101766 - He delays coming to pray in congregation lest he be asked to lead the prayer

the question

I am a religious man, I love to pray. But sometimes I go to the masjid late; fearing that I will lead the congregation. I fear leading them especially in the jahri (loud) prayers. Will I be sinful if I do not lead them, and if I intentionally go late? Is there any treatment to get rid of this fear and be able to lead them, although I do not fear when I pray alone?.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Hastening to join the congregation and coming early to the mosque are virtuous deeds which many people neglect and fall short in. When the believer tastes the sweetness of faith and feels delight in worship, he can hardly wait to hear the call to prayer and go to the mosque. Indeed you will see him hastening and rushing, and the time for prayer does not begin without him longing for it. The Prophet’s description applies to him, as one of the seven whom Allah will shade with His shade on the Day when there is no shade but His: he is the man whose heart is attached to the mosque.

Undoubtedly coming early to congregational prayers and being keen to be one of the first ones there is a sign of respect and eagerness for this ritual, and it is also indicative of a person’s righteousness, religious commitment and piety. Sufyaan al-Thawri said: Your coming to the prayer before the iqaamah is a sign of respect for the prayer."(Fath al-Bari 3/533).

Ibraaheem al-Taymi said: If you see a man being careless about the first takbeer, then wash your hands of him."(Siyar A’laam al-Nubala’ 5/84).

Wakee’ ibn al-Jarraah used to say: Whoever does not catch up with the first takbeer, do not hope

for any good from him."(Narrated by al-Bayhaqi in Shu’ab al-Eeman 3/74).

Some of the salaf regarded coming to the mosque after the adhaan as a shortcoming, and that it was better to go to the mosque before the call to prayer.

Sufyaan ibn ‘Uyaynah said:

Do not be like the bad slave who does not come until he is called. Come to prayer before the call is given.

"(Al-Tabsirah by Ibn al-Jawzi 131).

We will remind ourselves and you of some of the virtues of coming early for prayer in congregation and hastening to do that.

1- Ibn al-Mundhir narrated – as reported in al-Durr al-Manthoor (2/314) – from Anas ibn Maalik (may Allah be pleased with him) about the meaning of the verse (interpretation of the meaning): “Race with one another in hastening towards forgiveness from your Lord” [Al-Hadeed 57:21], that it refers to the first takbeer. This was narrated by some of the mufassireen from Mak-hool and Sa’eed ibn Jubayr among the Taabi’een.

2- ‘Abd al-Razzaaq narrated in al-Musannaf (1/528) via a saheeh isnaad from Anas (may Allah be pleased with him) that he said: Whoever does not miss the first rak’ah of prayer for forty days, he will be saved from two things: he will be saved from the fire and will be saved from hypocrisy.”

And it was narrated that Meetham, one of the companions of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: I heard that the angel comes with his banner accompanying the first one who comes to the mosque, and he stays with him until he goes back, and he enters his home with him, carrying the banner.

Narrated by Ibn Abi ‘Aasim in al-Ahaad wa’l-Mathaani (5/183); classed as saheeh by Ibn Hajar in al-Isaabah (6/148) and by al-Albani in Saheeh al-Targheeb (1/242).

Thirdly:

By coming early for prayer in congregation you will earn the reward of waiting for the prayer and of staying in the mosque, and the du`a of the angels. Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “When he enters the mosque, he is in a state of prayer so long as the prayer is what is keeping him there, and the angels send blessings on any one of you so long as he remains in the place where he prayed, saying, ‘O Allah, forgive him, O Allah, have mercy on him…’” Narrated by al-Bukhari (477) and Muslim (649).

It also brings the virtue of praying in the first row, and of saying Ameen with the imam. It says in the saheeh hadeeth: “When the imam says ‘Ameen’ then say ‘Ameen,’ for if a person’s saying Ameen coincides with that of the angels, his previous sins will be forgiven.” Narrated by al-Bukhari (780) and Muslim (410).

The one who comes early to pray in congregation can also make good use of the time between the adhaan and iqaamah by offering regular Sunnah prayers or praying tahiyat al-masjid (two rak’ahs to greet the mosque), and he can spend the time in saying du`a and seeking the good of this world and the Hereafter, because the time between the adhaan and the iqaaamah is one of the times when du`as are answered.

Fourthly:

In the practice of the salaf there are examples which stir the heart and make one resolute, and call everyone who is negligent or falling short to feel shy before the Lord of the Worlds, as righteous people are competing to attain reward whilst he is negligent about reward.

Ibn Shaheen narrated in his book al-Targheeb fi Fadaa’il al-A’maal wa Thawaab dhaalika (no. 107) from al-Hasan that Anas (may Allah be pleased with him) said:

The companions of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), including Hudhayfah, gathered together and a man said: I would not like to miss the first takbeer with the imam even if I were to have fifty sheep. Another man said: I would not like to miss (the first takbeer) with the imam even if I were to have one hundred sheep. Another man said: I would not like to miss (the

first takbeer) with the imam even if I were to have everything on which the sun rises. Another man said: I would not like to miss (the first takbeer) with the imam even if I prayed from ‘Isha’ until Fajr.

It was narrated from Abu Harmalah that Ibn al-Musayyab said: I have not missed the first takbeer for fifty years, and I have not looked at a man’s back whilst praying for fifty years. End quote. Al-Siyar (4/30), i.e., he used to pray in the front row.

Fifthly:

There is the fear for the one who is always late in coming to pray in congregation and who neglects the virtue of the first takbeer that Allah may delay reward, virtue and goodness for him, until he is content to come late, so his reward will be akin to his action.

Some of the scholars said, commenting on the words of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), “Come forward and follow me (in the prayer), and let those who are behind you follow you, for people will keep moving to the back until Allah puts them back (away from His mercy or Paradise)” (narrated by Muslim, 438), that what is meant is the one who keeps away from the first row and the first takbeer.

See also the answer to question no. 34852.

Sixthly:

I think that from the above you can understand the mistake that you are making by deliberately coming late to prayers in congregation, and that the fear which is making you do that is something that comes from the shaytaan, who wants to deprive you of reward and virtue.

We understand that the position of imam is a position that may make one nervous, but that should not make you fall short with regard to it. If you go to the mosque and you are the most qualified to lead the people in prayer, then you should go forward and not hold back, because the sin will be on you if the people appoint someone who does not recite al-Faatihah properly or does not do all the pillars or essential parts of the prayer properly.

We assure you that the fear which you feel when leading the prayer is a temporary fear which will soon go away when you get used to leading the prayers. You have to put up with the hardship at the beginning, then Allah will open the door to goodness for you as a reward for your patience and forbearance.

You can seek help to reduce the fear that you feel, by trying to do the following things:

1 – Review thoroughly the verses that you want to recite in prayer, because this will make you more confident and that will dispel the fear and nervousness.

2 – Get used to reciting the prayers in a loud voice at home, by praying qiyaam and the naafil prayers at night. This will get you used to acting as an imam and reciting out loud.

3 – Lead people in praying the prayers in which Quran is recited silently, because getting used to standing in the imam’s place will reduce the fear of standing before the people in the prayers in which Quran is recited out loud.

4 – Try to convince yourself that this matter is easy, and how some of the children of the Sahaabah used to lead the people in their local mosques, and all that is required is a simple recitation, proper focus, peace of mind and submission before Allah the Lord of the Worlds.

5 – Do not forget to ask Allah to help you to do good, and to make it easy to do righteous deeds.

We ask Allah to help us and you and to grant us the victory of attaining eternal bliss.

And Allah knows best.