



PLACE OF PRAYER

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Objectives >>>

Students should:

- Understand the conditions of the place of prayer in brief detail
- Be reminded of the rewards of praying at the mosque

Lesson 1: The Place of Prayer

In this lesson, we will discuss the conditions for the place in which we choose to perform our prayer. In this lesson, we will discuss the most important conditions, and leave other conditions for discussion in later years.

THE PLACE OF PRAYER SHOULD NOT BE USURPED

One of the major conditions of the place of prayer is that it should not be usurped. This means that one must have permission to pray in that place. It is important to remember that although we usually discuss this condition when it comes to prayer, this rule applies to any type of usage of a place. Therefore, living in, sleeping in or walking through a place that one does not have permission to use is forbidden in Islam and considered a sin.

JURISPRUDENCE

LEVEL 4

If a place belongs to someone else, we need to have their permission before we pray in that place. When it comes to vast expanses of land such as large farms, deserts or gardens which are not bound by fences, then one can pray in such places without the permission of the owner, unless they know that the owner has explicitly made it clear, that they are not happy with anyone praying there

THE PLACE OF PRAYER MUST BE TĀHIR (PURE)

The place where a person is praying should not be impure (Najis) in such a way that the impurity would reach the person's body or clothes. Therefore, if a place is impure but dry, such that the impurity would not reach the person's body or clothes, it is permissible to pray there. Even if the place was impure and wet, one is allowed to place a prayer mat or something else over it to stop the impurity from being transferred to the body or clothes and pray there.

The only exception to this rule is that the place of prostration must be pure, whether it is dry or wet.

MEN SHOULD PRAY IN FRONT OF WOMEN

If a man and a woman are praying close to each other, the woman should pray behind the man. This is the case even if the man and woman are *maḥram* (e.g. a teenage

boy needs to pray in front of his mum). Different scholars give different criteria for what is considered 'behind'.ⁱ This rule does not apply if:

- They are more than ten arm spans far from each other (about 5 metres)
- There is a curtain or other barrier between them not allowing them to see each other

OTHER RULES

- The place of prayer must be steady and not moving (for example, we cannot pray on a rocking boat)
- We cannot pray on very steep hills or steps because the place we perform sujūd on should be roughly level with where we are standing.

PRAYING IN A MOSQUE

As we have learnt in previous years, it is highly recommended to pray at the mosque and that the rewards of a prayer prayed at the mosque are far greater than a prayer prayed at home. This is especially the case for people who live close to a mosque or Islamic centre.

“He who walks to a mosque intending to join the congregation gets the equivalent of seventy thousand good deeds for every step he takes, and he is raised just as many levels...”ⁱⁱ

ⁱ Aytollah Sistani: the woman's place of prostration must be in line with the man's thighs

Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi: the woman's place of prostration must be 'a little more behind than that of men'.

Review Questions:

Q1. If a man and woman are praying close to each other, the man must pray in front of the woman:

- a) Whether they are maḥram or not
- b) Only if they non-maḥram
- c) Only in a mosque

Q2. The place of prayer:

- a) Can be very steep
- b) Must not be very steep
- c) Must be completely flat

Q3. Praying in a usurped place:

- a) Is a sin but our prayer is accepted
- b) Makes our prayer void
- c) Both of the above

Ayatollah Khomeini: the woman's place of prostration must be in line with the man's feet

ⁱⁱ Mizanul Hikmah, no. 2930