126348 - It is makrooh for the imam to single himself out in joint supplication to the exclusion of the people praying behind him

the question

If the imam prays for himself during congregational prayer, is it considered to be a betrayal of the people praying behind him? Is that permissible, or must we pray for the members of the congregation?.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

What is meant by the du'aa' in which the imam and the people praying behind him all take part in a congregational prayer is where the imam says the du’aa’, and the people behind him say ameen. This is the case in which it is makrooh for the imam to single out himself in du'aa' to the exclusion of the people praying behind him. That is because of the report narrated from Thawbaan (may Allaah be pleased with him), who said: The Messenger of Allaah (blessings and peace of Allaah be upon him) said: “There are three things which it is not permissible for anyone to do: a man should not lead people in prayer and single himself out for du'aa' to the exclusion of them, and if he does that then he has betrayed them; and he should not look into a house before asking permission, and if he does that then he has entered; and he should not pray when he needs to relieve himself until he has done so.”

Narrated by Abu Dawood (no. 90) and al-Tirmidhi (37); he said the hadeeth of Thawbaan is a hasan hadeeth.

This hadeeth was classed as weak by Ibn Khuzaymah, Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah, Ibn al-Qayyim and others.

See Da’eef Abi Dawood by Shaykh al-Albaani (12, 13).

If we assume that the hadeeth is sound, then what it means is what we mentioned at the beginning: singling himself out for mention in a du'aa' which he shares with the people praying behind him.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allaah have mercy on him) was asked about the words of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allaah be upon him): “a man should not lead people in prayer and single himself out for du'aa' to the exclusion of them, and if he does that then he has betrayed them” -- is it mustahabb for the imam, every time he offers du'aa' to Allaah, glorified and exalted be He, to include the people praying behind him? Is it related in a saheeh report from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allaah be upon him) that he singled himself out in du'aa' during his prayer to the exclusion of them? How can we reconcile between these two?

He answered:

It is proven in al-Saheehayn from Abu Hurayrah (may Allaah be pleased with him) that he said to the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allaah be upon him): When you are silent between the takbeer and recitation, what do you say? He said: “Allaahumma baa’id bayni wa bayna khataayaaya kama baa’adta bayna al-mashriqi wa’l-maghrib. Allaahumma naqqini min khataayaaya kama yunaqqa al-thawb al-abyad min al-danas. Allaahumma ighsilni min khataayaaya bi’l-thalji wa’l-maa’i wa’l-barad (O Allaah, put a great distance between me and my sins, as great as the distance You have made between the East and the West. O Allaah, cleanse me of sin as a white garment is cleansed from filth. O Allaah, wash away my sins with snow and water and hail).”

This is a saheeh hadeeth which clearly states that he prayed for himself alone when he was acting as an imam. Similarly, there is the hadeeth of ‘Ali concerning the opening du’aa’, which begins: “ I turn my face to the One Who created the heavens and the earth”, in which it says, “forgive me for no one forgives sin except You, and guide me to the best of attitudes for the one guides to the best of them except You, and divert bad deeds from me, for no one diverts bad deeds from me except You.”

Similarly, it is proven in al-Saheeh that he used to say after raising his head from bowing: “No one can withhold what You have given, and no one can give what You have withheld.”

All these hadeeths, which refer to his du'aa' after the tashahhud, are narrated in the singular, such as his words: “Allaahumma inni a’oodhu bika min ‘adhaabi jahannam wa min ‘adhaab il-qabri wa min fitnat il-mahyaa wa’l-mamaat wa min sharri fitnat il-maseeh il-dajjaal (O Allaah, I seek refuge with You from the torment of Hell and from the torment of the grave and from the trials of life and death and from the evil of the trial of the Dajjaal).”.”

the same applies to his du'aa' between the two prostrations, which is mentioned in al-Sunan in the hadeeth of Hudhayfah and in the hadeeth of Ibn ‘Abbaas, and in both cases the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allaah be upon him) was leading the prayer, on one occasion leading Hudhayfah and on the second occasion leading Ibn ‘Abbaas..

According to the hadeeth of Hudhayfah, he said, “Lord forgive me, Lord forgive me,” and according to the hadeeth of Ibn Abbaas, he said: “Forgive me, have mercy on me, guide me, pardon me, and grant me provision” and so on.

These hadeeths which appear in the books of Saheeh and Sunan, indicate that in these places the imam may say du’aa’ in the singular. Similarly, scholars are agreed on that, as they were of the view that this type of du'aa' is prescribed.

Once this is understood, it will become clear that what is meant in the hadeeth mentioned -- if it is sound -- is the du'aa' in which the person praying behind the imam says ameen, such as du’aa’ al-Qunoot, when if the person says ameen then he is saying du’aa’. Allaah, may He be glorified and exalted, said to Moosa and Haroon (interpretation of the meaning: “Verily, the invocation of you both is accepted” [Yoonus 10:89]. And one of them was sayng the du’aa’ and the other was saying ameen.

If the person praying behind the imam is saying ameen to the du'aa' of the imam, then the imam should offer the du’aa’ in the plural form, as in the du’aa’ of al-Faatihah, “Guide us to the Straight Way”. The person praying behind the imam of says ameen because he believes that the imam is

offering du’aa’ for both of them together, so if he does not do that then the imam has betrayed the person praying behind him.

As for the places in which each person offers supplication on his own behalf, as in the opening du’aa’, following the tashahhud and so on, where the person praying behind the imam is offering supplication for himself, then the imam may offer supplication for himself. End quote.

Majmoo’ al-Fataawa (23/116-118)

Al-Iraqi (may Allaah have mercy on him) said:

Part of the etiquette of supplication is that the one who offers du'aa' in a gathering should not single himself out for du'aa' among them, or single himself and some of them out but not all of them. All the members of the congregation should be included in the du’aa’ by the imam, so he should not single himself out to the exclusion of the people praying behind him, because of the report narrated by Abu Dawood and al-Tirmidhi from the hadeeth of Thawbaan (may Allaah have mercy on him) who said: The Messenger of Allaah (blessings and peace of Allaah be upon him) said: “A man should not lead people in prayer and single himself out for du'aa' to the exclusion of them, and if he does that then he has betrayed them.” al-Tirmidhi said: it is a hasan hadeeth.

The apparent meaning is that this is to be understood as referring to that in which the people praying behind him do not take part in saying the du’aa’, such as du’aa’ al-Qunoot and the like. As for that which everybody says, such as saying between the two prostrations, “O Allaah forgive me and have mercy on me and guide me,” each of the people praying behind him says this du’aa’, so there is nothing wrong in that case with saying it in the singular. But some of the people praying behind him may omit that because they forget or they do not know this is mustahabb. In that case the imam should make the pronoun plural. End quote.

Tarh al-Tathreeb (2/136-137)

And Allaah knows best.