

IMAMAT: LEADERSHIP OF PRAYERS

The leadership of the prayers is a minor form of the greater leadership of the community for which Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) was sent to mankind. For this reason, *imamat* is called the lesser leadership. The leadership of prayers is a superb example of discipline, orderliness, compliance and collectivism in the Islamic order. The worshippers prefer such persons as their *imams* who are selected on the basis of their merit. Eligibility for *imamat* requires knowledge of the matters related to prayers, the acumen for understanding, and better recital of the Quran.

Conditions for *Imamat*

1. A Muslim alone can become an imam.
2. He must be sane, not insane or mentally deranged.
3. He must be an adult. Minors are not allowed.
4. He must be a male. Males can be led in prayers only by a male, neither by a neutral gender nor by a woman. However, a congregation of women can be led by a woman.
5. He must be able to recite Quran properly and perform all pillars of *salat* correctly. If somebody cannot recite even Surah *Al-Fatiha* properly then nobody who can recite correctly should pray behind him. Likewise, it is not proper to pray behind a physically disabled person who cannot perform *ruku'* and *sajdah* etc properly.
6. He must be clear of tongue not staggering and must be able to pronounce all words correctly.
7. He must not be suffering from any infirmity like farting or uraemia or any other such infirmity.

Imamat of the following is Obnoxious

Lewd persons, innovators whose innovations do not border on disbelief, persons who are disliked by the followers, those who recite Quran like singers, those who cannot pronounce certain letters correctly.

Precautions to be Taken by an Imam

1. It is the responsibility of the imam to arrange for correct ordering of the rows. Allah's Messenger (*sallAllahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) used to say:
« سَوُّوا صُفُوفَكُمْ، فَإِنَّ تَسْوِيَةَ الصُّفُوفِ مِنْ إِقَامَةِ الصَّلَاةِ » People ought to correct their rows because the orderliness of the rows is a part of the whole salat (*Muslim*). When people stood up for prayer he used to tell them to straighten their rows and stand shoulder to shoulder with each other (*Bukhari*).
2. The imam ought to lighten his prayers in consideration of the people's convenience. Allah's Messenger (*sallAllahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said:
«إِذَا صَلَّى أَحَدُكُمْ لِلنَّاسِ، فَلْيُخَفِّفْ، فَإِنَّ مِنْهُمْ الضَّعِيفَ وَالسَّقِيمَ وَالْكَبِيرَ، وَإِذَا صَلَّى أَحَدُكُمْ لِنَفْسِهِ فَلْيُطَوِّلْ مَا شَاءَ»
“If some of you has to lead the prayers he must lighten his prayers as there may be the weak, the infirm, the **sick** and the old among the congregation, though you may lengthen your prayers when you are praying alone (*most of the narrators*).
3. The imam ought to lengthen the first cycle so that the greatest possible number is allowed to join the prayer.
4. The imam ought to sit facing the congregation after salam.

Precautions to be Taken by the Followers [Muqtadis]

1. To follow the imam fully and absolutely. They should not deliberately make an advance over the imam. Allah's Messenger (*sallAllahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said:
«أَمَّا يَخْشَى أَحَدُكُمْ إِذَا رَفَعَ رَأْسَهُ قَبْلَ الْإِمَامِ أَنْ يَجْعَلَ اللَّهُ رَأْسَهُ رَأْسَ حِمَارٍ أَوْ يَجْعَلَ اللَّهُ صُورَتَهُ صُورَةَ حِمَارٍ»
anybody who raises his head from *sajdah* before the imam, is warned lest Allah convert his head or face into that of an ass (*most of the narrators*).
2. If a person comes to the mosque and finds the jama'at standing, he must join it after reciting *takbeer-i-tahreema*. If the imam is in the

posture of ruku' or sajdah, then he should go into it reciting the second takbeer. If any cycles are missed, he can complete them after the salam. But if he joins the imam in the posture of ruku' he will not have to repeat the cycle as Allah's Messenger (*sallAllahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said: «مَنْ أَدْرَكَ رُكْعَةً مِنَ الصَّلَاةِ، فَقَدْ أَدْرَكَ الصَّلَاةَ» anybody who finds one rak'at it is as if he found the whole salat [i.e. jama'at] (*Al-Bukhari and Muslim*).

3. To pray in one row alone or pray behind the last row alone is obnoxious.
4. There is no harm if a curtain or wall intervenes between the imam and the followers provided the latter is able to listen to his voice and follow his gestures. There is also no harm if for lack of space the followers are forced to stand at a place which is higher than that of the imam.
5. If there is a only one man to form the jama'at he must stand to the right of the imam a little behind him. But some theologists say he should stand parallel with the imam. And if the follower is a woman she has to stand behind him, even if she is a *mahram* to him.
6. It is desirable that the first row is filled with persons who have knowledge of religion and have memorized the Quran. Allah's Messenger (*sallAllahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said: «لِيلْنِي مِنْكُمْ أُولُو الْأَحْلَامِ وَالنُّهَى، ثُمَّ الَّذِينَ يَلُونَهُمْ، ثُمَّ الَّذِينَ يَلُونَهُمْ» Behind me should stand those who possess knowledge and understanding, **then those** who are lesser than them, then those who are lesser than them (Muslim, Abu Dawood, Tirmizi, Ahmad).
7. The ordering of rows behind the imam should be like this: First row to be filled by males; second row to be filled by minor children and last row should be formed of women.
8. One should see to it that he finds a place in the first row. Allah's Messenger (*sallAllahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said that: «إِنَّ اللَّهَ وَمَلَائِكَتَهُ يُصَلُّونَ عَلَى الصَّفِّ الْأَوَّلِ» Allah and his angels send salam to those standing in the first row (Ahmad, Abu Dawood, Ibn Maja).
9. If the number of the congregation is large and the voice of the imam does not reach to those in the last rows, then it is desirable to appoint repeaters of the takbeers of the imam [*mukabbir*]. But *mukabbirs* should not be appointed unnecessarily.

Repetition of Salat with Jama'at

If somebody has performed his salat solitarily still it is allowed for him to join the jama'at for the same salat. In this case his repeated salat will be deemed as *nafl*. Hazrat Abu Said Khidri narrated that once Allah's Messenger (*sallAllahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) had performed the salat of *zohr* with his companions. Then a companion arrived. The Prophet (*sallAllahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) asked him for the reason for coming late so he mentioned some excuse. Then the companion stood up for salat. So the Prophet (*sallAllahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) asked: Is there anybody to do good to him by joining him? At this a companion joined him (Ahmad).

Replacement if the Imam is Encumbered

If during the course of the performance of a salat the imam needs to move out, then he can make somebody else as imam in his place. The rest of salat will be completed by the next imam. For this the first imam will pick a worshipper from behind him and withdraw after putting him in his place.

Attendance of Women in Mosques

Women are permitted to join the congregation for performance of their salat. But they are forbidden from attendance with makeup and perfume. It is preferable for them to pray at home. Allah's Messenger (*sallAllahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said: «لَا تَمْنَعُوا إِمَاءَ اللَّهِ مَسَاجِدَ اللَّهِ» Don't stop the slave-girls of Allah from attending the houses of Allah but they should avoid applying perfume (Abu Dawood, Ahmad). It is permissible that womenfolk form their own congregations but in this case they are exempted from *adhan* and *iqamat*.

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