

Does Islam Discourage Women from Attending the Masjid?

As Islam is a universal religion, its call is directed to human beings generally. "O ye people" is the standard call addressed to everyone who understands it. No distinction whatsoever is made between the sexes. "So their Lord accepted their prayers (saying), I will not suffer the work of any worker among you to be lost, whether male or female, he (or she) being a believer, these will enter the Garden and they will not be dealt with unjustly." (Al-Nisa: 124). There are countless Qur'anic verses stressing the essential fact that human society is built upon the idea of the male and female pair and that both are equal partners on their own merits in their own fields. Where any distinction is made, it is a natural and not an imposed one, as, for example, the rule relieving a woman of certain religious duties during menstruation, thus lessening her distress.

The Mosque is for both Men and Women:

The general Islamic attitude is therefore that, if a mosque is essential for Muslims, it is essential for both partners, male and female. The Muslim community which attended the prayer at the mosque during the lifetime of the Prophet (PBUH) included both males and females. It is authentically reported that the Prophet (PBUH) said, "On many occasions I start the prayer with the intention of prolonging it and then shorten it on hearing the cry of a baby for fear of keeping his mother away from attending him." The Prophet's (PBUH) Mosque had a number of doors. One day, the Prophet said, "If we could only leave this door for the ladies!" Ibn Omar, who was always very scrupulous in following the way of the Prophet (PBUH), was reported as not using this door from then on, leaving it for the purpose mentioned by the Prophet (PBUH).

Bearing in mind these incidents, together with the general Islamic attitude, it is obvious that free mixing between males and females is not encouraged in Islam. Islam stresses simplicity and decency in dressing, walking and talking and indeed in every aspect of life. Colorful or fancy kinds of dress, perfume or sexually attractive things or modes of talking are not welcome in public places where people gather, such as markets, offices or institutional buildings. How much more must this apply to the mosque! In the light of all this, Muslim jurists differ as to the desirability of Muslim women attending the Jummah (Friday) prayer at the mosque.

Al-Mughni, the standard Hanbali Fiqh, gives his views on the matter of the congregational prayer. After discussing the acceptability of the woman as imam for other women, he says the following: "It is allowed that they-women-attend the congregational prayers with men. For women used to pray with the Messenger of Allah (PBUH)." Aishah said, "Women used to offer their prayers with the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) and then they dismiss, while wrapping their heads in their scarf, without being recognized because of darkness." And the Prophet (PBUH) said, "Do not stop the female servants of Allah from attending the Mosques of Allah but let them go there without applying perfumes." But prayer in her own house is best for her according to Abdullah ibn Omar, who reported that the Messenger of Allah said, "Do not prevent your women from (going to) the Mosques, though their houses are best for them." (Abu Dawud).

The best scholarly treatment of this subject is given in the voluminous book, Al-Muhalla by Ibn Hazam, who was called the "literalist" for his dependence upon the texts. He is described in his book of biography as "The great Imam, the traditionalist, the Faqeeh, the juror, the strong-in-argument, the renewer of the fifth Islamic century, the pride of Andalusia." In volume 3, problem or question number 321, he deals extensively with the question of women's attendance at mosques, covering all points of view and mentioning the weaknesses and strengths of each.

Modest Dress:

I will follow his method, with exception of listing the chain of narrators which he, as a traditionalist, insists upon. He says, "It is not lawful for the guardian of the woman-father, husband, brother or whatever he

may be-or the master of a slave girl to stop her from attending the congregation at the mosque once he knows that she wants to pray. And it is not lawful for them-women-to go to the Mosque while using perfume or in attractive clothes. If a woman does so, he is to stop her. Their prayer in the jamaat (congregation) is better than individual prayers. The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said, "Do not stop the female servant of Allah from (going to) the Mosques of Allah." Ibn Omar said, "I heard the Messenger of Allah say, "Do not prevent your women from (going to) the Mosques if they seek your permission to do so." His son Bilal said, "Surely we will stop them." He turned to his son, abusing him in a way I have never heard him doing so and said, "I tell you the saying of the Prophet (PBUH) and you say you will stop them."

Imam Muslim reported from Ibn Omar that the Messenger of Allah said, "Do not prevent women from going to) the mosques at night." Abu Hurayrah said that the Messenger of Allah said, "Do not stop the male servants of Allah from (going to) the mosques of Allah but let them go in modest dress." Zaynab, the wife of Abdullah ibn Mas'ud said, "The Messenger of Allah said to us, 'If any one of you attends the Mosque, let her not touch perfume.'" Jabir ibn Abdullah said that the Messenger of Allah said, "The best lines for men are the front ones and the worst are the back ones. The worst lines for females are the front ones and the best are the back ones. O ye Muslim women, if the male prostrate themselves, lower your gaze so as not to see their private parts." Omar ibn al-Khattab used to stop the males using the door reserved for females.

From these traditions of the Prophet (PBUH) and the attitudes of the companions, it is clear that, during his period, the golden era in Islamic history, it was natural for all the members of Muslim community to participate fully in every aspect of Islamic life, so long as it was a decent and constructive participation. This is clearly shown in many of the biographies of the female companions of the Prophet (PBUH). In their book, *The Stories of Sahaba, of the Tablighi Jamaat*, the author writes, "Ladies in the Khaibar Campaign; shoulder to shoulder with their men-folk, the ladies of those times, imbued with the same spirit of sacrifice, were striving heart and soul in the Path of Allah; and no service in this connection was too much for them." Ummu Ziyad says, "In the Khaibar Campaign, I, along with five other women, reached the battlefield. The Prophet (PBUH), having learned this, sent for us. He said, with anger, "Who permitted you to come here? Who brought you to this place?" We said, "O Prophet of Allah, we know how to knit and we have medicines with us. We shall help the soldiers by supplying them with arrows, by attending them when they are sick and by preparing food for them. The Prophet (PBUH) permitted us to stay." (Page 164). This is just one example of how this first generation of Muslims allowed male and female to work hand in hand to build the newly formed Islamic society with the knowledge and encouragement of the Prophet (PBUH).

Origin of Idea Discouraging Women Attending the Mosque:

Then how did the idea of discouraging Muslim women from attending the mosque come about? We continue with Imam ibn Hazam, who tells us who were the advocates of the idea, what their arguments were and the refutation of such arguments.

He says, "Abu Hanifah and Malik said, 'Their prayers in their houses are better for them'." Abu Hanifah even disliked their going to the mosque for congregational prayer, the jummah prayer and the two feasts. He conceded for the elderly women the specific permission, to attend the night, Isha, prayer and the dawn, Fajr, prayer. It is also reported of him that he did not dislike their going out for the two feasts.

Imam Malik said, "We do not stop them going to the mosque" and he allowed elderly respectable women to attend the feasts prayer and the prayer for rain. He said, too, that the young could go to the mosque from time to time. As for the elderly, although they could go to the mosque, they should not go very often. (Vol.3, page 178).

The authority upon which these jurists depend consists of three main traditions showing why it is

preferable for women to offer their prayer at home rather than in the mosque. There is also another tradition prohibiting attendance at the mosque if the woman applies perfume. Ibn Hazan accepts the last point as he stated at the beginning when he said, "It is not allowed for them to go out while using perfume or dressed in fancy kinds of dress or bright colors."

This is in accordance with the traditions related by Abu Hurayrah, "Any woman who touches perfume should not attend our Isha prayer." And Zaynab, wife of Abdullah Ibn Mas'ud, said: "If any one of you wishes to attend the mosque with us, she should not touch perfume." (See Naylul-Awtar, Vol.3, pages 148-9).

But Ibn Hazam rejects very strongly the authenticity of two traditions while arguing against the third one, related to A'ishah. In discussing these with him, we shall point out whether his criticisms are fair or otherwise in the light of the comments in the text itself or through the criticism in Naulul-Awtar.

Main Traditions:

The three main traditions in favor of women praying at home are as follows. Ibn Hazam says, "Those who disliked women going to the mosque depend on the saying of A'ishah, "If the Messenger of Allah had seen what the women innovated after him, he would have stopped them attending the mosques." The second is a tradition of Umm Humaid that the Prophet (PBUH) said, "Surely your prayer in your house is better than your prayer with me." And the third is the tradition of Abu Hurayrah, who said that the Prophet (PBUH) said, "For the woman to offer her prayer in her chamber is of greater merit than to offer it in her courtyard, in her courtyard than in the mosque of her people, in the mosque of her people than in the congregational mosque and in the congregational mosque than going out for prayer in Eid day." (Pages 179-80).

The above are the three main traditions mentioned by Ibn Hazam in favor of women praying at home. But if we look at Sahih Muslim Chap.167, Vol. 1, pages 240-241, we find that, of the three, only that of A'ishah is mentioned. The other two fail to satisfy Muslim's conditions of Sahih. Ibn Hazm will take up this point when he criticizes the authenticity of both of them.

No Islamic Basis to Discourage Women Attending the Mosque:

But let us first listen to what he had to say about A'ishah's judgement in this connection. It makes very interesting reading as it shows great insight on his part. He lived in Spain at a time when Islamic culture was flourishing and when that part of what used to be the Islamic world was making great strides in all aspects of scholarship. His literalistic attitude did not obstruct his rational enlightened attitude in considering the attendance of women at the mosque. He says, "What A'ishah (RA) says is of no authority for a number of considerations."

"First: The Prophet (PBUH) did not see what they innovated, so he did not stop them. Anyone stopping them is himself innovating and as such it is wrong to stop them. The error is that it is an argument from a hypothetical case." We do not know any argument more silly than that of those who argue that if such-and-such happened, then such-and-such would follow. That is to make a fact out of something that did not happen.

"Second: Allah Most High certainly knew what the women would innovate. Anyone who denies that is a disbeliever. He did not at all reveal to His Prophet (PBUH) that he should stop them from what they would innovate. Neither did He reveal to him, "Tell the people that if women make innovations, prevent them from going to the mosques." Since Allah Most High did not do so, then clinging to such arguments is wrong and in bad taste." (Vol.3, page181).

Shamsul-Haqq answered, "It is really surprising for such eminent scholars to start building up probabilities and claiming this or that as special cases without sound proof for such probabilities. If everyone did this, we could all claim that such-and-such a rule is confined to such-and-such persons. We would end up in a

very difficult situation. As for their saying that it is allowed for the predecessors but not for their successors, this is a claim without proof, for all the Muslim ummah is equal in matters of lawful (halal) and unlawful (haram) things, except those who were exempted by the Prophet (PBUH).

It was this same point which was not clearly appreciated by A. Siddiqi in his translation of **Sahih Muslim** when he handled this issue in **Vol.1, Chap.167**. Imam Muslim quoted the same hadith allowing women to go to the mosque in a decent manner. In his commentary on these hadith, (he quoted other hadith) and said, "Apparently there seems to be some contradiction between these groups of hadith, but the exposition given by the scholars of hadith, especially by Shah Wali Ullah of Delhi, resolves it altogether. The actual fact is that the women who had the good fortune to live during the lifetime of Muhammad (PBUH) had a deep longing to say their prayer under his Imamah as it was an enviable privilege for them.

They, therefore, sought permission to join prayer in the mosque. Moreover, the moral atmosphere of that blessed period was quite congenial to the coming out of women from their houses and there was not even the slightest chance of indecency towards them. Under such conditions the Holy Prophet (PBUH) did not like to put any curb on their desire to join prayer in the mosque before daybreak and during night. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) could well visualize that moral conditions would change; therefore women were advised to say their prayers in their houses when there would be deterioration in the moral standards of the people in general."

He fell into the same intellectual trap of taking the changing times as a reason for changing to religious point of view. The imam Ibn Hazm answered his argument. Let us go on with his arguments. "Third: We do not know what women innovated or did not innovate at the time of the Prophet (PBUH). There is nothing worse than adultery. This happened during the time of the Messenger of Allah and he ordered the lashing and stoning of those who committed this thing. But he did not stop women on that account from going to the mosque. The prohibition of adultery is equally enjoined on males and females, without differentiating. What, then, could make its existence a reason to stop women from going to the mosque but not men? This is the type of reasoning that is not acceptable to Allah and His Messenger (PBUH).

Fourth: Those who innovated were some of the women while no doubt there were others who did not. It is quite wrong to prevent good coming to those who did not innovate for the sake of those who did, except when there is a clear text either in the Qur'an or the Sunnah saying so, in which case we listen and obey. Allah Most High says, "And no soul earns (evil) but against itself. Nor does a bearer for burdens bear the burden of another." (Al-An'am: 164).

Fifth: If the innovation is the cause of stopping them from going to the mosque, it would be more appropriate to stop them from going to the market places or from visiting, but they did not stop them from those things.

Sixth: It is one of the great sins to abrogate a law -the Shariah-after the death of the Prophet (PBUH), without himself having abrogated it. It is even pure disbelief.

Seventh: There is no authority in the saying of anyone after the Prophet's (PBUH) saying. As for the other two traditions, he relied upon suspecting the authenticity of one of the narrators in each hadith. In the first one, he says that Abdul-Hameed Ibn Al-Munthir is not known. This point is not accepted, as this tradition is one of many others on the same point-that the prayer at home is preferable to the one at the mosque. The same is said about Abdullah ibn Raja'Al-Ghudani the narrator of the tradition quoted earlier starting, "For the woman to offer her prayer in her chamber is better than to offer it in her apartment...." The criticism that these two narrators are not known, therefore, does not affect the authenticity of the traditions. The valid point here is that the other traditions ordering Muslims husbands and fathers to give the permission to women to go to the mosque are more numerous, more authentic and more reliable than the opposing one. If we add to that the fact that Muslim women used to offer their prayers in the

mosques in the time of the Prophet (PBUH) and the general agreement of all jurors that he never stopped them from doing so at any time in his life, we can feel quite rightly that the tradition practiced by the early Muslim community was for Muslim women to attend the mosque.

The presence of Muslim women in the mosque, the arrangement of the prayer times and the chapters written about these facts are to be found in every religious book. In his book, "Quamul-Layl" Al-Marwazi writes, "An-Nakhaie said, "I used to call the Adhan and Iqamah and no one would be present to offer the prayer with me except an elderly woman." (95)

Abu Malik Al-Ashuri said to his people, "Shall I show you the prayer of the Messenger of Allah? Then he put them in lines, men first, then the young children, then the women." (101)

The Prophet (PBUH) used to stay in his place in the mosque for a little while after the prayer. The Companions who reported it said that this was to give the women a chance to leave first. Omar ibn Al-Khattab, seeing a male and female making their ablutions from the same basin, separated them. Then he called the attendant and said, "Did I not order you to prepare a basin for the use of the women?" *We all remember the incident when Omar was preaching and advised people not to give a higher marriage gift for women or to ask for it. A Muslim woman in the mosque said to him in front of the whole gathering, "This is not for you." He said, "Why?" She replied, "Because Allah Most High said, 'And you have given one of them-as mahr (marriage gift) -a whole treasure' (Al-Nisa: 20) without putting a limit to the amount: how can you limit the mahr?" He answered, "All people are more judicious than you Omar! The woman is right and the man is wrong."*

In the light of such reasoning, it would appear that the attitude of one who insists upon the barring of women from the mosque is the attitude of a wholly ignorant and backward person, one who is limited in his perspective because of the lack of education, insight and understanding. He is clinging to a tradition of three to four hundred years of decadence and stagnation in Muslim ignorant, blind, retrogressive way of life, which has no sanction in Islam.

No Differentiation:

But such a line of thought is not productive. After all, as Muslims we reason in the light of preserved traditions; the Qur'an and the Sunnah, not in the light of ever-changing situations. The facts of the Qur'an are that its message is a universal message without any differentiation between male and female regarding piety, observance of religious duty and religious obligations.

We have quoted enough traditions of the Prophet (PBUH) and his companions and other authorities to show clearly that women attended the mosque to the last minute of the life of Allah's Messenger without restriction or hindrance. The attitude of the vast majority of the Muslim jurors is not against women's attendance at the mosque. What the Qur'an and Sunnah enjoin upon women is a matter of conformity with the Islamic point of view. Women, as a matter of course, are bearers of children and suffer much physical distress. They nurse the sick and the elderly.

Source: **The Tamil Islamic E - Library on the Net**

2nd Opinion

There is no specific mention about the entry of women in the mosques, but Sûrah Al Jumma (Al Jumma = assembly) states:

" O ye who believe! When the call is proclaimed to prayer on Friday (the day of assembly) hasten earnestly to the remembrance of God....." (62-9)

Are the believers only men?

Surely not, there is no gender difference between men and women on the question of worshiping the Creator.

However, mention is made in the Hadith about whether women should be denied access to the Mosque or not. In "Kitabul Juma", the book of Friday Prayer of Imam Bukhari who wrote two centuries after the death of the Prophet, he quoted the hadith:

Do not forbid the Mosques to the women of Allah"

Half a century later (300H), Imam Nassa'i in his book " Al-Sunnan" wrote in the chapter of "Al- Masjid" about the specification of the rows between men and women and how far they should be from each other. An indication that facilities for women to pray should be provided in the mosques. Imam Nassa'i quoted the prophet as saying:

"When a woman asks authorization from one of you to go the mosque, let him grant it to her."

Many discourses have been written on the right of entry to mosques by women all backing the hadith quoted by Imam Bukhari, In Makkah al Mukaramah and Madina al Munawarrarah, men and women pray together and there is no restriction.

Where then, does this so-called restriction come from?

It is said that it was Amir ul Mumineen, Umar who prevented women from attending the Mosque. It seems that this restriction is not quoted in context. The Mosque, at that time, were banned only to women who stayed behind for loitering and relaxation (istirwah) . Women who attended the obligatory prayers and Tarawih were not banned. To quote from "Al-Muhalla", "Umar made sure that the mosque had separate entrance and exit and that proper ablution facilities were provided."

Atika bin Zaid, Umar's wife used to go the Mosque, though Umar was not fully appreciative of this. Umar once said to her: " I swear that you know very well that I dislike your going to the Mosque." She said to Umar : " By Allah, I shall not stop until you forbid me." Umar replied: " I truly do not forbid you." It should be remembered that when Umar was stabbed to death in the Mosque, his beloved wife, Atika was at his side.

It is right to say that the Prophet sws said that the place for a woman to pray is in the privacy of her home but that was because of the family obligation of the woman. But to-day, things have changed, women are emancipated and are not at home all day long, they are in the work place. So should they wait until they get home in the evening to pray? Or should we not provide facilities for them at the mosque, to fulfill their obligations to Allah swt. Al-Quran mentions repeatedly:" establish regular prayer", then why are we failing in our duty to fulfill this demand of our Lord for our working women? Should we deny them the opportunity to learn from the Friday Khutbahs? Should we deny the underprivileged women of the ghettos, cramped in a one -room accommodation, the facilities of a clean and spacious place to say their prayers alongside their children?

We are certainly very far away from the ideal of the Prophet's mosque - open to all, welcoming all those interested in Islam, including women. Is it a betrayal of the Prophet's view of the ideal community? To day, women are declared persona non grata in the place of worship. In the days of our beloved Prophet, women had privileged access to the mosque as sahabiyyaat, companions. Women came to the Mosque to even challenge the Prophet and later the Caliphs if they disagreed with them.

Allah u alam- Allah knows best.

Source: http://islam1.org/iar/imam/archives/2000/02/04/important_rules_of_the_friday_prayer_1.php

3rd Opinion:

The Friday prayer as an obligation: The Muslim scholars are in agreement that salat al-jumu'ah (Friday prayer) is an individual obligation (and it is two rak'at).

Allah (S.W.T.) says in the Qur'an: "O you who believe, when the call for the salah of jumu'ah is proclaimed, hasten unto the remembrance of Allah, and leave off business (and trading). That is best for you if you but knew." And also Imam Abo Dawud reports an authentic hadith that the prophet (S.A.W.) said: "Al-Jumu'ah is a duty upon every Muslim in the community..."

Upon whom salat al-jumu'ah (Friday prayer) is obligatory: salat al-jumu'ah (Friday prayer) is an obligation upon every free, adult, sane, resident Muslim who has the ability to attend the salah (prayer) and does not have a valid excuse to miss it. Salat al-jumu'ah (Friday prayer), however, is not obligatory on the following:

- Women and children. Concerning this category there is no difference of opinion.
- The person who is ill and faces hardship if he goes to the mosque, or fears that his illness will be increased by going to the mosque, or whose recovery will be delayed. This also includes the person who is nursing a very ill person if, especially, the ill person cannot manage in the absence of the nursing person. Tariq Ibn Shihab reports that the prophet (S.A.W.) said: "Al-Jumu'ah is a duty upon every Muslim in the community, save four: a slave, or a woman, or a child, or a person who is ill." {Reported by Imam Abu Dawud with a sahih (authentic) chain.}
- For the traveler, even if he is staying at a certain place during the time of the begging of salat al-jumu'ah (Friday prayer), it is not obligatory. This is based on the fact that the Prophet (S.A.W.) traveled and did not perform the salat al-jumu'ah (Friday prayer) but only prayed the zuhr and 'asr together during the time of the zuhr prayers. The caliphs after him and others also acted in a similar manner.
- One who is in debt and cannot repay his debt and therefore fears that he will be imprisoned, and who fears that he will be harmed by an oppressive ruler: Ibn 'Abbas reports that the Prophet (S.A.W.) said: "Whoever hears the call to the salah and does not respond to it, there will be no prayer for him unless he has an excuse." The people inquired: "O Messenger of Allah, what is a valid excuse?" He answered: "Fear or illness." {Reported by Imam Abu Dawud with a sahih (authentic) chain.}
- Environmental restraints like rain, mud, extreme cold, and so on. Ibn 'Abbas said to the mu'adhbin on a rainy day: "When you say 'I testify that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah,' do not say 'Come to the prayer,' but say: 'Prayer in your houses.'" The people objected to that and he told them: "One better than me did so (the prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.)) Al-Jumu'ah is (Friday prayer) an obligation but I dislike that you should go out walking in the mud and slush." Abi Mahlih reports that his father had witnessed that day of Jumu'ah (Friday) with the Prophet and it was raining and the people were troubled by their shoes so he ordered them to pray in their stopping places. {Reported by Imams Abu Dawud and Ibn Majah.}

All of these people are not obliged to pray the Friday salah (prayer) although they are obliged to pray the zuhr. Should one of them pray salat al-jumu'ah (Friday prayer), it will still be valid for him or her and he will no longer be obliged to pray the zuhr. **And the women during the time of the Prophet (S.A.W.) attended the mosque and used to pray al-jumu'ah with him.**

Source: Summary of the book "Fiqh us-Sunnah" by As-Sayyid Sabiq