

The Issue of joining the feet with the feet of the next person in the congregational prayer.

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The straightening of the rows in the congregational Salaah holds great importance and significance in the Shariah. As a result, the Ahaadeeth have interpreted this practice as being the perfection and completion of Salaah

The correct Sunnah method of arranging and straightening the rows is that the people intending to perform the Salaah stand beside one another without leaving a gap in between. Also, no person should stand ahead or behind the row but in a straight line.

The clear majority of the Islamic scholars have adopted this meaning in the issue of straightening the rows.

Contrary to this certain people consider the joining of the feet with the feet of the next person in Salaah to be the Sunnah method. They tend to practice this to a high degree, and they exaggerate in carrying this out. In addition to this they criticise those people who practice in contrast to them and accuse them of acting contrary to the Sunnah. Therefore, it seemed appropriate to explain and clarify the reality of this issue.

Hence, I begin by seeking the assistance of Allah the Almighty who is fully aware of the truth and unto him is our return.

Many narrations have been reported from the Prophet in regards to this issue, but the joining of the feet with the feet of the next person is not established from him, neither verbally or through practice. Similarly, the four rightly guided khulafa would pay great importance in arranging and straightening the rows, but even from them this practice is not established, neither verbally or through practice.

Hence it is recorded in Saheeh Muslim,

'Numaan bin Basheer relates," The Prophet would straighten our rows as though he was straightening arrows. (The Arabs used to make a great effort in straightening their arrows, which were used in battles and for hunting purposes. For this reason, the expression "as though he was straightening arrows" is employed in exaggerating and emphasising the straightness and evenness of any particular thing.) The Prophet maintained this practice until he assumed that we had fully understood his intention.

Thereafter, one day the Prophet emerged and stood in position to lead the prayer, as he was about to say the takbeer his gaze fell on a man whose chest was bulging out from the rows. Upon seeing this the Prophet remarked, "O! Servants of Allah, You must straighten your rows or Allah will create dissension amongst you." (Saheeh Muslim Pg.182 Vol. I)

The Sunan of Abu Dawood reads,

'Abdullah bin Umar reports that the Prophet said, "Straighten your rows, bring in line your shoulders, fill in the gaps, co-operate with your brothers i.e. in arranging and straightening the rows and do not leave empty spaces for the Shayateen. Whoever fills in the gap Allah will shower his mercy on him and whoever leaves a space in the row Allah will deprive him of his mercy." (Sunan Abi Dawood Pg.97 Vol.I)

Bara bin Aazib relates, "The Prophet would walk within the rows, from one side to another, straightening them. He would pass his hands over our chests and shoulders and say," Do not disperse, otherwise your hearts will become disunited." He would also say, "Allah the Almighty sends blessings upon those who stand in the first row and the angels seek forgiveness on their behalf." (Sunan Abi Dawood Pg. 97 Vol. 1) Anas bin Maalik reports, the Prophet said, "Pull your rows together, keep them close and keep your necks in line, for by He whose hands rests the soul of Muhammad, indeed I see the Shayateen entering the gaps in the rows as though they are small sheep." (Sunan Abi Dawood Pg.97 Vol. I)

It has been reported that Umar bin Al-Khattab would appoint a person to straighten the rows and he would not begin the prayer until he was informed that the rows were straight. It has also been reported that Ali bin Abi Taalib and Uthmaan bin Affan would be punctual in maintaining this practice. (Appointing a person to straighten the rows before the Salaah.) Ali bin Abi Taalib used to say, 'Step forward O! So and so' and 'step back O! So and so' (Tirmidhi Pg.53 Vol.I)

Maalik bin Abi Aamir Al-Ansaari relates that Uthmaan bin Affan would say in his Friday sermon, "When the time of Salaah comes, straighten your rows and bring in line your shoulders." (Muwatta imaam Muhammad Pg.86)

From the aforementioned narrations we come to understand that the Prophet would instruct the Sahaaba to bring in line their shoulders in order to straighten the rows. He would pass his hands over their chests and shoulders also, in order to straighten the rows. Neither did the Prophet instruct the Sahaaba to join their feet with the feet of the next person nor did he make them do it.

Similarly, Uthmaan bin Affan would instruct the people to straighten the rows and bring in line their shoulders. Also, neither from him is the instruction of joining the feet with the feet of the next person established. Ali bin Abi Taalib would instruct the people to step back and forward to ensure that the rows were straight and in an orderly fashion. But also, neither from him is the instruction of joining the feet with the feet of the next person established.

The people in question, in support of their claim, use the narrations of Nu'maan bin Basheer and Anas bin Maalik as evidence, which have been recorded by Imaaam Bukhaari in his Saheeh.

Imaam Bukhaari says, 'The chapter of joining the feet with the feet and the shoulder with shoulder in the row'. "Numaan bin Basheer says, I saw each man join his ankle with the ankle of the

next person.".....Anas bin Maalik reports (Once as the Iqaamah was being said) the Prophet said, "Straighten your rows, for indeed I see you from behind my back. Anas bin Maalik says, "We would join our shoulders and feet with the shoulders and feet with the person next to us." (Saheeh Bukhaari Pg.1 00 Vol. I)

The people in question use these narrations as evidence and say that the joining of the feet and ankles with the feet and ankles of the next person will be taken in its literal meaning. However, them presenting such narrations as items of evidence in support of their claim is incorrect. The reason being that the meaning of such narrations are not taken in their apparent and literal form i.e. the feet and the ankles be joint with the feet and the ankles of the next person. But what they mean is to straighten and complete the rows as best possible and to fill the gaps in between.

There are many reasons indicating why such narrations and expressions should be taken in the meaning above and not in their literal and apparent form.

The Muhaddithun and commentators on Ahaadeeth have provided such explanations for these narrations and have interpreted the chapter as mentioned. Consequently, Hafidh Ibn Hajar Al-Asqalaani says in Fathul-Baari a commentary on the Saheeh of Al-Imaam Bukhaari, "The meaning of this is to lay emphasis on straightening the rows and filling the gaps in between." (Fathul-Bari Pg.247 Vol.2) Allamah Qastallani has related exactly the same explanation in his Irshad-Sari Pg.368 Vol.2

Also, Allamah Aynee in his Umdatul-Qari Pg.259 Vol.5 has mentioned the same explanation but with a difference in wording. His text reads as follows; " The Prophet has indicated through this emphasis on straightening the rows and filling the gaps in between."

Allamah Anwar Shah Kashmeeri says, "This is the meaning adopted by the Aimmah of the four major schools of Fiqh i.e. two people should not leave such a wide gap in between them where

in a third person can step in. Also, the issue of joining the feet with the feet of the next person in Salaah is an innovation on the part of certain people." (Faidhul-Bari Pg.236 Vol.2)

2. In taking the literal meaning of joining the feet with the feet of the next person in Salaah and bringing it into practice not only bears hardship and extreme difficulty but it is also an action of false pretension. In the narration of Sunan Abi Dawood, along with mentioning the joining of the ankle with the ankle of the next person in Salaah it mentions the joining of the knee with the knee of the next person. (Sunan Abi Dawood Pg.104 Vol. I)

In this situation this practice will become even more awkward and will bear even more hardship. Whereas Allah the Almighty states in the Quran 'He has not imposed any difficulties on you in religion' and also in another verse it is stated 'Allah does not burden a person beyond his capacity.' For these very reasons the Shariah has totally buried and wiped out extremely difficult and critical situations.

The commentator of Sunan Abi Dawood Allamah Khaleel Ahamd Saharanpuri writes, 'Because the joining of the knees with the knees and the joining of the ankles with the ankles is extremely difficult (if not impossible) in Salaah.' (Badhul-Majhud Pg.230 Vol.4)

Allamah Zafar Ahmad Uthmaani says, "It is obvious that the joining of the feet with the feet along with the shoulders and the ankles is an extremely difficult practice, especially when this has to remain the practice all throughout the Salaah. In addition to this, extremely difficult situations and practices have been dislodged through explicit Sharee texts. (I'laaus-Sunan Pg.360 Vol.4)

Taking the literal meaning of the Ahadeeth and joining the ankle with the ankle brings about such a wide gap in between the feet which not only leads one to act contrary to his natural style but it is also in contrast to the calmness and humility required in Salaah.

The eminent Muhaddith Muhammad Yusuf Al-Binnori writes, 'Certain people consider this explanation to be adopting to the true meaning, whereas in reality this is incorrect. The true and correct meaning of such expressions is to stress the point of straightening the rows and filling the gaps in between. Also, these expressions are from the part of the narrator. (Extracts from Fathul-Bari and Umdatul-Qari)

This refutes those people who claim to practice upon the Sunnah and adhere to the Ahadeeth. They exert in joining the ankles with the ankles of others in the row and consequently leave a wide gap in between their own feet. This practice of theirs leads to false pretension and dissimulation. This alters the natural behaviour of people and deforms the normal method of humility in Salaah. In return they wish to fill the gaps in between people, but in reality, they continue to leave empty spaces and they are unaware that this particular practise of theirs is even more severe.' (Ma' arifus-Sunan Pg.297 Vol.2)

In addition, no Hadeeth can serve as proof for widening the feet to such an extent in fact the Ahaadeeth suggest a narrower and more lesser gap in between the feet. Consequently, it has been reported that Abdullah bin Umar would not leave a wide gap in between his feet and nor would he totally join them but he would adopt a comfortable and moderate method i.e. not too close and not too wide. (Al-Mughni Pg.11 Vol.2)

The method that was adopted in the individualistic Salaah was also adopted throughout the congregational Salaah.

We do not find the Sahaaba or the Tabiun differentiating between the individualistic and congregational Salaah. From this we come to know that the true meaning of joining the shoulders is to bring them in line and to avoid leaving gaps in between. (Faidhul-Bari Pg.237 Vol.2)

It is recorded in the Sunan of Imam Nasai that, 'Abu Ubaydah related from Abudulah bin Masood that he said, upon seeing a person who had joined his feet in Salaah, "He has erred in

practising the Sunnah, if he was to practise Muraawaha then this will be more beloved and liked by me." (Sunan Nasai Pg.103 Vol.I)

The original meaning of the word Muraawaha is to take support from one leg at times and at other times, lean on the other side and take support from the other leg. Sometimes this word is also used to mean a narrow gap. The second explanation is referred to in the above Hadeeth. Therefore, the maintaining of a narrow gap in between the feet can be understood from the light of this Hadeeth.

(Faidhul-Baari Pg.237 Vol 2, Al-Faidh As-Samaayi alaa Sunan An-Nasaai Pg.288 Vol I)

Abdullah bin Masood did not suffice on disapproving of joining the feet, but he advised in favour of practising Muraawaha.

It is apparent from this that when there is a little amount of space in between the feet then it will not be possible to join the feet or ankle with the feet or ankle of the next person. Therefore, the narrations mentioning the joining of the ankle with the ankle of the next person will be interpreted to the explanation provided by Hafidh Ibn Hajar and Allamah Aynee.

It is possible that the objective of such narrations is to invalidate and refute exaggeration in joining the feet with the feet. Thus, the Sunnah method is that a person performing the Salaah does not leave a wide gap in between his feet or nor does he join them up totally.

But he adopts a moderate and comfortable method. Therefore, when the wide gap in between the feet no longer remains the joining of the ankle with the ankle will also not be possible. Hence, the narrations of joining the feet with the feet will be interpreted to the explanation provided by Allamah Badr-Uddin Al-Aynee and Allamah Shihaab-Uddin Al-Qastallani. (Ma'arifus-Sunan Pg.298-299 Vol.2)

It can be understood from various narrations that an empty space should be kept in between the feet of a person offering the prayer.

It is recorded in Sunan Abi Dawood, The Prophet said, "When any one of you intends to perform the Salaah then he should not place his shoes on his right-hand side or his left-hand side. This is because his left-hand side is the right-hand side of another person, unless there is no person there, and he should place them in between his legs." (Sunan Abi Dawood Pg.103 Vol. I)

It can be understood from this narration that an empty space should be kept on the right hand and left-hand sides of the people performing the Salaah wherein one may place his shoes. If the practice of joining the feet with the feet is adopted then this space will be closed and no space will remain on the right hand and left-hand sides of those performing the Salaah. In this situation it is meaningless preventing the people from placing their shoes on their right hand and left-hand sides at the time of Salaah.

Bringing into practice the literal meaning of joining the feet with the feet of the next person, in most cases causes the toes to point at a direction other than the Qiblah. Whereas, the pointing of the toes towards the Qiblah is among the etiquette's of Salaah. This etiquette of Salaah is that, upon which Imaam Bukhaari, whom a clear majority of a particular group view an ultimate authority in matters of Hadeeth, has entitled a chapter in his Saheeh as follows, 'The toes should be facing the Qiblah'.

Entitling the chapter as mentioned above requires that the toes point towards the Qiblah. If the expression of joining the feet with the feet of the next person is taken in its literal form then the etiquette of Salaah as mentioned in Saheeh Bukhaari will be neglected in most cases. Whereas, if such an expression and other similar expressions are taken to mean the straightening of the rows and filling the gaps in between, then the practice of pointing the toes towards the Qiblah can be adopted with ease.

If after considering the narrations of Saheeh Bukhaari one views necessary the joining of the feet and ankle with the feet and ankle of the next person in Salaah then the narration of Bukhaari which suggests the joining of the shoulder with the shoulder of the next person should also be taken into consideration and deemed necessary. This practice is only possible if all the people of the row are of one height. Similarly,

the joining of the feet with the feet is only possible if all the feet of the people are of one size. These two factors are generally not to be found.

Shaykhul-Hadeeth Muhammad Zakariyya writes, 'Imaam Bukhaari has mentioned the joining of the shoulders and feet in titling one of his chapters. Through this he has indicated that in the joining of the shoulders and feet nearness and straightness is intended and the literal meaning is impracticable. Thereafter, he has related the Muallaq narration of Numaan bin Basheer, indicating that the explanation of the first two Ahadeeth is also applicable in the third Hadeeth due to the sequence and context of the Hadeeth being of the same nature.' (Hamishul-Laami Pg.228 Vol.3)

Allamah Zafar Ahmad Uthmaani writes, 'The joining of these parts of the body in a true sense is impossible if the people performing the Salaah are of various heights. Thus, the meaning of such narrations will be to bring in line the bodily parts.'

(I,laaus-Sunan Pg.360 Vol.4)

Allamah Anwar Shah Kashmeeri says, "The joining of the feet with the feet along with the shoulders with the shoulders is not possible even after vexatious and tiresome practice. Therefore, this practice will be classified an innovation from there (Certain people) part for which no trace is to be found among the pious predecessors." (Faidhul-Bari Pg.337 Vol.2)

Also, the apparent meaning of the Hadeeth requires the joining of the ankle with the ankle. But in reality, this practice is extremely awkward and difficult if not impossible.

Shaykh Gangohi writes, 'The ankle with the ankle can be joined if a person is broad from the upper part of the body and thin from the lower part.'

(Fataawa Rashidiyya Pg.363)

Maulana Abu Ubaydullah Qadhi Shams-uddin writes: In the narration of Musnad Ahmad Pg.276 Vol.4 it is related thus, 'The ankle would be joint with the ankle and the shoulder with the shoulder'. Thus, the claim made by certain people of this day and age, of joining the feet in a manner wherein the shoulders and ankles are not joint, is of vain. (Ilhaamul-Bukhaari Fi Halli Musbkilaatil-Bukhaari Pg.50)

The wording, "Bring in line your shoulders" have been related in some narrations. Commenting on these words, the Author of Awnul-Mabood writes, "Bring in line your shoulders in a manner wherein the shoulders of every individual performing the Salah is parallel to the shoulders or the people beside him. As a result, the shoulders, necks and feet will all be in one straight line. (Awnul-Mabood Pg.275 Vol.2)

Imaam Shawkaani in his Naylul-Awtaar Pg.65 Vol.3 has provided this very explanation.

The explanation adopted in regards to bringing in line the shoulders, is also the explanation for the narrations reported by Anas Bin Maalik and Numaan Bin Basheer wherein the mention of joining the ankles is to be found. The narration goes, "We would join our shoulders and feet with the shoulders and feet of the people beside us", thus meaning, the ankle or feet and the shoulder will be in line with the ankle or feet and the shoulder of the next person.

Even for a short while if we assume that the joining of the feet with the feet has been demanded by the Shariah, then the question will be asked, is this practice required in every posture of Salaah or is it restricted to certain postures? If it is required in every posture of Salaah then what method should be adopted in the sitting posture? If it is restricted to certain posture's then

where is the evidence for such a restriction? If a reply is given that this practice is difficult in the sitting position, therefore this position has been excluded, then it will be said, this practice is also not so easy in the standing position and it causes difficulty for those performing the Salaah.

Therefore, it is more suitable that the practice of joining be only adopted as a pre Salaah requirement, that the Prophet would instruct the Sahaaba to straighten the rows before beginning the prayer. At which point, the Sahaaba would join the shoulder and feet with the shoulder and feet of the next person and they would closely observe if the rows were straight or not.

Such narrations do not prove the continuity of this practice throughout the Salaah. The reason being that the Ahadeeth do not contain the words, 'In Salaah'. Now, if the Ahadeeth were to contain such wordings then their deduction of ruling would have been complete. Without the aforementioned wording their deduction of ruling is incomplete and incorrect. (Imdadul-Ahkaam Pg.290 Vol. I, I'laaus-Sunan Pg.360 Vol.4 and Dawaat Abdiyyat Az Ifaadaat Thanwi Pg.151-152 Vol.19)

If the narrations of Saheeh Bukhaari brought forth as evidence by certain people are to be taken in their literal sense, then it will also become necessary to accept this practice not being a 'Sunnah-Maqsudah'. (This term refers to a Sunnah wherein the practice is continued even though the initial purpose is achieved) This is because the narration of Mamar contains the following wording, 'Anas bin Maalik said, "If I was to try and carry out this practice i.e. The joining of the ankles with the ankles of the next person, the people would run away like restive mules." (Fathul-Bari Pg.247 Vol.2)

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It is apparent from the statement of Anas bin Maalik that he did not continue practising the joining of the feet after the demise of the Prophet. From this it is also evident that this practice was not a 'Sunnah-Maqsudah', because if the issue so, the Sahaaba would not have abandoned it due to the aversion and hatred of any person. Also, hatred is often shown to those actions, which are not carried out in Salaah and everyday actions in general.

If the joining of the feet was to be a 'Sunnah-Maqsudah', then the Sahaaba would have maintained this practice on a regular basis and the Tabiun would have realised it to be a Sunnah of the Salaah through the regular practice of the Sahaaba. After which, the question of aversion and showing hatred should not stand.

As can be understood from the statement of Anas Bin Maalik that he would not practice the joining of the feet due to the hatred of this practice in the people, it can also be understood that this practice was generally overlooked throughout the era of the Sahaaba and Tabiun. All this serves as evidence in excluding this practice from the category of Sunnah-Maqsudah'. The behaviour and actions of the Sahaaba have been listed as strong items of evidence. This is all in favour of the opinion expressed by the four leading Aimmah and the majority of the scholars. (Imdadul-Ahkaam Pg.290 Vol.I, I,laaus-Sunan Pg.360 Vol.4)

Allah the Almighty is fully aware of the truth.

Shaykhul-Hadeeth Mufti Umar Faruk (May Allah lengthen his shadow over us)