


CONNECTING THE LINES FOR PRAYER

By Abu Khaliyl Source: Al-Huda Magazine

Ibn Umar  reported that Allaah (AWJ)'s Messenger ﷺ said, **Establish your lines [straight], for indeed the angels [pray] in lines. Align your shoulders, close the gaps, yield your hands to your brothers, and do not leave any gaps for Shaytaan. Whoever connects a line, Allaah maintains him, and whoever breaks a line, Allaah cuts him off.** (Ahmad, Aboo Daawood, an-Nasaa`ee and others. See Saheeh ul-Jaami no. 1187)

Anyone who has prayed with different groups of people will probably have experienced the following situation: When you line up for prayer, the person next to you prevents your feet from touching theirs. If you try to move closer to them, they move away, if you persist trouble will most likely erupt.

The evidence for standing four fingers width away?

Most people who stand away from their neighbor during group prayer do so simply out of custom. **It would not be fair to claim that it is based upon a certain madhhab, for one will not find it taught in any of the source books for the madhhab. For example, in the famous Hanafee fiqh book "Haashiyah" by Ibn `Aabidayn, the only mention of one not touching the feet to their neighbor during group prayer, is in the case of a man praying with his wife! . Similarly, it is not mentioned in "al-Um" by Ash-Shaaf`ee.** However, the opinion stating that it is allowable for one to stand four fingers width away from the person praying next to them is collected in some comparative fiqh books.⁽¹⁾ This opinion, we hope to show, is pure baseless conjecture, and furthermore implementing it violates numerous general and specific texts which govern how to stand in line for group prayers. Additionally, the manner in which the companions prayed in the presence of the Prophet ﷺ is an evidence for the Muslims to follow. especially when he ﷺ said, **...For surely I can see you from behind my back... (Al- Bukhaaree)** And he said so after commanding the companions to correct their lines. Were they to have not followed his command properly, or if they were excessive, then he, being able to see them in that state, surely would have corrected them further. And this is the argument against those who claim that concern over this matter constitutes excessiveness.

Furthermore, this opinion is one that requires the praying person to do an additional act, that is - to move away, whereas were he to stand still when the person next to him put his foot next to his, he would be doing less, and less action is the rule in prayer unless there is an evidence otherwise! This is especially true in the light of the texts as we will prove if Allah (AWJ) allows.

The command to straighten the rows and close the gaps, and that it is Waajib

The Prophet ﷺ said **Make good your standing in the rows during prayer.** (Ahmad and Ibn Hibaan. Authenticated by al-Albaanee in Saheeh ul-Jaami no. 195) And, **Establish your lines [straight], and consolidate...** (Al-Bukhaaree, Muslim, and others)

Imaam al-Baghawee comments on the word "**taraassoow**" [translated here as consolidate] saying, "His saying taraassoow means to cling together until there are no gaps between you. As Allaah (AWJ) said, **"Surely Allaah loves those who fight in His cause in ranks as if they were a solidified [marsoosan] wall."** (as-Saff 61:4) meaning they join together with each other. In this is the evidence that the Imaam should turn towards the people commanding them to straighten their lines."⁽²⁾

The Prophet ﷺ also said, **Straighten your lines, for indeed straightening the lines is part of the completeness of the prayer.** (Al-Bukhaaree and Muslim), about which Imaam Ash-Shawkaanee noted, **"From this it is understood that straightening the lines is waajib."** (Nayl ul-Aawtaar)

And he ﷺ commanded, **Close the gaps...** (Ahmad, Aboo Daawood, an-Nasaa`ee and others. See Saheeh ul-Jaami no. 1187)

Ordering the action by way of a verb accompanied by the "laam" of command

Among the well known signs of an obligation or waajib, in usool ul-fiqh, is when the commanding verb is preceded by the Arabic letter laam. This type of laam is known as laam al-amr, or the commanding laam. Whenever it is used then we understand that the address is an obligation, unless it is accompanied by an act or saying which indicates that it is only recommended. In the following texts, such laam precedes the verb, Letting us know that the statement is a command: **Establish your lines [straight],** [in one narration this follows: **By Allaah either you establish your lines (straight), or Allaah will cause dissension in your hearts.** (Aboo Daawood, Ibn Hibaan. Authentic, see Saheeh at-Targheeb wat-Tarheeb no. 512 and the addition is with Aboo Daawood, see Saheeh ul Jaami no. 1191)

And: **Straighten your lines or Allaah (AWJ) will cause dissension to appear upon your faces.** (Al-Bukhaaree, Muslim and others)

Imaam an-Nawawee explains as follows, "Meaning that anger, animosity and disagreement will appear in the hearts. As when it is said, 'So and so's face changed towards me.' It means, 'his face shows his dislike for me.' So their differing in their rows is an apparent type of dissension, and outwardly evident differences are the cause for inner dissension"⁽³⁾

Mentioning the "Laa" of prohibition

The laa of prohibition is called such be cause it means, "Do not do such and such." In all such cases of prohibition (nahee), then it implies that the act is haraam, unless it is accompanied by an act or saying which indicates that it is only disliked.

The Prophet ﷺ said,

- **Do not leave gaps for Shaytaan** (Ahmad, Aboo Daawood, an-Nasaa`ee and others. Saheeh ul-Jaami no 1189)
- **Do not differ, or your hearts will dissent.** (Muslim, Ahmad, an-Nasaa`ee and others.)
- **Do not make your chests irregular, or your hearts will dissent.** (Ibn Khuzaymah See Saheeh at-Targheeb wat-Tarheeb no. 513)
- **Do not let your lines be irregular or your hearts will dissent.** (Aboo Daawood, an Nasaa`ee and others. See Saheeh at- Targheeb wat-Tarheeb no. 513)

Warnings

Warning against the gaps

The Prophet ﷺ said, **Beware of the gap.** Meaning in prayer (at- Tabaraanee in al-Kabeer and others, see as-Saheehah no. 1757)

Gaps invite Shaytaan

The Prophet ﷺ said, **Straighten your lines, and align your shoulders, and yield your hands to your brothers, and close the gaps, for indeed Shaytaan comes between you through them, just as the small lamb does.** (Ahmad, at-Tabaraanee and others and it is Saheeh.)⁽⁴⁾

Severe warning of being cut off from Allaah (AWJ)

Whoever connects a line, he is maintained by Allaah (AWJ), and whoever breaks a line, Allaah (AWJ) cuts him off. (See note for first hadeeth.) And such a severe warning would not be issued for a deed that is simply recommended.

The behavior of the companions

Hitting the feet

Umar and Bilaal **رضي الله عنهما** are both reported to have hit the feet of people in order to straighten their lines.⁽⁵⁾ And as Ibn Hazm noted, they would not hit anyone unless he **رضي الله عنه** felt an obligation.

"Straighten the lines" explained

Anas **رضي الله عنه** reported that in al-Madeenah he was asked whether he found anything to have changed from the time of the Prophet ﷺ, to which he replied, **"I have not found any change except that you do not straighten your rows properly."** (Al-Bukhaaree)

It would be enough for us to understand his saying, **"taqeemoona as-sufoof"** to mean simply, your lines are zig-zagged and you don't straighten them. But the following narration of Anas **رضي الله عنه** enlightens us to the true meaning of straightening the lines "[After standing for prayer, before the takbeer, Allaah (AWJ)'s Messenger ﷺ faced the people and said:] **Straighten your lines and consolidate, for indeed I see you from behind my back. (Two separate narrations from Al-Bukhaaree and Muslim.)** In one narration Anas added, **"I saw that one of us would connect his shoulder to the shoulder of his companion, and his heel to his heel, and if one were to do this today, one of you would flee as if he were an untamable donkey."**⁽⁶⁾

An-Nu'maan bin Basheer **رضي الله عنه** said, **"...So I saw a man clinging his shoulder to his companion's shoulder, and his foot to his foot, and his ankle to his ankle."** (Al-Bukhaaree)

The argument that tightening the lines prevents concentration

After all of what we have noted, some people insist that standing closely to another during prayer causes them to have distracting thoughts. Due to this problem they believe that their prayer is more apt to be accepted if they stand away from the person next to them. However this is a poor excuse, because one's lack of ability to concentrate during prayer is not a reason for him to encourage Shaytaan to enter the ranks; And clearly the command as well as the virtue is with the people who pray close not separately as the Prophet ﷺ said, **The best of you is the one with the friendliest shoulder in prayer. (Aboo Daawood and others. It is hasan according to al- Albaanee, Saheeh ul-Jaami no. 3264)**

Related Matters

When two are praying...


Ibn Hajar reports by way of Ibn Juraeej who said, "I said to Ataa, **'the man who prays with another man, where does he stand?'** He said, **'Along his right.'** I said, **'He comes parallel to him until he aligns with him, neither of them is further back than the other?'** He said, **'Yes.'** I said, **'Do you like that he be equal with him until there is no gap between them?'** He said **'Yes.'** (Fath ul-Baaree - Kitaab al-Athaan no. 57)

Prohibition of praying between pillars or columns

It is obligatory for the people to line up either ahead of or behind the threshold of any architectural structures in the masjid. This is derived from the following reports.

Mu`awiyah bin Qurrah reports that his father said, **"We were prohibited from aligning between "as-sawaaree" [fences, walls, pillars, etc.] during the time of Allaah (AWJ)'s Messenger ﷺ, he drove us away from them."** (Ibn Majaah, Ibn Khuzaymah, Ibn Hibaan and others).⁽⁷⁾

And Abdul-Hameed bin Mahmood said, **"I prayed with Anas bin Maalik one Friday, we [prayed] opposite the sawaaree, we went forward or backward, for Anas said We were prevented from this during the time of Allaah (AWJ)'s Messenger ﷺ."** (Aboo Dawood, An-Nasaa`ee, at-Tirmithi, and others with authentic chain of narrators.)

It is reported that **Ibn Mas`ood**  said, "**Do not line up between sawaaree**"⁽⁸⁾."

Al Bayhaqee commented, "**This is because the columns [prevent them from] connecting the line.**" **Imaam Maalik** said, "**There is no harm in the lines between columns if the masjid becomes tight.**" And **Ibn Qudaamah** said, "**It is not disliked for the Imaam to stand between the sawaree, only for the followers because it cuts their lines...**"⁽⁹⁾

Aboo Haneefah said, "**It is disliked to stand between two pillars or in the corners or enclaves...**"⁽¹⁰⁾

Praying alone behind the line

There are numerous reports forbidding one to pray alone behind the line. The following is an example. **Alee bin Shaybaan** said, "**We prayed behind him - meaning the Prophet ﷺ - so the Prophet of Allaah (AWJ) finished the prayer. He saw a man praying alone behind the line. The Prophet of Allah (AWJ) waited until he finished his prayer, then he said to him, Return to you prayer, for there is no prayer for the one alone behind the line. (Ibn Khuzaymah 1569 see Irwa ul-Ghaleel no.541)**

Pulling someone back to form a line

There is no authentic evidence for pulling a person from the line ahead to form a new line when the prayer has begun already and one is late. However the texts supporting this are **very weak or fabricated**⁽¹¹⁾.

What should one do in this case?

Since it is confirmed that the reports on commanding one to pull another back are not authentic, then it is not allowed for one to do it, rather it is obligatory for him to close any gaps on the lines, and if not, then he prays alone and his prayer would be correct, for he has done all he can correctly do, and followed that which is legislated, and Allah (AWJ) has said (which means) "**Allaah does not burden a soul beyond its ability**" (al-Baqarah 2: 286)

Further references for this Article:

Taswaytus-Sufoof wa Atharhaa fee Hayaat ul-Ummah by Hasayn al-`Awaayshah.
Al-Qawl ul-Mubeen fee Akhtaa il-Musalleen by Mashoor Hasan Salmaan

⁽¹⁾ al-Fiqh ala al-Mathaahab al-Arb`ah, for example

⁽²⁾ Sharhus-Sunnah vol. 3 pg 365.

⁽³⁾ Sharh Muslim

⁽⁴⁾ See Saheeh at-Targheeb wat-Tarheeb no. 491.

⁽⁵⁾ Fath ul-Baaree

⁽⁶⁾ Reported by al-Mukhlis in al-Fawaa'id and Aboo Ya'ala in his Musnad, Sa`eed bin Mansoor in his Sunan and Ismaa`elee. See Fath ul-Baaree 2/112. It is authentic according to the conditions of Al-Bukhaaree and Muslim, see as-Saheehah no. 31.

⁽⁷⁾ Al-Albaanee has shown it to be hasan in Tamam ul-Minnah pp. 296-297, and as-Saheehah no. 335, and the following report is a witness for it.

⁽⁸⁾ Al-Bayhaqee 3/104 and Ibn al-Qaasim in al-Mudawanah 1/106. See as-Saheehah no. 335.

⁽⁹⁾ Al-Mughnee. For previous quotes see as-Saheehah no. 335.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Hashiyah Ibn Aabadayn.

⁽¹¹⁾ See Silsilat al-Ahaadeeth ad-Da`eefah no. 921.