

Differences In Salah (Prayer) Between Men And Women

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Some people are of the view that all the laws of salah are common to both men and women, and that there is no difference between them. They also claim that the hadeeth '**Pray as you have seen me praying**' is general and, therefore, should be applied equally to both men and women. It should be realised, however, that our own interpretation and logical inference of this hadeeth cannot compare with the other ahadeeth of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) and the verdicts and practice of the Sahabah and Tabi'un (رضي الله عنهم) quoted below.

The Shariah has ordained distinct rules for men and women in many important questions of salah. For example,

- **Jumuah is fardh upon men but not on women, and the Eid prayer is wajib for men but again not for women.**

Sayyiduna Tariq bin Shthab (رضي الله عنه) reports that the Prophet (ﷺ), said, '**Jumuah in congregation is an obligatory duty upon every Muslim except four people: a slave, a woman, a child, and one who is sick.**'⁵³⁸

Sayyidatuna Umm Atiyyah (ra) says as part of a longer hadeeth, '**We have been forbidden from following funerals and there is no Jumuah upon us.**'⁵³⁹

- **The reward of congregational prayer for men is twenty seven times more than an individual prayer. Contrary to this, the more rewarding prayer of a woman is that which is most concealed and performed within the confines of her innermost living quarters.**

Sayyiduna Abdullah bin Mas'ud (رضي الله عنه) reports that the Prophet (ﷺ) said, '**The prayer of a woman in her makhda' (partition) is better than her prayer in her hujrah (chamber), and her prayer in her hujrah is better than her prayer in her bait (house).**'⁵⁴⁰

Sayyiduna Abu Hurairah (رضي الله عنه) narrates that the Prophet (ﷺ) said, '**The most beloved salah to Allah of a woman is one that she performs in the darkest spot of her home.**'⁵⁴¹

- **Unlike men women should not give adhan or say the iqamah.**

Sayyidatuna Asmaa (ra) narrates as part of a longer hadeeth that the Prophet (ﷺ) said, '**There is no adhan iqamah or Jumuah upon women.**'⁵⁴²

Sayyiduna Ibn Umar (ra) says '**There is no adhan or iqamah upon women.**'⁵⁴³

- **There is a great difference in the awrah of a man and that of a woman in salah. Women must cover**

their entire body including the hair, leaving only the face, hands and feet exposed.

Ummul Mu'mineen Aisha (ra) reports that the Prophet (ﷺ) said, **'Allah does not accept the salah of a mature female without a scarf.'**⁵⁴⁴

- Women cannot lead men in salah.

Abu Bakrah (رضي الله عنه) reports that the Prophet (ﷺ) said **'Never will those people succeed who have appointed a woman over them.'**⁵⁴⁵

Jabir bin Abdullah (رضي الله عنه) reports as part of a longer hadeeth that the Prophet (ﷺ) said, **"Know that a woman should not lead a man in salah."**⁵⁴⁶

- For the purpose of correcting or deterring someone in salah men should say 'subhanallah' loudly, whilst women are only allowed to clap their hands.

Sayyiduna Abu Hurairah (رضي الله عنه) reports that the Prophet (ﷺ) said, **'Tasbeeh is for men, and clapping is for women.'**⁵⁴⁷

The different postures, positions and rulings concerning the prayers of the female are not the invention of a group or an individual but teaching of the Prophet (ﷺ) himself. He was the very first person to differentiate between the prayer of a man and a woman.

Yazid bin Abi Habib reports that the Prophet (ﷺ) passed by two women who were praying salah. He said, **'When you prostrate, let part of your body cling to the earth, for women are unlike men in this regard'.** 548

Sayyiduna Ibn Umar (رضي الله عنه) narrates that the Prophet (ﷺ) said, **'When a woman sits in salah she should place one thigh over the other, and when she prostrates she should press her stomach to her thighs in a manner that is the most concealing for her. Indeed Allah looks at her saying, "Oh my angels! I make you witness that I have forgiven her."**⁵⁴⁹

Sayyiduna Wail bin Hujr (رضي الله عنه) reports that the Prophet (ﷺ) said, **'Oh Ibn Hujr! When you pray make your hands level with your ears. And the woman shall raise her hands close to her bosom.'**⁵⁵⁰

We derive some very important and fundamental principles about the prayer of a woman from all the above ahadeeth.

- The laws of salah are not always the same for men and women.
- The sunnah posture of a female in any position of salah is that which is the most concealing for her.

Imam Baihaqi (ra) says,

'All of the laws of salah in which a woman differs from a man are based on the principle of satr

(concealment). This means that the woman is instructed to do all that which is more concealing for her. The following chapters of hadeeth explain this meaning in detail.'⁵⁵¹

As mentioned earlier, this variation in the salah of a woman has been prescribed by none other than the Prophet (ﷺ) himself. It has remained the practice of the whole ummah till this day and is also reflected in the rulings of the Sahabah and Tabi'un. The ulama and fuqaha of all four schools have always recognised this difference and, as is evident in their books of fiqh, have always observed the above principles whenever making a ruling about the salah of a woman. Following are a few narrations detailing the verdicts and practice of the Sahabah & together with the verdicts of some of the Tabi 'un and the ulama of the different schools of fiqh:

Verdicts and practice of the Sahabah (عنه رضي):

Khalid bin al Lajlaaj reports as part of a longer hadeeth that **women were ordered to do tarabb'u 552 when sitting in salah.**⁵⁵³

Nafi' narrates that Safiyyah (عنها رضي) **would pray and do tarabb'u.**⁵⁵⁴

Nafi' also narrates that **the womenfolk of Sayyiduna Abdullah bin Umar's (عنه رضي) family would do tarabb'u.**⁵⁵⁵

Sayyiduna Ibn Umar (عنه رضي) was once asked, **'How did women pray their salah during the time of the Prophet (ﷺ)'** He replied, **'They used to sit cross legged until they were told to practice ihtifaz.'**⁵⁵⁶

Sayyiduna Ali (عنه رضي) says, **'When a woman prostrates she should do ihtifaz and press her thighs together.'**, and in Abdul Razzaq's narration **'press her thighs against her stomach.'**⁵⁵⁷

Sayyiduna Ibn Abbas (عنه رضي) was asked about the prayer of a woman. He replied, **'She should pull herself close together and do ihtifaz.'**⁵⁵⁸

Verdicts of the Tabi'un and other ulama:

Ibn Jurayj reports, 'I asked Ataa: **"Should a woman motion with her hands at the time of takbeer as a man does?"** he replied, **"She should not raise her hands with takbeer in the manner of men."** Ataa then demonstrated (the way in which she should.) He placed his hands very low and then pulled them towards him. He then said, **"The posture of a woman in salah is not that of a man."**⁵⁵⁹

Ataa also says, **'A woman should pull herself together when she bows down into ruk'u: she should bring up her arms to her stomach and pull herself together as much as possible. When she prostrates she should bring up her arms close to her and press her bosom and stomach against her thighs: she should pull herself together as much as possible.'**⁵⁶⁰

Hasan al Basri says, **'A woman should pull herself close together in sujud.'**⁵⁶¹

Hasan and Qatadah both say, **'When a woman prostrates she should pull herself together as much as possible. She should not allow for any space between her limbs so that her posterior is not raised.'**⁵⁶²

One certain author has argued that all the descriptions of the Prophet's (ﷺ) prayer are equally applicable to both men and women and there is nothing in the sunnah that excludes women from any of them. Insha Allah the contents of this chapter will answer that claim. The author then goes on to say that this is the view of Ibrahim al Nakhai who said, 'A woman's actions in the prayer are the same as a man's.' - transmitted by Ibn Abi Shaibah (1/75/2), with a saheeh sanad from him.

This is not what Ibrahim al Nakhai said at all nor is it his view. His narration transmitted by Ibn Abi Shaibah actually reads, **'A woman will sit in salah just as a man does.'**⁵⁶³ This somehow has been misquoted as **'A woman's actions in the prayer are the same as a man's.'**!

In fact, Ibrahim al Nakhai's other narrations quite clearly contradict the above report. His view about the prayer of a woman as reported by Ibn Abi Shaibah and others is as follows:

Ibrahim al Nakhai says, **'When a woman prostrates she should press her stomach against her thighs. She should not raise her posterior nor should she allow for any space or distance between the limbs of her body as a man does.'**⁵⁶⁴

He also says, **'When a woman prostrates she should bring her thighs together and press her abdomen to them.'**⁵⁶⁵

He also says, **'A woman should sit to one side in salah.'**⁵⁶⁶

Imam Baihaqi (ra) says,

'All of the laws of salah in which a woman differs from a man are based on the principle of satr (concealment). This means that the woman is instructed to do all that which is more concealing for her. The following chapters of hadeeth explain this meaning in detail.'⁵⁶⁷

Ibn Qudamah al Maqdisi al Hanbali quotes Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal in his al Mughni as saying, **'I consider sadl to be better for a woman.'** He also quotes the narration of Sayyiduna Ali (رضي الله عنه) who says, **'When a woman prays salah she should do ihtifaz and press her thighs together.'**⁵⁶⁹

Imam Ahmad was asked about how a woman should prostrate and sit for tashahhud. He replied, **'She should do whatever is more concealing for her.'** He added, **'She should do tarabb'u in tashahhud and draw her legs to one side (sadl).'**⁵⁷⁰

According to the narration of Abu Dawood, Imam Ahmad was asked about how a woman should sit in salah. He replied, **'She should press her thighs together.'**⁵⁷¹

Qadhi Iyadh has also quoted from some Salaf that **the sunnah for women is tarabb'u**.⁵¹²

All the above quite clearly demonstrates that the prayer of a woman is different in some aspects from that of a man, and that this distinction was first made by none other than the Prophet (صلى الله ورساله عليه وآله), and then maintained by the prominent Sahabah and Tabi'un. Furthermore, as can be seen in their works, there is almost universal agreement amongst the scholars of all schools of fiqh on this issue.

List of differences between the prayer of a man and a woman.

Some of the differences as mentioned in the Hanafi books of fiqh are listed below.

In all the postures and movements of salah, including qiyam, ruk'u, sajdah, and tashahhud a woman should adopt that which is the most modest and concealing for her.

At the beginning of salah a woman should not raise her hands to her ears but only to her shoulders or close to her bosom.⁵⁷³

In qiyam, women are to place their hands on their bosoms. They can fasten them in any one of the different ways 'akdh' (grasping) or 'wadh' (placing) described in part two, or they can simply rest the right palm on the left one.

Unlike men, in ruk'u, women should tuck their arms into the body and not spread them outward. They should also merely place their hands over their knees with closed fingers, and not grasp them with the fingers spread wide open.⁵⁷⁴ In fact, women should try to keep their fingers close together in all the postures of salah.

During prostration men should allow for some space and distance between their stomachs and thighs, and arms and the side of the body, whilst women should press these limbs together.

Again in prostration, men should raise their arms off the ground and allow for some distance but women should let them cling to the ground.

During the sitting of tashahhud, men are to rest on their legs and raise their right foot with the toes facing qiblah, whereas women are to take out both their legs towards the right hand side of the body and rest on the posterior without raising their right foot.

Notes:

⁵³⁸ Abu Dawood 1067 and Hakim 1062. Hakim declared it saheeh and Dhahabi agreed.

⁵³⁹ Ibn Khuzaimah 1722

⁵⁴⁰ Abu Dawood 570 and Ibn Khuzaimah 1690.

⁵⁴¹ Ibn Khuzaimah 1691, and Tabarani in al M'ujam al Kabeer as mentioned by Hafidh Haithami 2/35. Hafidh Haithami also says that its narrators are authentic.

⁵⁴² Baihaqi 1921. ⁵⁴³ Baihaqi 1920.

⁵⁴⁴ Ahmad 24012, Ibn Majah 655, Abu Dawood 641, Tirmidhi 377, Ibn Khuzair 775, Hakim 917 and Baihaqi 3254. Hakim declared it saheeh and Dhahabi agreed.

- 545 Ahmad 19507, Bukhari 4163, Tirmidhi 2262 and Nasai 5388.
- 546 Ibn Majah 1081 and Baihaqi 5131.
- 547 Bukhari 1145.
- 548 Abu Dawood in his al Maraseel pl8 (Muassasah al Risalah edition), and Baiha 3201.
- 549 Baihaqi 3199. He also declared it dhaeef.
- 550 Tabarani in al M'ujam al Kabeer 22/19 no.28. Hafidh Haithami says 2/103, 'Tabarani has narrated it as part of a long hadeeth on the virtue of Wail bin Hujr 4fc with a chain of Maimoonah bint Hujr narrating from her auntie Umm Yahya bint Abdul Jabbar. I have not identified her but the rest of the narrators are reliable.'
- 551 Baihaqi 2/314.
- 552 i.e., to draw out one's right leg towards the right side of the body and to place the left leg beneath the right leg.
- 553 Ibn Abi Shaibah 2783.
- 554 Abdul Razzaq 5074 and Ibn Abi Shaibah 2784.
- 555 Ibn Abi Shaibah 2789.
- 556 Narrated by all three, Abu Muhammad al Bukhari, Qadhi Umar bin al Hasan Ashnani, and Ibn Khusruw in their Musnads of Imam Abu Hanifah's ahadeeth Ihtifaz is to lean to one side and rest on the posterior. It is more or less the same a sadl.
- 557 Abdul Razzaq 5072 and Ibn Abi Shaibah 2777. Muhaddith Dhafar Ahmad Uthmani 3/32 has declared it hasan.
- 558 Ibn Abi Shaibah 2778.
- 559 Abdul Razzaq 5066 and Ibn Abi Shaibah 2474.
- 560 Abdul Razzaq 5069.
- 561 Ibn Abi Shaibah 2781.
- 562 Abdul Razzaq 5068.
- 563 Ibn Abi Shaibah 1/242, no 2788.
- 564 Abdul Razzaq 5071 and Ibn Abi Shaibah 2782.
- 565 Ibn Abi Shaibah 2779.
- 566 Abdul Razzaq 5077 and Ibn Abi Shaibah 2792.
- 567 Baihaqi 2/314.
- 568 To draw out the right leg to one side of the body and place the left leg beneath one's right thigh. In this way the posterior will come to rest on the ground rather than on the left leg. She would, therefore, not be resting on her legs, but on her posterior as mentioned in the narration of Sayyiduna Ali (عنه الله رضى)
- 569 Ibn Qudamah in al Mughni 2/135.
- 570 Masaail of Imam Ahmad narrated by his son Abdullah 373.
- 571 Masaail of Imam Ahmad narrated by Abu Dawood p51.
- 572 Awjaz al Masalik 2/119.
- 573 Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal also says that she should raise them slightly and, according to one narration, she should not raise them at all.
- 574 In some books of Hanafi fiqh it has been suggested that in ruk'u they should also bend their backs and knees slightly. The Hanbali scholar Imam Khirqi also says as part of a longer statement, 'The woman should gather herself in ruk'u and sujud.' (al Mughni 1/134.)