

أَقِيمُوا الصُّفُوفَ وَخَازُوا بَيْنَ الْمَنَاقِبِ وَسُدُّوا الْخَلَلَ

“Straighten the rows, stand shoulder  
to shoulder and leave no gaps”

*The Etiquette of*  
CONGREGATIONAL  
PRAYER

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Died 1421 AH – 2001 CE  
May the abundant mercy of Allāh be upon him

*The Etiquette of*  
**CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER**

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## Guarding and Preserving the Prayers

All praise is due to Allāh ﷻ who has prescribed His servants with the obligations so that they may receive an abundance of reward. He encourages them with acting upon these obligations and exhorts them as a mercy upon them and as a reminder to the people of understanding and intelligence. He warns His servants from wasting their deeds and neglecting them so they may be deterred from that fearing His punishment. And we bear witness that none has the right to be worshipped except Allāh ﷻ alone, He has no partners, the Possessor of Majesty, Honour, the Gracious and Beneficent. And we bear witness that Muhammad ﷺ is His servant and Messenger, the leader of mankind, the illuminator of darkness, may the salutations of Allāh and an abundance of peace be upon him, his family, his Companions and those who follow them precisely.

O Muslims, fear Allāh ﷻ and praise Him due to what He has blessed you with of the mandatory daily prayers that are the pillar of your Religion. Indeed Allāh obligated the daily prayers upon you, and made them easy, and made their number small yet magnified their reward. So they are five in number in a day, yet they are worth fifty times that on the scales of good deeds.<sup>1</sup> So

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<sup>1</sup> Abu Dharr ؓ narrated regarding the Night Journey and Ascension through the Heavens that Allāh's Messenger ﷺ said:

“So I returned to Allāh ﷻ and He said, ‘These are the five daily prayers and they are equal in reward to fifty, and My word does not change.’ Then Jibrīl took

maintain and guard your daily prayers, and especially the middle prayer<sup>2</sup> and stand before Allāh in obedience. Guard your prayers strictly by perfecting the conditions, the pillars and obligations, for indeed the prayer is the last thing to be lost from the Religion<sup>3</sup> and

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me till we reached the *Sidratul-Muntaha* (Lote Tree of the utmost boundary) which was shrouded in colours indescribable. Then I was admitted into Paradise where I found small walls made of pearls and its soil was of musk.”

Reported by al-Bukhārī, *Kitābus-Salāt*, no. 349.

<sup>2</sup> Referring here to the statement of Allāh ﷻ:

﴿حَفِظُوا عَلَى الصَّلَوَاتِ وَالصَّلَاةِ الْوُسْطَىٰ وَقُومُوا لِلَّهِ

قَانِتِينَ﴾

“Guard strictly the daily prayers and especially the middle prayer, and stand before Allāh with obedience.”

[Sūratul-Baqarah 2:238]

The middle prayer referred to here is the ‘*Asr*’ prayer. The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ stated:

“Whoever misses the ‘*Asr*’ prayer, then it is as if he has lost his family and property.”

Reported by al-Bukhārī, no. 543. He ﷺ also said:

“Whoever offers the two cool prayers (i.e. ‘*Asr*’ and *Fajr*) will enter Paradise.”

Reported by al-Bukhārī, no. 574.

<sup>3</sup> Abu Umāmah رضى الله عنه narrated that Allāh’s Messenger ﷺ said:

لتنقض عرى الإسلام عروة عروة فكلما انتقضت عروة تشبث

الناس بالتي تليها فأولهن نقضا الحكم و آخرهن الصلاة

“The handholds of Islām will be annulled one by one, and every time a handhold is annulled the people will hold fast to the one that follows it. The first of them

the first affair to be accounted for on the Day of Resurrection<sup>4</sup>. So if you have guarded and preserved your prayer, you will be successful. And if you neglected and wasted your daily prayers, then in the others deeds, there will be even more loss. The prayer is the illumination of the heart, illumination of the face, illumination in the grave and illumination on the Day of Resurrection. The prayer is like a river in front of the

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to be annulled is the rule (*al-hukm*), and the last of them is the prayer (*as-salāt*).”

Reported by Ahmad in his Musnad, Ibn Hibbān and al-Hākim. Sahīh al-Jāmi‘ as-Saghīr, no. 5057, of Shaykh al-Albānī who declared it *sahīh*.

<sup>4</sup> Abu Hurairah رضي الله عنه narrated that the Messenger ﷺ stated:

إِنَّ أَوَّلَ مَا يُحَاسَبُ بِهِ الْعَبْدُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ مِنْ عَمَلِهِ صَلَاتُهُ فَإِنْ صَلَحَتْ فَقَدْ أَفْلَحَ وَأَنْجَحَ وَإِنْ فَسَدَتْ فَقَدْ خَابَ وَخَسِرَ. فَإِنْ انْتَقَصَ مِنْ فَرِيضَتِهِ شَيْءٌ قَالَ الرَّبُّ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ انْظُرُوا هَلْ لِعَبْدِي مِنْ تَطَوُّعٍ فَيُكَمَّلَ بِهَا مَا انْتَقَصَ مِنَ الْفَرِيضَةِ ثُمَّ يَكُونُ سَائِرَ عَمَلِهِ عَلَى ذَلِكَ

“The first affair from his actions for which the servant will be brought to account on the Day of Resurrection will be his prayer (*salāt*). If it was sound, then he will verily succeed and prosper, and if they were corrupted, he will be a loser and be doomed. If anything is lacking from his obligatory prayers, the Lord will say, ‘Look and see whether my servant has any voluntary prayers, and use that to make up what is deficient from his obligatory prayer.’ Then all of his deeds will be reviewed in like manner.”

Reported by at-Tirmidhī, an-Nasāī, Ibn Mājah, and al-Albānī graded it as *sahīh* in Sahīh al-Jāmi‘ as-Saghīr wa Ziyādah, no. 2020.

doors of your homes wherein one bathes five times a day not leaving any filth, likewise is the case with the five daily prayers. By way of them Allāh wipes away the sins.<sup>5</sup> The five daily prayers, a Friday prayer to the next Friday prayer, a Ramadān to the next Ramadān are all an expiation of whatever sins take place between them, so long as the major sins are abandoned.<sup>6</sup>

The prayer prevents the one who performs it from lewdness and fornication. It is a source of aid during times of hardship and disaster. Allāh ﷻ stated:

﴿وَأَسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ﴾

“And seek help through patience and prayer.”

[Al-Baqarah: 45]

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<sup>5</sup> Narrated Abu Hurairah ﷺ that Allāh’s Messenger ﷺ said:

“If there was a river at the door of any of you and he took a bath in it five times a day would you notice any dirt on him?” They said: “Not a trace of dirt would be left.” The Prophet ﷺ added: “That is the example of the five daily prayers with which Allāh wipes out the evil deeds.”

Reported by al-Bukhārī, no.528.

<sup>6</sup> Abu Hurairah ﷺ narrated that Allāh’s Messenger ﷺ said:

الصَّلَاةُ الْخَمْسُ وَالْجُمُعَةُ إِلَى الْجُمُعَةِ وَرَمَضَانُ إِلَى رَمَضَانَ  
مُكْفِرَاتٌ مَا بَيْنَهُنَّ إِذَا اجْتَنَبَ الْكَبَائِرَ

“The five daily prayers, the Jumu’ah to the next Jumu’ah and a Ramadān till the next Ramadān are expiation for whatever is committed between them so long as one keeps clear of the major sins.”

Reported by Muslim, nos. 233,344.

When an affair troubled the Prophet ﷺ he would seek protection by praying.<sup>7</sup> The prayer is the comfort of the heart and the coolness of the eyes<sup>8</sup> because it is a connection between the servant and his Lord ﷻ. When the servant enters into the prayer, then he stands before his Lord directing his speech towards Him, exalting Him with praise, and mentioning His Greatness and Magnificence. He glorifies and praises his Lord with speech and actions of the prayer. He asks Allāh ﷻ for the best of this world and the Hereafter. The closest a servant can be to his Lord is when he is in prostration.

So guard and preserve this mighty act of worship which is the support of the Religion and the coolness of the eyes of the leader of all the Messengers ﷺ. Fulfill it with tranquility, serenity and complete submissiveness, for there is no prayer for the one who is not tranquil and at ease in the prayer. How can it befit a believer that he

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<sup>7</sup> Hudhaifah bin Yamān ؓ narrated:

إِذَا حَزَنَهُ أَمْرٌ صَلَّى

“Whenever something serious troubled the Prophet ﷺ, he would pray.”

Reported by Abu Dawūd, no. 1319, and al-Albānī graded it as *hasan*.

<sup>8</sup> Meaning: the comfort of the soul and its contentment. Anas bin Mālik ؓ narrated that Allāh’s Messenger ﷺ said:

حُبَّتْ إِلَيَّ النِّسَاءُ وَالطِّيبُ وَجُعِلَتْ قُرَّةُ عَيْنِي فِي الصَّلَاةِ

“Women and perfume have been made dear to me, and the coolness of my eyes is in the prayer”

Reported by an-Nasāī, Kitāb Ishratin-Nisā, no. 3940, and al-Albānī graded it as *sahīh*.



pecks the ground like the pecking of a crow whilst he knows that he is standing before his Lord? How can it befit a believer that he pecks the ground in his prayer whilst he knows that he will not be rewarded for it? He has not discharged his obligation with this kind of prayer. This type of prayer is the same as if he had not prayed at all.

And guard your prayers by praying them in the Mosques, for the prayer in the Mosque is twenty seven times more excellent than prayer by oneself<sup>9</sup>; and the greater the congregation, the more beloved it is to Allāh ﷻ and the more steps a person takes walking to the Mosque the greater the reward. Indeed the one who performs ablution (*wudū*) and perfects his ablution in his home, then he leaves out to go to the mosque, wishing for nothing other than the prayer, then he does not place a step, except that with every step Allāh raises him in rank and wipes away a sin.

Ibn Mas‘ūd ﷺ stated:

**“Whoever would like to meet Allāh ﷻ tomorrow as a Muslim, then let him preserve these prayers wherein he is called to them, for indeed Allāh ﷻ**

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<sup>9</sup> Abdullāh bin ‘Umar ﷺ narrated that Allāh’s Messenger ﷺ said:

صَلَاةُ الْجَمَاعَةِ تَفْضُلُ صَلَاةَ الْفَدْيِ بِسَبْعٍ وَعِشْرِينَ دَرَجَةً

“The congregational prayer is twenty-seven times more virtuous than the prayer of a person praying alone.”

Reported by al-Bukhārī, no. 645.

legislated for your Prophet ﷺ the *Sunan* of guidance, and they are from the *Sunan* of guidance. And if you pray in your houses just as this opposer prays in his house, then you have abandoned the *Sunnah* of your Prophet ﷺ. And if you abandon the *Sunnah* of your Prophet then surely you have gone astray. There is not a man who purifies himself and does so well and then heads off to a Mosque from these Mosques except that Allāh writes for him with every step a reward, and raises him in rank thereby, and wipes away a sin thereby. I remember when no one would stay away except for a hypocrite whose hypocrisy was known - and (even a sick) man would come staggering between two others in order to stand in the row.”<sup>10</sup>

I seek refuge with Allāh from the accursed Shaytān, Allāh ﷻ stated:

﴿ قَدْ أَفْلَحَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿١﴾ الَّذِينَ هُمْ فِي صَلَاتِهِمْ خَاشِعُونَ ﴿٢﴾ ﴾

“Successful indeed are the believers. Those who offer their prayers (*salāt*) with all solemnity and full submissiveness.”

[Al-Mu’minūn 23:1-2]

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<sup>10</sup> Reported by Muslim, ‘Book of Mosques and Places of Prayer’, no. 654.

## The Responsibility of the Imām and those who Pray Behind him

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O people, have *taqwa* and fear Allāh, the Most High, and know the limits of that which Allāh revealed upon His Messenger ﷺ so that you may worship your Lord upon sure-sighted knowledge and evidences, for indeed those who have knowledge are not like those who do not have knowledge<sup>11</sup>. The one who worships Allāh ﷻ and he knows how to worship Him, and he worships Him in accordance to the *Sharī'ah* of Allāh, the Most High, and in accordance to the *Sunnah* of His Messenger ﷺ is not the same as the one who worships Allāh ﷻ whilst he is ignorant of what he is doing.

So when will you learn the limits of that which Allāh ﷻ revealed? So fear Allāh ﷻ with respect to holding fast to what you are able to do. So act in accordance to what you know, and obey Allāh and the Messenger ﷺ so that you may be shown mercy, do not fear the blame of the blamers in that regard, nor the criticism of the

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<sup>11</sup> Allāh, the Most High, has stated:

﴿ قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُونَ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ إِنَّمَا يَتَذَكَّرُ أُولَٰئِكَ  
الْأَلْبَابِ ﴾

“Say: ‘Are those who know equal to those who know not?’ It is only men of understanding who will take heed.”

[Az-Zumar 39:9]

criticisers – Do you fear them? Rather Allāh has more right that you fear Him, if you are truly believers!

O people! Indeed from the prescribed limits which Allāh has revealed upon His Messenger ﷺ are the prescribed limits of the prayer in congregation, wherein He has prescribed limits for the Imām and for the one praying behind him, limits that He has not prescribed to the one praying alone. And for each of them there is a responsibility that is specific for him.

So from the responsibilities of the Imām is that he is ardent upon perfecting the prayer so that it resembles the prayer of the Prophet ﷺ amongst his Companions,<sup>12</sup> for that was the most complete prayer and yet the briefest as stated by Anas bin Mālik ؓ:

مَا صَلَّيْتُ وَرَاءَ إِمَامٍ قَطُّ أَحَفَّ صَلَاةً وَلَا أَمَمٌ مِنَ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى  
اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ

**“I have never ever prayed behind an Imām who prayed a prayer briefer yet more complete than the Prophet ﷺ.”<sup>13</sup>**

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<sup>12</sup> And this is an obligation due to the saying of Allāh’s Messenger ﷺ:

**“Pray like you have seen me pray.”**

Reported by Bukhārī and Ahmad.

<sup>13</sup> Reported by Bukhārī, no. 780, and Muslim no. 469. In a narration of Muslim (no. 468), from ‘Uthmān bin Abil-Ās ath-Thaqafī ؓ who said that Allāh’s Messenger ﷺ said to him:

If the Imām was to pray on his own, then he has the choice between keeping it as brief as possible whilst fulfilling the obligations or fulfilling all of the affairs desired within it. However, if he leads the prayer in congregation then he no longer has a choice in the matter, rather he is obligated to take into consideration those behind him so that they are able to be as close as possible to perfection in their prayer because he is no longer now praying by himself so that he merely suffices himself – he is now praying for himself and for those behind him. So he must fear Allāh ﷻ and not forbid those who are behind him from obtaining perfection as near as is possible. And if he ascends to a degree that his prayer is like the prayer of the Prophet ﷺ, then that is the most perfect and best.

And also from the responsibilities of the Imām is that he is ardent upon establishing and straightening the rows

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أَمْ قَوْمَكَ فَمَنْ أُمَّ قَوْمًا فَلْيُخَفِّفْ فَإِنَّ فِيهِمُ الْكَبِيرَ وَإِنَّ فِيهِمُ الْمَرِيضَ  
وَإِنَّ فِيهِمُ الضَّعِيفَ وَإِنَّ فِيهِمُ ذَا الْحَاجَةِ وَإِذَا صَلَّى أَحَدُكُمْ وَحْدَهُ  
فَلْيُضِلَّ كَيْفَ شَاءَ

“Lead your people in prayer. Whoever leads people in prayer, let him make it brief, for among them are the elderly, among them are the sick, and among them are those who have urgent needs. And when one of you offers the prayer alone, let him pray however he wishes.”

in both his speech and action<sup>14</sup>. So if mere speech does not suffice, he then commands them with straightening the rows and lining them up. He asserts that upon them and warns them from opposing that; and he straightens them with his hand if they do not listen just as our Prophet ﷺ, our Imām and our example did. It is reported from Anas bin Mālik ؓ that the Prophet ﷺ said:

سَوُّوا صُفُوفَكُمْ فَإِنَّ تَسْوِيَةَ الصَّفِّ مِنْ تَمَامِ الصَّلَاةِ

“Straighten your rows as the straightening of the rows is essential for a perfect and correct prayer.”<sup>15</sup>

And in a wording of al-Bukhārī:

سَوُّوا صُفُوفَكُمْ فَإِنَّ تَسْوِيَةَ الصُّفُوفِ مِنْ إِقَامَةِ الصَّلَاةِ

“Straighten your rows, for indeed the straightening of the rows is from the perfection and establishment of the prayer.”

And in the wording of Abu Dawūd ؓ:

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<sup>14</sup> Additionally, the congregation should not stand for the prayer until they see the Imām, even if the *iqāmah* has been called. Abu Qatādah ؓ narrated that Allāh’s Messenger ﷺ said:

إِذَا أُقِيمَتِ الصَّلَاةُ فَلَا تَقُومُوا حَتَّى تَرَوْنِي

“If the *iqāmah* is called, then do not stand for prayer till you see me (in front of you).”

Reported by al-Bukhārī, no. 637.

<sup>15</sup> Reported by al-Bukhārī, no. 723; Muslim, no. 433, and the narrator is Anas bin Mālik ؓ.

رُصُّوا صُفُوفَكُمْ وَقَارِبُوا بَيْنَهَا وَحَاذُوا بِالْأَعْنَاقِ

“Line up your rows tightly and make your rows close, and make your necks straight in one line.”<sup>16</sup>

And there occurs in the *hadīth* of Ibn ‘Umar رضي الله عنهما that the Prophet ﷺ said:

أَقْبِمُوا الصُّفُوفَ وَحَاذُوا بَيْنَ الْمَتَاكِبِ وَسُدُّوا الْخَلَلَ وَلِينُوا بِأَيْدِي إِخْوَانِكُمْ وَلَا تَذَرُوا فُرُجَاتٍ لِلشَّيْطَانِ

“Straighten the rows, and stand shoulder to shoulder and leave no gaps<sup>17</sup>, and do not leave any gaps for the Shaitān.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Reported by Abu Dawūd from Anas bin Mālik, no. 667, declared *sahīh* by al-Albānī رحمته الله. The complete wording of the *hadīth* is:

رُصُّوا صُفُوفَكُمْ وَقَارِبُوا بَيْنَهَا وَحَاذُوا بِالْأَعْنَاقِ قَوْلَ الَّذِي نَفْسِي بِيَدِهِ إِنِّي لَأَرَى الشَّيْطَانَ يَدْخُلُ مِنْ خَلَلِ الصَّفِّ كَأَنَّهَا الْحَدْفُ

“Line up your rows tightly, and be close together, and make your necks straight (in one line). I swear by Him in whose Hands is my soul, I see the Shaitān enter between the gaps in the rows as if he is a small black goat.”

<sup>17</sup> Nu‘mān bin Bashīr said:

فَرَأَيْتُ الرَّجُلَ يَلْزُقُ مَنكِبَهُ بِمَنكِبِ صَاحِبِهِ وَرُكْبَتَهُ بِرُكْبَةِ صَاحِبِهِ وَكَعْبَهُ بِكَعْبِهِ

“So I saw a person attach his shoulder to the shoulder of his companion, and his knee with his companion’s knee, and his ankle with his companion’s ankle.”

Meaning the space between the legs of one worshipper and the next for the Shaitān enters into the gaps between the people. And then he ﷺ said:

وَمَنْ وَصَلَ صَفًّا وَصَلَهُ اللَّهُ وَمَنْ قَطَعَ صَفًّا قَطَعَهُ اللَّهُ

“Whoever connects a row, Allāh will connect him (with His Mercy) and whoever severs a row, then Allāh will sever him (from His Mercy).”

There occurs in the two *Sahīhs* from Anas bin Mālik رضي الله عنه:

أَقِيمَتْ الصَّلَاةُ فَأَقْبَلَ عَلَيْنَا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ بِوَجْهِهِ  
فَقَالَ أَقْبُوا صُفُوفَكُمْ وَتَرَاصُّوا فَإِنِّي أَرَأَى مِنْ وَرَاءِ ظَهْرِي

The *Iqāmah* was called and Allāh’s Messenger faced us and said: “Establish the rows and line up straight.”<sup>19</sup>

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Reported by Abu Dawūd, under the chapter of ‘Straightening the Rows’, no. 622. Al-Albānī graded this *hadīth* as *sahīh*. Anas bin Mālik رضي الله عنه said:

وَكَانَ أَحَدُنَا يُلْزِقُ مَنْكِبَهُ بِمَنْكِبِ صَاحِبِهِ وَقَدَمَهُ بِقَدَمِهِ

“Everyone of us used to put his shoulder with the shoulder of his companion and his foot with the foot of his companion.”

Reported by al-Bukhārī, no. 725.

<sup>18</sup> Reported by Ahmad, 2/98; Abu Dawūd, no. 666; an-Nasā’ī, 2/93. Abu Dawūd رضي الله عنه added: And the meaning of, “Be gentle with the hands of your brothers” is that if a man comes to the row and seeks to enter it, then it is compulsory upon each person to ease his shoulders so that he may enter the row.

<sup>19</sup> Reported by al-Bukhārī, no. 718; Muslim, no. 434.



An-Nu'mān bin Bashīr رضي الله عنه said:

كَانَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يُسَوِّي صُفُوفَنَا حَتَّى كَأَنَّمَا يُسَوِّي بِهَا الْقِدَاحَ حَتَّى رَأَى أَنَا قَدْ عَقَلْنَا عَنْهُ ثُمَّ خَرَجَ يَوْمًا فَقَامَ حَتَّى كَادَ يَكْبُرُ فَرَأَى رَجُلًا بَادِيًا صَدْرُهُ مِنَ الصَّفِّ فَقَالَ عِبَادَ اللَّهِ لِنُسُوِّنَ صُفُوفَكُمْ أَوْ لِيَخَالِقَنَّ اللَّهُ بَيْنَ وُجُوهِكُمْ

“Allāh’s Messenger ﷺ used to straighten our rows as if he was straightening an arrow, until he saw that we had learned it. Then he came out one day and was about to say the *tabkīr* when he noticed a man whose chest was sticking out from the row. So he said: ‘O servants of Allāh! You will indeed straighten your rows or Allāh will cause separation between your faces.’”<sup>20</sup>

Meaning he will divide your hearts as occurs in the narration of Abu Dawūd. This is a severe threat upon the ones who do not straighten their rows, that Allāh ﷻ will divide their hearts, so there will be differing in their viewpoints, and loss in their peace and harmony due to this differing in their rows.

And there is a narration on the authority of al-Barā bin ‘Āzib رضي الله عنه, who said:

كَانَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يَتَخَلَّلُ الصَّفِّ مِنْ نَاحِيَةٍ إِلَى نَاحِيَةٍ يَمْسُحُ صُدُورَنَا وَمَنَاقِبَنَا وَيَقُولُ لَا تَخْتَلِفُوا فَتَخْتَلِفَ قُلُوبِكُمْ

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<sup>20</sup> Reported by al-Bukhārī, no. 717; Muslim, no. 436.

Nu'mān bin Bashīr said:

كَانَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يُسَوِّي صُفُوفَنَا إِذَا قُمْنَا  
لِلصَّلَاةِ فَإِذَا اسْتَوَيْنَا كَبَّرَ

“The Messenger of Allāh would straighten our rows when we stood up to pray. Once we had straightened them, he would pronounce the *takbīr*.”<sup>21</sup>

So look at his saying, “Once we had straightened them, he would pronounce the *takbīr*.” This is a conditional sentence; there is found in it clearly that he would not pronounce the *takbīr* for the prayer until the rows were straight. And this reached the Rightly Guided Caliphs, and the Imāms who followed the way of the Messenger ﷺ. There occurs in the Muwatta of Imām Mālik from the Leader of the Believers, ‘Umar bin al-Khattāb that he used to command that the rows be straight, and when they informed him that they were straight, he would pronounce the *takbīr* (to begin the *salāt*).<sup>22</sup> And he used to appoint men to straighten the rows. Mālik bin Abī ‘Āmir stated:

“I was with ‘Uthmān bin ‘Affān and the *iqāmah* was called for the prayer, and I was talking to him for a need, until some men came and he had appointed them to straighten the rows. So they informed him that the rows were indeed

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<sup>21</sup> Reported by Abu Dawūd, no. 665. Al-Albānī graded it as *sahīh*.

<sup>22</sup> Al-Muwatta, 1/156, no. 382.

straight, so he said to me, “Line up in the row.”  
Then he made the *takbīr* to begin the prayer.”<sup>23</sup>

So this is the action of the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ, and his Rightly Guided Successors, that they would not make the *takbīr* to begin the prayer until the rows were straight. Do we not have for us what is worthy in them? That we have in them an example to follow, that we wait and we do not pronounce the *takbīr* for prayer until we see that the rows are straightened in the required manner? And that we do not fear the blame of the blamers in this affair or the annoyance of those who get annoyed!

Unfortunately, there are many Imāms, may Allāh grant us and them understanding, who do not give this affair due attention. And the most that one of them will do is to say, out of habit, the words: “*Istawwoo wa’tadiloo*” – i.e. be straight and steady. And he does not realise in himself the intent of that, and he does not care about those behind him with regard to that. And they do not carry out what has been said to them. You will find that he says these words yet they remain upon bent and crooked rows, and distant from each other.

And if the Imām was to realise the true intent of what is required, and was to look at the rows with his eyes, and then wait until he sees that they have straightened the rows, with a perfect straightening, after that he makes

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<sup>23</sup> Al-Muwatta, 1/157, no. 383.

the *tabkīr* to begin the prayer, then he has freed himself from blame and has fulfilled his responsibility.

So these are some of the responsibilities that have been placed upon the Imām.

As for the *ma'mūm* (the follower), then when he is praying on his own, he is free to pray as he wishes, either shortening it to the point that he fulfils only the obligations in his prayer, or he lengthens it - even though it is more virtuous for him to take into consideration the *Sunnah* (and follow that). However if he is praying with the Imām, then his prayer is connected to the prayer of the Imām. So in that case, it is not allowed for him to precede the Imām in making *tabkīr* or in standing before him, or sitting or bowing or prostrating<sup>24</sup>. He should also not be in-step with the Imām, mirroring his actions, rather he should follow after him, and not lag behind him (excessively). The Prophet ﷺ stated:

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<sup>24</sup> Imām al-Bukhārī رحمه الله stated:

**Chapter: When do those who are behind the Imām prostrate (make *sajdah*)? Anas رضي الله عنه said: "When the Imām has prostrated, then prostrate." Al-Barā' رضي الله عنه stated: "When Allāh's Messenger ﷺ said, '*sami'Allāhu liman hamidah*', none of us would bend his back (to prostrate) until the Prophet ﷺ was in prostration (*sajdah*), then we would make prostration after him."**

*Hadīth* no. 690.

أَمَا يَخْشَى الَّذِي يَرْفَعُ رَأْسَهُ قَبْلَ الْإِمَامِ أَنْ يُحَوِّلَ اللَّهُ رَأْسَهُ رَأْسَ  
جَمَارٍ أَوْ يُجْعَلَ اللَّهُ صُورَتَهُ صُورَةَ جَمَارٍ ؟

“Isn’t he who raises his head before the Imām afraid that Allāh may transform his head into that of a donkey?! Or his [facial] image into that of a donkey?!”<sup>25</sup>

He ﷺ also said:

إِنَّمَا جُعِلَ الْإِمَامُ لِيُؤْتَمَّ بِهِ فَإِذَا كَبَّرَ فَكَبِّرُوا وَإِذَا رَكَعَ فَارْكَعُوا وَإِذَا رَفَعَ  
فَارْفَعُوا وَإِذَا قَالَ سَمِعَ اللَّهُ لِمَنْ حَمِدَهُ فَقُولُوا رَبَّنَا وَلَكَ الْحَمْدُ وَإِذَا  
سَجَدَ فَاسْجُدُوا وَإِذَا صَلَّى قَاعِدًا فَصَلُّوا قُعُودًا أَجْمَعُونَ

“The Imām is appointed to be followed, so if he makes *takbīr*, then make *takbīr*; if he enters into *rukūʿ*, then enter into *rukūʿ*; when he rises from that, then rise; when he says: *samiʿ Allāhu liman hamida*, then say: *Rabbanā walakal-hamd*. If he prays sitting, then all of you pray seated.”<sup>26</sup>

And from the responsibilities of the follower is that he maintains and preserves the straightness of the rows and that he is aware of the punishment for the one who does not straighten them. He must keep them close and tight, and fill the gaps, connect the rows by completing the foremost rows first and so on. One must be aware of the punishment of severing or leaving gaps in the rows. Allāh’s Messenger stated:

<sup>25</sup> Reported by al-Bukhārī, no. 691; Muslim, no. 427. The *hadīth* was narrated by Abu Hurairah ﷺ.

<sup>26</sup> Reported by Ahmad, 2/314; Al-Bukhārī, no. 722; Muslim, no. 414. The *hadīth* was narrated by Abu Hurairah ﷺ.

وَمَنْ قَطَعَ صَفًّا قَطَعَهُ اللَّهُ

“Whoever severs the row, Allāh will sever Him (from His Mercy).”<sup>27</sup>

And in the two *Sahīhs*, from Abu Hurairah رضي الله عنه, that the Prophet ﷺ:

لَوْ يَعْلَمُ النَّاسُ مَا فِي التِّدَاءِ وَالصَّفِّ الْأَوَّلِ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَجِدُوا إِلَّا أَنْ  
يَسْتَهْمُوا عَلَيْهِ لَأَسْتَهْمُوا

“If the people knew the reward for the *adhān* (the call for prayer) and for standing in the front row and found no other way to get that except by drawing lots, verily they would draw lots.”<sup>28</sup>

And he ﷺ also said:

خَيْرُ صُفُوفِ الرِّجَالِ أَوْلَاهَا وَشَرُّهَا آخِرُهَا

“The best of rows for the men are the first rows, and the worst are the last ones.”

أَتِمُّوا الصَّفَّ الْمُبْتَدَأَ ثُمَّ الَّذِي يَلِيهِ فَمَا كَانَ مِنْ تَقْصِيرٍ فَلْيَكُنْ فِي  
الصَّفِّ الْمُؤَخَّرِ

“Complete the foremost row first, then that which follows it - and if there is any deficiency

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<sup>27</sup> Reported by Ahmad, 2/98; Abu Dawūd, no. 666; an-Nasā’ī, 2/93.

<sup>28</sup> Al-Bukhārī, no. 615, 761; Muslim, no. 437. The *hadīth* was narrated Abu Hurairah رضي الله عنه.

(in completing the row), then let it be in the last one.”<sup>29</sup>

On an occasion, he ﷺ saw some of his Companions ﷺ going towards the back of the Mosque, or in a wording: “He saw a group of people at the back of the Mosque.” So he ﷺ said to them:

تَقَدَّمُوا فَاتَّبِعُوا بِي وَلِيَأْتِمَّ بِكُمْ مَنْ بَعْدَكُمْ لَا يَزَالُ قَوْمٌ يَتَأَخَّرُونَ حَتَّى  
يُؤَخِّرَهُمُ اللَّهُ

“Come forward and follow me (in prayer), and let those who are behind you follow you, for people will keep moving to the back until Allāh puts them back.”<sup>30</sup>

So would you be pleased, O Muslim, for yourself to be in the worst of rows, those being the last rows whilst you are able to be in the foremost of them? Would you be pleased to expose yourself to punishment due to preferring the back rows over the front ones, so much so that Allāh ﷻ will put you at the back in all of the affairs of goodness?

Would you be pleased for yourself that you are not lined up in front of your Lord like the lining up of the Angels, close and straight, completing the foremost rows?

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<sup>29</sup> Reported by Ahmad, 3/333; Abu Dawūd, no 671; An-Nasā’ī, 2/293; Ibn Hibbān, no. 2173. The *hadīth* was narrated by Anas bin Mālik ﷺ.

<sup>30</sup> Reported by Muslim, no. 438. The *hadīth* was narrated by Abu Sa’īd al-Khudrī ﷺ.

There is no one from mankind who would be pleased with that for himself, except for the one who is pleased with his own loss.<sup>31</sup>

So proceed and come forward O Muslims to the rows and complete the first rows first, and be close within them and keep them straight, and be gentle with the arms of your brothers, (i.e. be easy-going and gentle) when they draw you to straighten the row or to close the gaps in it, so as to perfect your prayer. Act upon the command of your Prophet ﷺ and follow the path of your Righteous Predecessors (*as-Salaf as-Sālih*) ﷺ.

Whoever finds a row completed and he cannot find a space within it, then he prays behind the row and there is no harm in that. And whoever prays on his own behind the row whilst there is space for him to pray

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<sup>31</sup> Jābir bin Samurah رضى الله عنه narrated that Allāh's Messenger ﷺ said:

أَلَا تَتَّصِفُونَ كَمَا تَتَّصِفُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ جَلَّ وَعَزَّ فَلْنَا وَكَيْفَ  
تَتَّصِفُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ قَالَ يُتِمُّونَ الصُّفُوفَ الْمُقَدَّمَةَ وَيَتَرَاصُونَ  
فِي الصَّفِّ

“Do you not wish to line up just as the Angels line up in front of their Lord?” We asked: “How do the Angels line up in front of their Lord?” He said: “They complete the first rows, and they line up closely in the rows.”

Reported by Abu Dawūd, no. 661, and al-Albānī graded it *sahih*.



within it, then it is considered that there is no prayer for him.

If three people or more are together, then one stands ahead of them and leads them. And if they are in a restricted space, and due to that it is not possible for the Imām to stand in front of them, then they should pray in one row with the Imām in the middle of them, with some on his right and some on his left. And if only two are praying, and they intend to pray in congregation, then the Imām prays on the left of the one following him, and he is therefore on the right side of the Imām, both of them standing next to each other, straight and level without the Imām being in front of the one who is praying with him, not by a small amount and not by a large amount<sup>32</sup>.

So fear Allāh ﷻ, so that you may attain success. And Allāh, the Most High, stated:

﴿ وَأَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَالرَّسُولَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ ﴾  
وَسَارِعُوا إِلَى مَغْفِرَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَجَنَّةٍ عَرْضُهَا السَّمَاوَاتُ

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<sup>32</sup> Narrated Ibn Abbās رضي الله عنه who said:

“One night I prayed to the left of the Prophet in the *salāt* so he took me by my hand or by my shoulder till he made me stand on his right side, and he beckoned with his hand for me to go to his right side from behind him.”

Reported by al-Bukhārī, no. 728.

وَالْأَرْضُ أُعِدَّتْ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿١٣٢﴾ الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ فِي السَّرَّاءِ  
 وَالضَّرَّاءِ وَالْكَبِيرِ وَالضَّعِيفِ وَالْعَافِينَ عَنِ النَّاسِ وَاللَّهُ  
 يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿١٣٣﴾ وَالَّذِينَ إِذَا فَعَلُوا فَحِشَةً أَوْ ظَلَمُوا  
 أَنْفُسَهُمْ ذَكَرُوا اللَّهَ فَاسْتَغْفَرُوا لِذُنُوبِهِمْ وَمَنْ يَغْفِرِ اللَّهُ  
 إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَلَمْ يُصِرُّوا عَلَىٰ مَا فَعَلُوا وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٣٥﴾ أُولَٰئِكَ  
 جَزَاؤُهُمْ مَغْفِرَةٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ وَجَنَّاتٌ تَجْرِي مِن تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ  
 خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا وَنِعْمَ أَجْرُ الْعَامِلِينَ ﴿١٣٦﴾

“And obey Allāh and the Messenger that you may obtain mercy. And hasten to forgiveness from your Lord, and for Paradise as wide as the heavens and earth, prepared for the righteous - Those who spend in the cause of Allāh in prosperity and in adversity; those who repress anger and who pardon the people. Verily Allāh loves the doers of good. And those who, when they commit an immorality or wrong themselves by transgression, remember Allah and seek forgiveness for their sins - and who can forgive sins except Allāh? And who do not persist in what they have done while they know. For these, their reward is forgiveness from their Lord and gardens beneath which rivers flow (in Paradise), wherein they will abide eternally. How excellent is the reward of the doers of good.”

[Āl-‘Imrān 3:132-136]

May Allāh bless me and yourselves with understanding and action upon the Noble Qurān; May He benefit me and yourselves with its verses and wise remembrances. I seek the forgiveness of Allāh for myself and yourselves, and for the Muslims as a whole from every sin, so you too seek His forgiveness, for indeed he is Oft-Forgiving, and the Bestower of Mercy.