

## CHAPTER THREE

### Why can't women join in the Friday Prayers?

Another common question asked is 'why can't women join in the Friday Prayers?' Let us understand the wisdom behind this. Firstly it is important to understand that women can join in prayers, however, with observing conditions.

#### Based on responsibilities

The answer to this question is that this difference is not based on any distinction between masculinity and femininity, or between men and women. Rather, it is based on other, external factors relating to the human interests for the sake of whom these responsibilities were assigned. The Friday congregational prayer, for example, was established as a means of bolstering Muslims' unity; however, the value in this practise is only stressed when it does not interfere with the fulfilment of some more vital interest. Thus, if some other, more urgent interest arises at any given time, the duty to perform the Friday prayer in the mosque is dropped in its favour, regardless of whether the individual concerned is a man or a woman. For example, if a man's attending the Friday prayer in the mosque would result in neglecting his care of a sick person due to the unavailability of anyone else to stand in for him during his absence, he is obliged to remain at the sick person's side, keeping him or her company and attending to his or her needs. On the other hand, since a woman's attending the communal Friday prayer could be taken as a sign of neglect of a similar interest, namely, the care and nurture of her young children, she is not required (not obligatory) to attend this prayer communally.

Interestingly I was speaking to a friend on this topic and he said to me, my wife is a convert, and she just couldn't understand why it wasn't necessary for women to join the Friday congregational prayer. After giving birth to their first child, she understood the reason, and the fact that she said if it was necessary for women to join in the congregational prayer, how could she attend as then who would look after her child?

One application of this ruling as it applies to men is illustrated in the words spoken by the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) to a man who came requesting his permission to go out on jihad (for defending Islam). In response, the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) asked, "Are your parents alive?" "Yes," the man replied. "So then," he (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) told him, "Your jihad consists in serving them."<sup>1</sup>

As for the waiver of the woman's obligation to take part in jihad, it is not based on her feminist as such, but rather, is simply another application of this same principle, since her going out for jihad could, in some situations, require her to neglect the more important duty of providing nurture and care for her children. The most sacred of all social functions, namely, that ensure that young children receive nurture and a sound upbringing, would be left unfulfilled.

Looking after his parents was more important, however, in the beginning of Islam the Islamic army was desperate for as many people as possible, however, if the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said to this person join for jihad then if he was martyred then who would look after his parents? So the wider picture is taken into consideration.

#### Persons upon whom the Friday prayer is obligatory<sup>1</sup>:

There are ten aspects that make Jumu'ah necessary (Wajib) and if even one of these were not fulfilled then it is not obligatory (Fardh) but even if he prayed the Jumu'ah it will count and in fact for an adult male who is sane it is better to pray the Jumu'ah and for a woman it is better to pray Dhuhr. The conditions are as follows;

1. To be resident in the town or city.
2. Jumu'ah is not obligatory on an ill person. The illness must be so bad that the person cannot go to the Mosque where Jumu'ah prayers are held or if he did go his illness would get worse or it would delay the illness from getting better.<sup>ii</sup> A very old person is treated in the same context as an ill person.<sup>iii</sup>

**Rule:** If a person is caring after an ill person and is aware that if he goes to pray Jumu'ah the ill person will be under risk and no-one else is available to look after them then for the career Jumu'ah is not Fardh.<sup>iv</sup>

3. Jumu'ah is Fardh on males; it is not Fardh on females.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Hanafi Madh-hab

4. To be an adult.
5. To be sane. Both these conditions are not specifically for Jumu'ah but for all worship to be Wajib you must be an adult and be sane.
6. To have sight. Jumu'ah is not Fardh on the blind, however, it is Fardh on the blind person who can walk around the streets without help or assistance and can reach the Mosque on his own accord.<sup>v</sup>
7. The person can walk and therefore is not handicapped. However, if he is lame but can walk to the Mosque, then Jumu'ah is Fardh on him.
8. Jumu'ah is not Fardh on an imprisoned person who is in Jail. However, it is Fardh for a person who has been imprisoned due to debt and is rich and therefore has the means to pay off the debt.
9. To have fear. If a person has the fear of a king or thief or an oppressor or is worried that he will be imprisoned because he does not have the means to pay off a debt, then Jumu'ah is not Fardh on them.<sup>vi</sup>
10. If there is a fear of a storm or flood or snow or hurricane, meaning that it would cause you harm if you went out in this weather then Jumu'ah is not Fardh.

So we find that Jumu'ah prayer is not obligatory on all men either. The reason why it is not obligatory for women to join the Friday prayer is based purely on responsibilities and not upon masculine or feminine reasons.

### **Corruption in the community**

Islam means peace, keeping this in mind; understand that Islam wants to protect individuals and families from things that may lead to corruption in society. The Muslim society is a community built up with respect and maintaining the rights of each individual. For example, taking into consideration the people in today's society, the Imam (Leader) came out of the mosque alone with a woman who was worshipping in the mosque, what do you think people of the society would think? *'I wonder what they've been up to?'* So Islam does not even want to put this suspicion in the minds of people. Let me give you a living example that if this would take place in the mosque then there is a good chance the young men and women would start to meet up in the mosque, a place which is purely for the sake of worship.

It is interesting to note that women were banned from coming to the mosque by the Khalif 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) and even by 'A'isha (may Allah be pleased with her). 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) imposed this ban because society had deteriorated to such an extent that it was not befitting for women to go out to the mosque, especially at night. The women of Madinah, resenting this ban, approached 'A'isha (may Allah be pleased with her), but she backed 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) up, telling them: *"If the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) knew what 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) knows, he would not have granted you permission to go out (to the mosque)."*<sup>vii</sup>

Imam Al-Ghazali (may Allah be pleased with him) writes in his great work, *Ihya-ul-uloom: 'Allah's Messenger (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) had allowed women to attend the mosque, but the right course nowadays is to prevent them from doing so, unless they are old. Indeed, this was already preferable in the time of the companions; so much so that 'Aisha<sup>2</sup> (may Allah be pleased with her) said: "Had the blessed Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) known what women would get up to after his death, he would have forbidden them to go."*<sup>viii</sup>

It is 'A'isha (may Allah be pleased with her) that tended to forbid the women from going to the mosques, including for the five prescribed prayers let alone *Tarawih* in the month of Ramadhan.

Let us look at the fact that if this would happen then what would be the state of the individuals involved and the state of the community at large?

### **Priest disqualified after affair<sup>ix</sup>**

The Reverend Simon Oberst, 46, resigned from his post as Rector in November following a complaint about his behaviour towards two women. The Bishop of Bath and Wells, the Right Reverend Peter Price, said Mr Oberst's behaviour had fallen short of that expected of him.

Mr Oberst has apologised unreservedly for the hurt caused.

<sup>2</sup> The wife of the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace)

A statement from the Bishop said: "The Censure of Deprivation was imposed by consent, Mr Oberst having acknowledged that his conduct towards two women fell short of the conduct required of a priest in Holy Orders."

Bishop 'saddened'. The married father-of-two, a singer and music lover and a Cambridge graduate, admitted at a Church of England hearing on Friday that he had made advances to two women in his parish. One refused his approaches, the other accepted and an affair followed.<sup>x</sup>

### **Woman charges rape in tangled affair with priest<sup>xi</sup>**

"A woman who said she turned to the former pastor of Our Lady of Pompei Church for spiritual guidance is claiming he met her need with what she at first believed to be "spiritual hugs" but that these embraces quickly went beyond the religious and became rape.

Leslie Fray is charging that Father Joseph Cogo, former pastor at the Carmine Street church, raped her at least three times. The incidents happened almost 30 years ago, when Fray, then a recent Yale graduate and convert to Catholicism, came to Greenwich Village. Fray, now 51, says she was beset by delayed-onset post-traumatic stress syndrome stemming from the alleged rapes and that it wrecked her life.

She says the recent media coverage of lawsuits against paedophile priests, her own growing awareness of what happened to her and wanting to inform others who may have had similar experiences are compelling her to tell her story now.

In June of 2004, Fray filed a complaint with the Manhattan district attorney and the Catholic Archdiocese of New York. The same week, she met with the superior of the Pious Society of the Missionaries of Saint Charles Borromeo, otherwise known as the Scalabrian order, with which Our Lady of Pompei is affiliated. The following month, Cogo was asked to step down as head pastor at the Village church. Three months later, he was transferred to Caracas, Venezuela, to head the Our Lady of Pompei Church there, also part of the Scalabrians' order.

Fray is seeking a financial settlement from the Scalabrian brothers. Initially, she asked for \$2 million, but she has since decided she is owed more. A year later, she is getting ready to sue for monetary damages if a settlement is not reached soon.

"I'm asking \$27 million, because it was 27 years of being a vegetable," Fray told The Villager in a recent interview. "I couldn't practice [archaeology], no career, children. I couldn't talk, I couldn't walk. I couldn't get close to people because of the abuse."

Speaking from Caracas, Cogo, 71, denied the accusations. He said Fray is disappointed with how her life turned out, and now with the Catholic church beset by lawsuits, has seen an opportunity to cash in.<sup>xii</sup>

### **The Bible?**

The Bible condemns not only adultery, but premarital sex, or fornication (Mk 7:21; Eph 5:5; Heb 13:4). The book teaches that only the complete commitment to one another that comes with marriage is the proper setting for sexual intimacy. Marriage is much more than just "a piece of paper." It is only in marriage that we publicly give ourselves to each other, belong to each other, and become responsible for one another, "in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health," all the days of our lives.

If the preachers are not following the teachings of their book then can you expect anything from the common people? This may be one of the reasons why Allah (The Exalted) has not made it obligatory for women to attend the Friday prayer. And Allah (The Exalted) knows best!

This is just another example, have you heard anything like this happening in any mosque? No, because Islam cuts evil at its root. Whatever Islam has laid down it is for the benefit of people and not because men are superior to women! The above incident has broken many families; killed a person and shaken many. Who are we to question the laws of Allah (The Exalted) he is the One who created us and set the rules for us, we should follow it, it is our short comings if we don't understand; not Islam's.

### **Prayer in the mosque**

The Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) advised women to offer their prayers at home, in the most secluded corner of the house:

*“Umm Humayd Sa’idiyyah (may Allah be pleased with her) said ‘O Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) I desire to offer prayers under your leadership’. The Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said: ‘I know that, but your offering the prayer in a corner (of your house) is better than your offering it in a closed room, and your offering it in a closed room is better than your offering it in the courtyard of your house; and offering it in your courtyard is better than your offering it in the neighbouring mosque, and your offering it in the neighbouring mosques is better than your offering it in the biggest mosque of the town.’”<sup>xiii</sup>*

This recommendation may be linked to menstruation. Women who regularly attend the mosque may be conspicuous by their absence at the time of the month, and this may be a source of embarrassment. Privacy in prayer is better so that no-one need know what is what in the particular aspect of a women’s life.

The Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) did not prevent women from attending the mosque, but he did make it clear that prayer at home is better. However, women are not banned from the mosque altogether. If the intention is to pray and learn, then they can go. The Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) told the men not to forbid the women if they wanted to go to the mosque:

*“Do not prohibit your women from coming to the mosques, though their houses are better for them.”<sup>xiv</sup>*

If this is the case then strict code of conduct should be preserved i.e. a separate entrance, separate facilities etc. However, some of the scholars<sup>3</sup> have said it is not permissible due the state of the people today, hence saving them from corruption as explained in some scenarios above.

There are at times of Salaah such as Friday prayers and occasions such as Eid etc. a great number of Muslim men are present. Although many mosque’s have a separate entrance for women, once women are leaving the mosque many men will also be leaving the mosque at the same time. Hence, bearing this in mind and also bearing in mind that generally speaking, religious men are attracted to religious women, it will thus be inevitable that intermingling and corruption will take place at such times.

It is therefore much more suitable for women to visit the mosque outside the times of Salaah, to help prevent such situations from arising.

Hence, the Friday prayer is not obligatory on women not due to being feminine but due to responsibilities.

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<sup>i</sup> Al-Bukhari and Muslim; narrated by ‘Abd-Allah ibn ‘Amr ibn al-‘As

<sup>ii</sup> Guniya

<sup>iii</sup> Qazi Khan, Durr-e-Mukhtar, Fatahul Qadir

<sup>iv</sup> Durr-e-Mukhtar, Bahar

<sup>v</sup> Durr-e-Mukhtar etc.

<sup>vi</sup> Radd-ul-Mohtar

<sup>vii</sup> Doi, op. cit, p 29-30

<sup>viii</sup> This hadith can be found in Sahih al-Bukhari, Sahih Muslim, and the books of Sunan.

<sup>ix</sup> Saturday, 6 March, 2004.

<sup>x</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/england/somerset/3537375.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/somerset/3537375.stm)

<sup>xi</sup> By Lincoln Anderson

<sup>xii</sup> [http://www.thevillager.com/villager\\_125/womenchargesrapeintangled.html](http://www.thevillager.com/villager_125/womenchargesrapeintangled.html)

<sup>xiii</sup> Imam Ahmad and al-Tabarani; similar hadith in Abu Daw’ud.

<sup>xiv</sup> Abu Daw’ud

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<sup>3</sup> Shaykh Amjad Ali (may Allah have mercy upon him) writes in Bahare Shariat with reference to Durr-e-Mukhtar: for women to attend any Salaah in congregation is not permissible be it in the day or night, be it Jumu’ah or ‘Eid, whether she is young or old. Durr-e-Mukhtar; Page: 380 & Bahar-e-Shariat; Vol: One; Page: 113. Specially in some places around the world this practise becomes obligatory to be adopted because of some incidents that have accrued and are accruing.