67934 - Can You Pray Sitting Down?

the question

In order for a person to be allowed to sit during the obligatory prayers, is it essential that he should be completely unable to stand? Or is it also permissible for a person who is able to stand, but it is possible that it may lead to harm? What is the definition of the inability that makes it permissible to sit during the prayer and not stand, without that incurring sin or punishment?

Summary of answer

It is not permissible for you to pray sitting down in obligatory prayers unless you are unable to stand, or standing is very difficult for you, or you are sick and there is the fear that your sickness may become worse if you pray standing up. It is permissible to pray sitting down in optional prayers, even without an excuse, but the reward of the one who sits in that case is half the reward of one who stands

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Can you pray sitting down in obligatory prayer?

Standing during prayer is an obligatory pillar which cannot be omitted. It is not permissible for anyone to pray sitting unless he is unable to stand, or standing is very difficult for him, or he is sick and there is the fear that his sickness may become worse if he prays standing up.

That also includes a paralyzed person who is unable to stand at all, and an elderly person for whom it is difficult to stand, and a sick person who will be harmed by standing because it will either make his sickness worse or delay his recovery.

The basic principle concerning that is the report narrated by Al-Bukhari (1050) from `Imran ibn Husayn (may Allah be pleased with him) who said: I had haemorrhoids, and I asked the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) about praying. He said: “Pray standing; if you cannot, then sitting; and if you cannot, then lying on your side.”

Ibn Qudamah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

“If standing will make a sick person’s sickness worse, then he should pray sitting. The scholars unanimously agreed that a person who cannot stand may pray sitting. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said to `Imran ibn Husayn: “Pray standing; if you cannot, then sitting; and if you cannot, then lying on your side.”

It was also narrated by Al-Bukhari, Abu Dawud and An-Nasa’i (may Allah have mercy on them), who added: “If you cannot, then lying on your back, and Allah does not burden any soul beyond its scope.”

Anas (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) fell from a horse and was injured on his right side. We entered upon him to visit him and the time for prayer came. He prayed sitting and we prayed sitting behind him. (Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim)

If he is able to stand but he fears that his sickness will be made worse, or that his recovery may be delayed, or it is too hard for him to stand, then he may pray sitting down. Something similar was said by Malik and Is-haq (may Allah have mercy on them). Maymun ibn Mahran (may Allah have mercy on him) said: If he is unable to stand for any worldly purpose, then let him pray sitting. Something similar was narrated from Ahmad.

i.e., if he is able to stand for some worldly purpose then he must also pray standing and it is not permissible for him to pray sitting.

Then Ibn Qudamah (may Allah have mercy on him) said: But Allah says (interpretation of the meaning): “[He] has not laid upon you in religion any hardship” [Al-Hajj 22:78]. Obliging a person

to stand in this case is hardship. And the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) sat when he had been injured on his right side, although it appears that he was not completely unable to stand, but because of the difficulty involved in standing, this requirement was waived for him, and is waived for others too… If a person is able to stand by leaning on a stick or on the wall, or leaning on someone who is next to him, then he should do that, because he is able to stand without it causing him harm, so he must do it, just as he should if he is able to do it without these things."

An-Nawawi (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

"The scholars of the Ummah unanimously agreed that whoever is unable to stand in an obligatory prayer may pray sitting , and he does not have to repeat it. Our companions said: That does not detract from the reward that he would earn if he prayed standing, because he is excused. It is proven in Sahih Al-Bukhari that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "If a person is sick or is travelling, there is written for him (the reward) for the deeds he used to do when he was healthy or not travelling." Our companions said: For a person to be allowed to pray sitting down , it is not a condition that he should be completely unable to stand, and it is not enough if he finds it a little difficult; rather what counts is evident hardship. If he fears that it will be extremely difficult or it will make his sickness worse , etc, or a person who is travelling by boat fears that he may drown or become dizzy, then he may pray sitting, and he does not have to repeat it."(Al-Majmu`, 4/201)

Shaykh Ibn `Uthaymin (may Allah have mercy on him) explained the definition of the hardship which makes it permissible for a person not to stand in an obligatory prayer, and how to sit. He said: The definition of difficulty is that which takes away Khushu ` (proper focus and humility). Khushu` means that the heart is focused and at peace. If it is the case that standing will make a person severely anxious and have no peace of mind, and he is longing to get to the end of Al-Fatihah so that he can bow because he is finding it too hard to stand, then it is too difficult for him to pray standing, so he should pray sitting.

The same applies to one who is afraid and cannot pray standing, such as if he is praying behind a

wall, and there are enemies around watching out for him, and if he stands they will be able to see him from behind the wall, but if he sits he will be hidden from his enemies. In this case we say to him: Pray sitting.

This is indicated by the verse in which Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And if you fear (an enemy), perform prayer on foot or riding” [Al-Baqarah 2:239]

Allah has exempted the one who is afraid from bowing, prostrating and sitting, and the same applies to standing if he is afraid.

But how should he sit?

He should sit Mutarabbi`an on his buttocks, with each calf tucked up to the thigh. This is called tarabbu’, and in this posture the calf and thigh on the right and the left are all visible, whereas in the case of Iftirash the calf disappears beneath the thigh, but in tarabbu’ all four parts (thigh and calf on both sides) are visible.

Is it obligatory to sit like this?

No, it is Sunnah. If a person prays Muftarishan (in the posture called Iftirash) there is nothing wrong with it, and if he prays Muhtabiyan (sitting with one’s legs drawn up and wrapped in one's garment) there is nothing wrong with it, because of the general meaning of the words of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), “If he cannot, then sitting.” He did not explain how he is to sit.

If a person says, Is there any evidence to suggest that he should pray Mutarabbi`an? The answer is yes. `Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her) said: I saw the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) praying mutarabbi’an. And because that is usually more comfortable than Al-Iftirash. It is well known that standing needs a longer recitation than saying, “Rabb ighfir li warhamni (Lord forgive me and have mercy on me).” Hence it is better to sit mutarabbi’an. And there is another benefit, which is differentiating between sitting instead of standing, and sitting when one is supposed to sit; if we say that a person should sit Muftarishan during the time of

standing, there would be no difference between the way of sitting when one is supposed to and the way of sitting when it is done instead of standing.

If that is at the time of bowing, some of them say that it should be Muftarishan but the correct view is that it should be mutarabbi'an, because when bowing a person's leg and thigh are upright, and he only bends his back. So we say that if a person is mutarabbi'an he should remain like that and bow in that posture. This is the correct view concerning this matter." (Ash-Sharh Al-Mumti`, 4/461)

Can you pray sitting down in Sunnah prayers?

With regard to optional prayers, it is permissible to sit during them with no excuse, according to scholarly consensus, but the reward of the one who sits in that case is half the reward of one who stands, because of the report narrated by Muslim from `Abdullah ibn `Amr (may Allah be pleased with him) who said: I was told that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "The prayer of a man who sits is half of the prayer of a man who stands." I came to him and found him praying sitting. I put my hand on his head and he said, 'What is the matter, O `Abdullah ibn `Amr?" I said, "I was told, O Messenger of Allah, that you said, 'The prayer of a man who sits is half of the prayer of a man who stands,' and you are praying sitting." He said, "Yes, but I am not like one of you."

An-Nawawi (may Allah have mercy on him) said in Sharh Muslim: What this means is that the prayer of one who sits brings half the reward of the prayer of one who stands, which means that it is valid but brings a lesser reward. This Hadith is to be understood as referring to an optional prayer offered sitting when one is able to stand. This brings half the reward of a prayer offered standing. But if a person offers an optional prayer sitting down because he is unable to stand, then the reward is not reduced, rather it will be the same as one who stands. With regard to obligatory prayers, if a person prays sitting down when he is able to stand, his prayer is not valid and he will not be rewarded, rather he is sinning.

Our companions (the Shafi`is) said: If he believes that to be permissible, he is a disbeliever and is

subject to the rulings on apostates, just like one who regards Zina (adultery/fornication), Riba and other prohibited things to be permissible.

If a person offers an obligatory prayer sitting down because he is unable to stand, or lying down because he is unable to stand or sit, then his reward will be like that of one who stands, and it will not be reduced, according to the consensus of our companions. The Hadith about the reduction in reward is to be understood as applying to one who offers an optional prayer sitting when he is able to stand. This differentiation is our view and is the view of the majority concerning the meaning of this Hadith.

And he said: With regard to the words of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him): “I am not like any one of you,” according to our companions it is one of the unique characteristics of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) that his optional prayers offered sitting when he was able to stand were like his optional prayers offered standing, as an honour for him, as he was also singled out for other honours that are well known in the books of our companions and others. We have discussed them in the beginning of Tahdhib Al-Asma’ wal-Lughat. (Sharh Sahih Muslim, 6/14)

And Allah knows best.