83110 - What Happens If the Imam Invalidates His Wudu?

the question

An Imam led the people in prayer, and during the prayer he remembered that he had not done Wudu at all. He stopped praying and appointed one of the worshippers to lead the prayer for him. He had prayed one rak’ah, and the person whom he appointed came and continued the prayer from where the imam had left off. Then the imam went and did Wudu, and repeated the prayer. Is what this imam did correct, knowing that he follows the Shafa’i madhhab?.

Summary of answer

If an Imam breaks his Wudu during prayer, he must stop praying and appoint someone to continue leading the congregation. If the Imam does not appoint a successor, the congregation may choose a new Imam or complete the prayer individually.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

What Should Be Done If the Imam Breaks Wudu?

What the imam did, stopping his prayer and appointing one of the worshippers to lead the prayer for him, and what that person did by carrying on the prayer where the imam had left off, was all correct.

The view that it is permissible to appoint someone else to carry on in such situations is the view of the majority of Hanafi, Maliki and Shafi`i scholars, and it was narrated from Imam Ahmad.

Evidence from Hadith and the Prophet’s Practice

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

Our companions said: If the imam stops praying because of breaking Wudu deliberately or otherwise, or that happened before or he forgot or for some other reason, or for no reason, then there are two well-known opinions on appointing someone else to carry on leading the prayer.

The correct view is that it is permissible because of the authentic Hadith. It is proven in the books of Al-Bukhari and Muslim that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) went to reconcile between Banu `Amr ibn `Awf, and Abu Bakr led the people in prayer. Then the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) came during the prayer, and Abu Bakr moved backwards, and the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) took over leading the prayer. (End quote from *Al-Majmu`*, 4/138)

Shaykh Ibn `Uthaymin said in *Ash-Sharh Al-Mumti`* (4/243):

If the imam remembers during the prayer that he does not have Wudu, then he has to stop praying and appoint someone to complete the prayer, because when `Umar ibn Al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) was stabbed by Abu Lu’lu’ah Al-Majusi, after he had started to pray Fajr, `Umar took the hand of `Abd Ar-Rahman ibn `Awf and made him move forward. And he led them in a brief prayer. (Narrated by Al-Bukhari)

This was in the presence of the Companions (may Allah be pleased with them).

Should the Congregation Appoint a New Imam?

But if he does not do that and he moves away – i.e., without appointing someone to lead the prayer for him – then the members of the congregation have the choice between making one of their number move forward to complete the prayer with them, or completing the prayer individually. (End quote)

Check the answers provided for additional information: (85011, 141613, 145834, 129666, 9023, 65731)

And Allah knows best.