



Congregational Prayers

صلاة الجماعة

Objectives >>>

Students should:

- Be reminded of the importance of Jamā'ah prayer.
- Understand that Jamā'ah prayers is very rewarding
- Learn some of the general rules of Jamā'ah prayer

Congregational Prayers

The congregational prayer is one of the most emphasised aspects of the practical life of a Muslim. It is the way in which all of the Muslims gather in one location and offer their prayers in unison. The prayer in congregation becomes the symbol of the unity of the Muslims and is a very important way of enjoining people in the community to pray regularly. In this lesson we will discuss the importance of praying in congregation and elaborate on more rules of praying in this form.

IMPORTANCE OF THE CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER

There are very few practical acts of worship emphasised in Islam as much as the congregational prayer. The Holy Prophet (saw) has said:

"One prayer of a man in congregation is worthier than his forty years of prayers at home (alone)."ⁱ

Explaining some of the wisdom of the congregational prayer, Imam al-Reḍā (as) said:

JURISPRUDENCE

LEVEL 5

"Certainly the congregational prayer has been decreed in order that the pure Faith in Unity, in Islam, and in worshipping Allah be openly revealed and (publicly) manifested, because... the proof of Allah, Almighty and Glorious, will be completed for the totality of people in the East and West (of the world)... Again, the congregational prayer causes people to know each other which allows for some of them to bear witness for others regarding their Islam, wherein there is the means of facility and association for righteous deeds and godly actions which prevents too much disobedience against Allah, Almighty and Glorious."ⁱⁱⁱ

We can see from this narration that the congregational prayer is a great way for Muslims to get to know one another and to encourage each other to do good.

So if our home is reasonably close to where Jamā'ah prayer is held it becomes almost compulsory upon us to pray in the congregational format. Similarly, it is ḥarām for one to avoid Jamā'ah without an excuse and simply because they do not like it. While if we are at a Mosque and there is congregational prayer occurring, it is impermissible to pray 'Furada' (alone) while there is a congregational prayer being held.

Some of us ignore the importance of congregational prayer when we are at home with the family. Congregational prayer, as will be seen later in the lesson, can be offered with only two people. We should not ignore the blessing of congregational prayer when with our families or visitors. Rather, we should take full advantage of praying in this format.

THE LEADER OF THE CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER

Prayer can be considered to be in the congregational format with as little as two people. However, the main condition is that there must be a prayer leader (Imām) who must have certain qualities. He does not need to be a scholar or sheikh. A basic summary of the conditions of the Imam is that he should be a practicing Muslim. Specifically, the Imam of the prayer must be:

- Adult
- Sane
- Just: A person is said to be just when he performs all those acts which are obligatory upon him, and refrains from all those things which are forbidden to him. And the sign of being just is that one is apparently of a good character, so that if enquiries are made about him from the people of his locality, or from his neighbours, or from those persons with whom he lives, they would confirm his good conduct.
- Of legitimate birth
- Male (when the followers are male)

The main condition from among the above is that the person must be just. As is explained above, we can determine whether a person is just or not according to their reputation amongst their community and by observing that they avoid sins and perform their obligations. It is sufficient that we observe this in general public life, we do not need to investigate about people and pry into their private life.

RULES OF CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER

Once the prayer leader has been established

- if there is only one follower, the follower should stand to the right, and slightly behind the one who leads the prayer
- If there are two or more followers, all must stand behind the Imam without a barrier (e.g. wall) separating them from the Imam.
- The gap between the Imam and the rest of the congregation must not be great. Similarly, the gap separating the worshippers standing side by side should not be large.

- The actions of those in the congregation must not precede those of the Imam. The parts of the prayer should be done in unison with the Imam or slightly after the actions of the Imam. This means one cannot go into Rukū' before the Imam or go into sujūd before the Imam. At the same time one should not be too far behind the actions of the Imam, for example, if the Imam is going in Sajdah, one cannot remain in Rukū' and should join him in sujūd quickly.
- When we are praying in congregation while the Imam is reciting the two chapters, Al-Hamd and the other Surah, we should just listen to the Imam's recitation. If we can't hear the chapters being recited, it is permissible to say some 'Thikr' under the breath. For all of the other parts of the prayer, one should recite the words quietly.
- The lines of the congregation should be straight, not at the place of prostration but from the position of the feet. Furthermore, one should not start another row, until the gaps of the first row are filled.

ETIQUETTES OF THE CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER

There are etiquettes which we should be aware of when praying in congregation. The majority of these are related to being considerate of those around you. One of the major blessings of the congregational prayer is that it is a gathering of the believers. Thus, we should help others achieve optimum comfort and concentration in prayer. This means we:

- Should not wear clothing printed with colours or images which may distract those around us
- We should also be considerate of those around us when reciting the Dhikr, that it is not too loud
- Generally for prayer, but especially for the congregational prayer we should put on some musk or fragrance
- Just like the followers of the congregation, the Imam should also be considerate of the followers. This means that he should not make the prayer so long that the followers get tired.

Review Questions

1. The leader of the congregational prayer must be:

- a. A male, regardless of who is praying behind the leader
- b. Just, regardless of who is praying behind the leader
- c. A sheikh, regardless of who is praying behind the leader

2. The minimum number of people required to offer congregational prayer is:

- a. 1
- b. 2
- c. 5

3. Congregational prayer can be offered:

- a. At the mosque only
- b. Anywhere
- c. Anywhere except one's home

ⁱ Mustadrak-ul-Wasa'il, vol. 6, p. 446

ⁱⁱ Bihar-ul-Anwar, vol. 88, p. 12