

Tawarruk or Iftirash? How should men sit in Salah?

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In the Name of Allah, the Inspirer of Truth

Some hadiths indicate that the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) sat in the tawarruk position, and other hadiths indicate that he sat in the iftirash position. Hence, we could gauge from this that the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) at one time or another during his blessed life sat in both of these positions.

The tawarruk position is when a person sits with the left posterior on the ground; his right foot placed vertically with toes pointing towards the qibla; and the left foot on its side emerging from under the right foot.

Slightly different from this is the iftirash position which is to place the left foot on its side and sitting on it; and keeping the right foot vertical while resting on the bottom of the toes turning them towards the qibla.

The Hanafi Opinion

According to the Hanafis, the more superior and preferred method is that one use the iftirash position in all sittings [qa'da] of the prayer. However, though it is not the preferred method, it would be permissible, in light of rigorously authenticated [sahih] hadiths, to sit in the tawarruk position as well.

The Hadiths on Iftirash

The Hanafis state that the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam), for the greater part of his life, sat in the iftirash position for all sittings [qa'da] of his prayer, and Imam Tirmidhi (rahmatullahi alaih) has stated it to be the practise of the majority of scholars. As for the few times the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) did do tawarruk—as some narrations state—it was either due to weakness and not being able to sit in iftirash in the latter part of his life, or it was merely to inform the Companions of its permissibility [bayanan li 'l-jawaz]. The following hadiths mention the Messenger's (Allah bless him and give him peace) use of iftirash while sitting in the salat.

1. 'A'isha (radiallahu anha) narrates that the Messenger of Allah (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) **would spread his left foot and keep the right one standing** (Sahih Muslim 1:195).
2. 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar (radiallahu anhuma) states in his narration: "**It is a sunna of prayer that you keep your right foot standing and fold the left one.**" (Sahih al-Bukhari 1:114).

The following hadiths will further clarify the posture illustrated in the above two narrations.

3. Ibn 'Umar (radiallahu anhuma) narrates that: **"Among the sunnats of prayer, one is that you keep the right foot standing with the toes pointed towards the qibla, and [you] sit on the left foot."** (Sunan al-Nasa'i 1:173)

4. Wa'il ibn Hujr (radiallahu anh) narrates: **"I came to Madina to observe the Messenger of Allah's (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) prayers. When he sat for tashahhud, he spread his left foot and kept the right one standing."** (Sunan al-Tirmidhi 1:65)

Imam Tirmidhi (rahmatullahi alaih) reports this to be a rigorously authenticated [sahih] hadith, and then states that this was the practise of the majority of the learned scholars and is the view of Sufyan al-Thawri (rahmatullahi alaih), Ibn al-Mubarak (rahmatullahu alaih) and the people of Kufa.

All of these hadiths speak of the iftirash position being generally used by the Messenger (salallahu alayhi wa sallam), and do not imply that he sat in any other position. This means it was his common practise to use the iftirash position. One objection raised here by the second group is that these hadiths only refer to the sitting posture of the first sitting and not to the second. Hence, a person should only sit in iftirash in the first sitting and use tawarruk in the second sitting. This objection however, is not a valid one, because of Wa'il ibn Hujr's (radiallahu anh) above-mentioned statement: **"I came to Madina [especially] to observe the Messenger's (salallahu alayhi wa sallam) prayer."**

This means that his main purpose of visiting the Messenger of Allah (salallahu alayhi wa sallam) was to observe how he prayed. So, for Wa'il ibn Hujr (radiallahu anh) to specifically mention iftirash as the only sitting posture used by the Messenger (salallahu alayhi wa sallam) and not mention any other sitting method, informs us that this Companion only observed the Messenger (salallahu alayhi wa sallam) using iftirash in all the sittings of the prayer.

Mufti Abdur-Rahman ibn Yusuf