

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



LAMPOST
EDUCATION INITIATIVE

Can a Woman Lead Men in Salat?

Let's get right to the point.

The first problem with this scheduled event is that the theme is 'Muslim Women Reclaim Right to Lead Prayer,' while it should read 'Muslim Women Claim Right to Lead Prayer,' since there is no basis for the belief that it was ever a *right* for women to lead a mixed-group prayer. And there are no explicit accounts of women ever leading a mixed-group of men and women in prayer.

Three of the four Sunni Schools of law (Hanafis, Shafi'is, and Hanbalis) permit for a woman to lead other women in prayer except that the one leading is not to stand out in front of the row.¹ Rather, she is to remain aligned in a single row with the other women, so as not to appear to be leading as a man would. They base this on the following reports:

- 1- Imam Baihaqi, Daraqutni, and Ibn Abi Shayba report from Ra'ita Al-Hanafiyya that she said: "Aisha led us. And she stood between us during the obligatory prayer."
- 2- Ibn Abi Shayba and 'Abdur-Razzaq Al-San'ani report by way of Hujayra bint Husayn that she said: "Umm Salama led us in Salatul-'Asr. And she stood between us."²

Imam Al-Nawawwi says about these two hadiths, Daraqutni and Baihaqi related them with sahih chains.³

As for Imam Malik and the popular view held in the Maliki School, any prayer that a woman leads others in – whether women, men, or mixed – is invalid. Ali ibn Abi Talib is reported to have said, "The woman is not to lead (Salat)."⁴ This was also the view of Sulaiman ibn Yasar and Al-Hasan Al-Basari.⁵

¹ This was also the view of Imams Awza'i and Thawri.

² Ibn Abi Shayba also reports from Umm Al-Hasan that she saw Umm Salama lead the women. And she would stand with them in their rank.

³ Al-Majmu' li al-Nawawwi: 4/173.

As for the other three schools, their position in general⁶ was that it is permitted for women to lead other *women* in Salat.

As for the cause of this disagreement, we can reasonably say that it is the direct result of the different views of the Sahaba, in so much as that 3 of the Imams adopted the views of Umm Salama and ‘Aisha who were both wives of the Prophet ﷺ while Imam Malik and those who held the same view accepted the report of ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib .

If we were Hanafis, it would be easy to resolve this matter by just having everyone follow the particular Companion’s opinion we deem most worthy of following.

If one is a Maliki, it would similarly seem easy to resolve by just ascertaining that there was a consensus found among the scholars of Medinah during Malik’s time that went contrary to these hadiths supported by the majority.

But if a Muslim is one who champions the hadith of the Prophet and doesn’t place anything over it – as is the view of Shafi’i and Ahmad, the solution would seem easy to resolve by simply relying on the most authentic report found that demonstrates what the Prophet’s sunnah was in this regard, since it is possible that some Sahaba heard what others may have not.

So after searching, we find that the strongest report found that goes back to the Prophet is the following:

Abu Dawud reports that Umm Waraqa said, “I said: “O Messenger of Allah! Permit for me to participate in the raid with you. I’ll nurse your sick. Perhaps Allah will grant me martyrdom.” He said: “Remain in your house. For verily Allah ﷻ will grant you martyrdom.” And she asked his permission to take a *muadhhdhin* in her home. And he allowed her.”

In another version Abu Dawud reports: “The Messenger of Allah ﷺ used to visit her in her house. And he assigned to her a *muadhhdhin* who would make the summons to prayer (adhan) for her. And he ordered her to lead the inhabitants of her home.”

⁴ Imam Sahnun reported it in Al-Mudawwana Al-Kubra from Ibn Wahb from Ibn Abi Dhi’b from a client of Banu Hashim from ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib that he said: “The women is not to lead.” [Al-Mudawwana: 1/85]

⁵ Al-Majmu’ li Al-Nawawwi: 4/173.

⁶ Abu Hanifa’s view was that it was permitted but with dislike [Al-Majmu’: 4/173].

The hadith was reported by Baihaqi, Daraqutni, and Hakim. And Hakim said, “Muslim advanced Al-Walid ibn Jami’ (one of the narrators) as being authoritative.⁷ But this is a hadith with a single chain of narration (sunnah ghariba). I don’t know of any hadith with a connected chain to the Prophet (musnad) in this chapter other than this one.” And Imam Dhahabi concurred with his findings⁸.

Al-Mundhiri said, “Al-Walid ibn Jami’ is the subject of dispute (fihi maqal). And Muslim has reported through him.” Ibn Al-Qattan said, “Al-Walid’s state isn’t known.”⁹ Ibn Hibban mentioned him in (his book) Al-Thiqat (Trustworthy Narrators).¹⁰ And Ibn Hajar said, “In its chain is ‘Abdur-Rahman ibn Khallad (a second questionable narrator). And his status is unknown (fihi jahala).”

If this is true in that this report has two suspect narrators, Al-Walid ibn Jami’ and ‘Abdur-Rahman ibn Khallad, then this hadith can’t really have much if any authority.

And if it had not been for its weakness, it could be used by those who argue for the right of women leading men in prayer to support their argument even though the indications in the hadith are very subtle. That is, the fact that it states that the Prophet assigned a *muadhdhin* for her and then ordered her to lead those in her house in prayer, gives the impression that she led at least *one* man in prayer who was likely a bondsman or unmarried relative of hers, since she would only be allowed to keep the company of a bondsman or a male relative, and men are usually those who make the call to prayer.

⁷ Just because Imam Muslim relates a hadith on the authority of a suspect narrator doesn’t automatically make that narrator’s reports acceptable in other places, because Imam Muslim merely relates a report from such a narrator when there are other versions of the same report that strengthen it.

⁸ Imam Hakim Al-Nisapuri has a book he wrote entitled ‘Al-Mustadrak’, which contains a number of hadiths that fulfill the conditions of the Sahih of Imams Bukhari and Muslim that neither of them reported in their two books. But after the scholars had a close look at Al-Mustadrak they found that many of the claims made by Imam Hakim weren’t true. For that reason, his claims of the hadiths reported in that book are usually not accepted unless Imam Dhahabi concurs with his findings.

⁹ To be unknown (majhul) is of two kinds according to the scholars of hadith. 1) To be an unknown person altogether (majhul al-‘ayn), and 2) to be of unknown status (majhul al-hal) such that a person may be known but his character and memory will be unknown. Refer to the books related to the science of hadith like Suyuti’s Tadrīb Al-Rawī Sharh Taqrīb Al-Nawawī.

¹⁰ Simply to be mentioned in a book dedicated to trustworthy narrators doesn’t render a narrator to be trustworthy, because many times the author will mention a kind of narrator whose mention wasn’t the original intent of the work. Add to that, a hadith isn’t authenticated just because its narrators are trustworthy.

One could just as well assume that the *muadhhdhin* appointed by Allah's Messenger while presuming the hadith is authentic – was another *woman*, and that Umm Waraqa led a group of women in prayer as the other authentic reports make clear.¹¹

But all of this is overshadowed by the weakness of the hadith. So it falls as a basis for argument.

Another important point is that Imam Abu Ja'far Ibn Jarir Al-Tabari (died 310 AH) held the view that a woman could lead Salat in spite of it being a view never accepted by the Ummah, and it has never been witnessed in all of Islamic history.¹²

Imam Al-Tabari was an absolute mujtahid and is known as the Imam of the Exegetes (Mufassirin). But his school didn't thrive and it didn't last as the 4 surviving schools did. So his view is extremely ancient and contradicts what the Ummah later unanimously agreed upon in that a woman cannot lead a man in prayer.

Add to that, it would be difficult to know what exactly Imam Al-Tabari based his *ijtihad* on today, since his school hasn't been preserved with an unbroken chain as the 4 schools have. So are we to accept his opinion just because it was an opinion without proper scrutiny and research?

Furthermore, what lends to the understanding that a woman's proper place is not leading a man in prayer are the following:

- If it was permissible, it would have been reported from the Salaf.
- Since the Sunnah for women in prayer is for them to be behind the men, it is known from that that it is not permitted for them to be in front of them. For Abdullah bin Mas'ud said: "Put them back to where Allah put them back." Al-San'ani and Tabarani reported it. It is also mentioned in Majma' Al-Zawa'id. And for that reason, some of them allowed them to lead other women, since they are all to align straight in one row.

¹¹ One might respond that the word used in the hadith was *muadhhdhin* – for the male – not '*muadhhdhinah*' – for the female. So it is clear that it was a male. If someone says this, we can respond by saying two things: 1) Sometimes the male is used and the female is intended as in most of the verses of the Qur'an and the hadiths, for example, the hadith that states, "None of you will believe until he loves for his brother what he loves for his self." Are we to assume this hadith doesn't apply to women? 2) is that even if we accept that the *muadhhdhin* was male, the hadith is still not clear in that he participated in the prayer, since it is possible that all he did was call the adhan and then leave the room or the house.

¹² Bidaya al-Mujtahid: 1/206. Abu Thaur also held this view.

- The Prophet also said, “The best ranks of the men are those at the front. And the worst of them are those at the back. And the best ranks of the women are those at the back. And the worst of them are those at the front.”

And if the Messenger – had intended any other arrangement for women in Salat, then we would have found him at least on one occasion allow the women to pray directly behind him or for a woman to lead the men in Salat.

So we are to understand that this is from the divinely inspired direction of the Creator. And to contravene it would be to question His wisdom. And to question His wisdom, would be to follow in the footsteps on Satan. And to follow in the footsteps of Satan, one is surely to be damned as he is.

So it becomes clear that such people who insist on the permissibility of a woman leading men in prayer have nothing firm to rely on in their position other than the following of their fancies and what their lusts dictate to them.

The Issue of Apostasy

The next important question would be, are such people Muslims who contravene the consensus of the Ummah, which upholds that a woman leading men in prayer is prohibited?

The short answer is, no! But that ‘no’ is a ‘no’ that doesn’t remove the danger from being damned by the Almighty One.

In other words, the decisive consensus for Sunnis cannot be violated. Were one to contravene that consensus, he/she would be considered an apostate from Islam.

But this consensus is one that occurred after a well-known disagreement due to the view of Al-Tabari and Abu Thawr. And scholars have differed about whether or not contravening this kind of consensus is enough to expel a person beyond the pale of Islam.¹³

One can also reply that the Shiites do not consider consensus to have the same authority that Sunnis do. And they do not accept it.

But we can reply that in spite of that Shiites do not allow for women to lead men in prayer. So even though they may not consider it to be a valid source of law, their practice shows that they share with Sunnis in their

¹³ Refer to Tuhfat Al-Murid Sharh Jawharat Al-Tawhid of Baijuri.

traditional belief that a woman may not lead the Jumu'a prayer or any other prayer for that matter unless it be a woman leading other women in a prayer that is not Jumu'a.

So even if Shiites don't accept scholarly consensus as a valid source of law, they do accept that Allah says in the Qur'an,

“Whoever splits from the Messenger after guidance has become clear to him, and then follows other than the way of the believers, We will turn him to what he has turned, and enter him into Hell. And how evil a destination!”

[4:115]

And it is the way of the believers that from the time of the Prophet until now that no woman has ever been reported leading the Jumu'a Prayer, Eid Prayer, or any other prayer when those being led were a mix of men and women.

In the end, I seriously doubt that many people will be in attendance at this event, at least not many *real* men or women.

We know that the enemies of Islam have many tactics they use in trying to get a misdirected and emotional response out of the Muslims. And perhaps they do that in order to produce a situation where they can justify taking action against those they label as extremists, radicals, terrorists, and fundamentalists.

I think that if people want to make up their own religion, let them do as they like. We just ask them to give us a little respect and not call it Islam, and don't call themselves Muslims. That's all.

Was Salam

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