending the congregational prayer, in the book of *Aḥḥādīth*. Ibn Ḥajar notes that the version narrated by Abū Mu‘āwiyah is the more preserved version and that which the scholars depend upon to determine which side the Prophet (ﷺ) sat on.

“Abū Bakr was following the Prophet (ﷺ) in prayer, and the people were following Abū Bakr in prayer, and the Prophet (ﷺ) was sitting.”¹

Commenting on al-Bukhārī’s chapter heading, “Standing next to the *imām* due to a reason” Walī Allāh ad-Dahlawī said;

“Meaning it is allowed when there exists a reason like the *imām* is weak, or the people cannot hear his voice from a distance...”²

However, it seems from al-Bukhārī’s chapterization, that he understood the reason to be general for the case of the follower as well as the case of the *imām*. And Allah knows best.

In summary, if one finds that he cannot enter any line, but he can pray next to the *imām* - without disturbing the other followers - then as a follower, he joins him at his right side. If he finds that he cannot accomplish this, and there is no room for him in any line that he can reach, then he prays according to his condition. And Allāh knows best.

¹Al-Bukhārī; the chapter of the *imām* is appointed to be followed...in the book of the *Athān*. For the discussion by Ibn Ḥajr see *Fath al-Bārī*, the chapter of the sick attending the congregation in the book of *Athān*

²*Risālat Sharḥ Tarajam Abwāb Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*.

BOYS PRAY IN THE MEN'S LINE

Some *imāms* put boys in their own line, even when there is room for them in the men's lines. This is because of the following report;

“Allāh's Messenger (ﷺ) placed the men in front of the boys... ”

This is recorded by Aḥmad and others. Yet it is a weak *ḥadīth*, and it is the only text used for this behavior. Therefore, since there is no authentic evidence to put the boys behind the men, when there is room for them to pray with the men, then it is not to be acted upon.¹

¹For a discussion about the weakness of this *ḥadīth* see *Tammam al-Minnah* p. 284 by al-Albānī.

A WOMAN PRAYS BEHIND THE MEN¹

Ibn Rushid said;

“As for the *sunnah* regarding the woman, she stands behind the man or men if there are men other than the *imām*, or behind the *imām* if she is alone, there is no difference known over that...
there is no difference of the view that the lone

¹As this section indicates, the *Sunnah* is for the women to pray behind the men. And when there was a problem due to this, that is, the men and the women seeing each other, then the Prophet (ﷺ) issued an order in regard to solve that problem. And he (ﷺ) was perfectly capable of ordering a screen or barrier to be set up between them, yet he (ﷺ) did not. The companion Sahl Bin Sa'd said; “The people used to pray with the Prophet (ﷺ) and they would tie their *izārs* around their necks due to their small size. So the women were told, ‘Do not raise your heads until the men have sat up.’” (Al-Bukhārī, the description of the prayer, chapter; to tie the clothes properly...). We have heard of complaints about the women who wear *niqāb*, and they find themselves praying in a *masjid* that has no barrier between the men and the women, and they seek permission to wear their *niqāb* during the prayer to protect themselves from the looks of the men. This is done out their belief that their faces are ‘*awrah*, and must not be seen by men. It should be clear from the above *ḥadīth*, just exactly what the women would have seen if they lifted their heads too early, and what they would have seen is ‘*awrah* according to the consensus of all of the Muslims! Therefore the Prophet (ﷺ) gave them an instruction, without putting up a barrier between them, and his (ﷺ) is the best guidance. On the matter of the women praying in a area separated from the men’s *muṣallā*, Shaykh Muḥammad Nāṣr ad-Dīn al-Albānī said; “...There is no reason for women to have to perform their prayer like this except when the place of the men is too crowded and there is no room for the women’s lines behind them...”(Al-Aṣālah magazine, no. 19, see HUDAA 7:2)

woman prays behind the *imām*, and that if there is a man then the man prays next to the *imām* and the woman behind him.”¹

To endorse this, al-Bukhārī has a chapter named; “A woman forms a row alone” in the book of *Athān* of his *Ṣaḥīḥ*.

Ibn Khuzaymah said;

“...And it is not allowed for her [a lone woman] to stand next to the *imām*...”²

Based upon this it is clear that the husband and wife do not stand next to each other for any prayer, in contrast to what some people think.³

¹*Bidāyat al-Mujtahid*, 1:286, (edited by Mājid al-Ḥamwī) Dār Ibn Ḥazm, first ed.

²In his *Ṣaḥīḥ*, the discussion after *ḥadīth* no. 1570.

³There is a report in the *Muṣanaf* of ‘Abdurrazzāq (no. 2392), that should be mentioned here for the record: ‘Abdurrazzāq reports from Ibrāhīm Bin Muḥammad from Abū al-Ḥuwayrith that “Allāh’s Messenger (ﷺ) would pray and some of his wives were at his right and some of them at his left, and they were the age of menstruation.” Aside from contradicting the consensus on this matter, this is a disconnected report since the narrator Abū al-Ḥuwayrith was not a companion of the Prophet (ﷺ), therefore it is a weak narration that cannot be used for an evidence.

THE LINES FOR WOMEN'S CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER

Regarding the case when women pray in a group, that is - not behind a man as *imām* - then a woman leads the others in prayer, but rather than standing alone, in front of the followers, she stands in the middle of the first row.

It is reported about the mother of the believers, Umm Salamah (رضي الله عنها), the wife of the Prophet (ﷺ) that she would;

“Lead the women in prayer, standing with them in their line.”¹

Similar is reported about the mother of the believers, ‘Ā’ishah (رضي الله عنها);

“That she would lead the women in prayer, standing with them in the line.”²

¹Recorded by Ibn Abū Shaybah (2:88-89) and others. Al-Albānī graded this narration *ṣaḥīḥ* in *Tamām al-Minnah* (p. 153-4).

²See previous references. Additionally, these and similar reports are cited by al-Bayhaqī, Imām ash-Shāfī in *al-Umm*, Ibn Ḥazm in *al-Muḥallā*, az-Zayālī in *Naṣb ar-Rāyah* as well as others.

**WOMEN'S CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER IN THEIR HOMES IS MORE RECOMMENDED
THAN THEM PRAYING ALONE**

The Prophet (ﷺ) said;

**«Do not prohibit your women from the
masjids, but their homes are better for them.»¹**

And;

**«The best *masjids* for women are in depths of
their homes.»²**

And;

**«The prayer of one of you in congregation
versus your prayer alone holds twenty-five
more rewards»³**

Commenting on these *ḥadīths* as well as the reports noted in the previous section and their like, *shaykh* Ṣāliḥ as-Sadlān summarizes the judgement for women praying in congregation in their homes;

“Women’s congregational prayer in their homes
is better than them attending the *masjids* with

¹ Aḥmad, Abū Dāwūd and others. Al-Albānī graded it *ṣaḥīḥ* in *Ṣaḥīḥ ul-Jāmiʿ* no. 7458.

² Aḥmad, al-Ḥākim, al-Bayhaqī and others. Al-Albānī graded it *ṣaḥīḥ* in *Ṣaḥīḥ ul-Jāmiʿ* no. 3327.

³ Al-Bukhārī and others.

men, because praying in their homes while alone is better for them than praying in the *masjid*. So when there is a group of women in a home, then it is better as long as that does not become a fixed practice. Accordingly, when there is a congregation of women in a home, or school etc., then it is recommended that they pray in congregation preceded by an *imām* from among them, or she stands among them [in the first line].¹ They recite in the audible prayers in a lowered voice when [unrelated] men may hear them.”

“These *ḥadīths* and reports testify that women’s prayer in congregation is recommended. This is the opinion of Abū Ḥanīfah, ash-Shāfi‘ī, Aḥmad Bin Ḥanbal and Dāwūd az-Zāhirī and their companions. Claims for other than this are rejected, having no evidence to support them....”²

¹May Allāh preserve him and cause him to bring continued benefit to *Islām* and the Muslims by his great works. It is advisable for all women who lead women in prayer to stand where our beloved mothers stood, this is what is confirmed by the texts - as indicated in the previous section - and when their practice is clear, then there is no room for further discussion over it.

²*Ṣalātul-Jamā‘ah*. Here it should be noted, as the *ḥadīths* in this section allude to, that their homes are better for them. It may be that a group of women, believing that prayer in congregation is better, begin to pray all of their prayers at the home of one of them. This may lead to problems for their families if they insist on doing this all of the time. Therefore the wives must be careful of their duties in “their homes”, knowing that the prayer in “their homes” is better. And Allāh knows best. The objective here is only to prove that when a group of women happen to be together, in one of their homes, then they should in fact pray

PROHIBITION OF PRAYING BETWEEN PILLARS OR COLUMNS

It is obligatory for the people to line up either ahead of, or behind the threshold of any architectural structures in the *masjid*. This is derived from the following reports,

Mu‘awiyah bin Qurrah reports that his father said,

“We were prohibited from aligning between *as-sawārī* [fences, walls, pillars etc.] during the time of Allāh’s Messenger (ﷺ), he drove us away from them.”¹

And ‘Abdul-Ḥamīd bin Maḥmūd said,

“I prayed with Anas bin Mālīk one Friday, we [prayed] opposite the *sawārī*, we went forward or backward, for Anas said, ‘We were prevented from this during the time of Allāh’s Messenger (ﷺ).’”²

It is reported that Ibn Mas‘ūd (رضي الله عنه) said,

“Do not line up between the *sawārī*.”³

in congregation, not separately.

¹ Ibn Majāh, Ibn Khuzaymah, Ibn Ḥibān and others. Al-Albānī has shown it to be *ḥasan* in *Tamam ul-Minnah* pp. 296-297, and *aṣ-Ṣaḥīḥah* no. 335, and the following report is a witness for it.

² Abū Dāwūd, an-Nasā’ī, at-Tirmithī, and others with an authentic chain of narrators.

³ Al-Bayhaqī and Ibn al-Qāsim in *al-Mudawanah*. See *aṣ-Ṣaḥīḥah* no. 335.

Al-Bayhaqī commented,

“This is because the columns [prevent them from] connecting the line.”

Imām Mālik (ﷺ) said,

“There is no harm in the lines between columns if the *masjid* becomes tight.”¹

And Ibn Qudāmah said,

“It is not disliked for the *imām* to stand between the *sawārī*, only for the followers because it cuts their lines...”²

Abū Ḥanīfah said,

“It is disliked to stand between two pillars or in the corners or enclaves...”³

¹ *Al-Mudawanah.*

² *Al-Mughnī.* For previous quotes see *aṣ-Ṣaḥīḥah* no. 335.

³ *Ḥashiyah Ibn ‘Ābadayn.*

Additional Questions and Answers

The following questions were issued by a reader of HUDAA after this work was originally published.

Question

Regarding a question that appeared in HUDAA, about boys praying in the first line, in the answer to that question,

“...The boy should not form a line by himself, this contradicts the Prophet’s command”

There seems to be a contradiction with your solution under the heading “What should one do in this case?” when someone comes late and can not find a place in an existing line; “...then he prays alone and his prayer would be correct, for he has done all he can correctly do.”

Answer

The question asked about the boy asks:

“Is he permitted to form a row by himself (even if there is room in the first row)? Is he required to form a row by himself (even if there is room in the first row)?”

This is not the same as what was discussed or concluded in the article on straightening the lines. In the case of the boy, it is well known that many people force boys to pray alone, even when there is room in the first line. But our discussion was over whether a person should pull someone back from the line ahead

to form a line with him when he is late, and **there is no room for him in the first row**. So I don't think there is a contradiction there.

Question

You should not violate the saying attributed to the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ):

«Repeat your prayer, for there is no prayer for the one alone behind the line.»

Because it makes it plain what you can't do. So you should wait (if the *ḥadīth* for pulling someone back to form a line is weak) until the prayer is over, then grab a brother and offer the *ṣalāh*.

Answer

This is not allowed, as proven by the *ḥadīth* in which two men watched the Prophet (ﷺ) lead the people in *fajr* prayer, then afterwards, he (ﷺ) said to them,

«Why didn't you pray with us?»

They informed him that they already prayed *fajr* at home. He told them;

«Do not do this. If you pray in your homes then you find a congregation [praying] when you arrive at the *masjid*, join them, it will be a voluntary prayer for you.» (At-Tirmithī, this wording is his, also Abū Dāwūd.)

This shows that even if one has already prayed an obligatory prayer alone, he may not watch the congregation in a *masjid* praying without joining them. If this is the case when one has prayed the prayer already, then it is even more so when he has not! Furthermore, this mentions praying after *fajr* prayer, which is known to be one of the forbidden times. Yet, in this particular circumstance, the Prophet (ﷺ) commanded praying at such time, even though other texts, “make it plain what you can’t do” as you have said. In this case the Prophet (ﷺ) did not violate his own words!

When a prohibition is issued (like the one forbidding prayer after *fajr* until sunrise passes) it is assumed that there may be some exceptions to it, and this is demonstrated by the above case. Likewise, this is assumed to be the case with the *ḥadīth* of the man who prayed alone behind the line. He was commanded, “**Repeat your prayer**” we are not told in the text that the man attempted to get in the line, but we are simply informed that he was alone. This is why it is assumed that this command, “**Repeat your prayer**” or, the prohibition of praying alone behind the line, was because there was room in the line, i.e., it is a command or a prohibition that one is capable of implementing. If the man prayed alone because there was no way for him to get in line, why would the Prophet (ﷺ) tell him to repeat his prayer, when by repeating his prayer, he would obviously repeat it alone again? Rather, he was capable of getting in the line, of closing a gap, but neglected to do so, and so he was told to repeat the prayer. So it is as Ibn Taymiyah said about this issue;

“So the prayer is correct for the one who is alone if there is an excuse, as is the saying of the *Hanafīs*. When one is not able but to stand

behind the line, it is better for him to stand alone, and not to pull someone back from his [rightful] place in the line....”¹

And this, he explains, is because if you pull someone back, you are obviously making a gap in the line! Likewise the case when two people come and there is room for one of them in the line, what do they do? If they stand together and form a second line then they are leaving a gap in the line, when we are commanded to close the gaps. So one of them closes the gap, and the other prays alone behind the line (unless he can get in too without unnecessary force of course!) without pulling someone back!

Question

If the person’s intentions were to offer *ṣalāh* alone behind the line then the person is in violation, but if the person’s intentions were to offer *ṣalāh* in congregation, but couldn’t without pulling someone back to form a line, then he should make the *ṣalāh*, and Allah is All-Knowing.

Answer

In this case, one’s intention to pray in congregation is not nullified simply because he finds himself incapable of following through with it, he is rather doing all that he can do within the limits of the *sharʿ* to fulfill his goal.

¹See *Silsilat al-Aḥādīth al-Ḍaʿīfah* no. 922 and the quote from *al-Ikhtiyārāt*.

Question

The individual should attempt to close any gaps in the ranks, and if not possible to join, this attempt or a slight noise on the part of the individual should alert at least one brother in the last rank to step back of his own accord without being pulled back. This is a way in which no *ḥadīth* prohibitions are violated, no *ḍā'if ḥadīths* are utilized, and the individual offers the *ṣalāh* in congregation. [Basically, it is the duty of the brothers to step back to protect their brother who has come in late - likening it to *fard kifayyah* status.]

Answer

This encourages the people praying in the line to contradict the command to close the gaps, since by stepping back, he will be making a gap in the line, and then he is liable to the threat mentioned in the text about cutting the line,

«Whoever breaks a line, Allah cuts him off.»¹

So the claim that it is the duty of a brother to step back, and that this is almost *fard kifayyah* is an obvious contradiction to the texts.

Question

Some brothers agreed that they would not want to pray alone behind the congregation, even to the extent that they would squeeze into the ranks somehow - forcibly even.

¹ Aḥmad, Abū Dāwūd, an-Nasā'ī, and others. See *Ṣaḥīḥ ul-Jāmi'* no. 1187.

Answer

Squeezing into the line is what one is obliged to do, as stated in the *ḥadīth*;

«...Align your shoulders, close the gaps, yield to the hands of your brothers, and do not leave any gaps for Shayṭān.»¹

“Yield to the hands of your brothers” means be willing to cooperate with them and accommodate them, not push them away. But there is always the possibility that one cannot get in the line no matter how hard he tries. If he has tried his best (without disturbing other people’s prayer too much, of course) then:

﴿لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا﴾

«Allah does not burden a soul beyond its ability» (*Al-Baqarah* 2:286)

In this case a person should not act on a false *ḥadīth*, nor do something new. And Allah knows best.

¹Same as above.

PRINTED IN LEBANON

PUBLISHED BY

Al-Qur'an was-Sunnah Society of North America
19800 VAN DYKE RD, DETROIT MI 48234 U.S.A.
(313) 893-3763

