11483 - Dispute in the mosque about making prayers long or short

the question

We have a mosque in the Islamic centre, and there has arisen a dispute among the worshippers about making the prayers long or short. I hope that you can inform us of what is said in the sharee'ah about this matter.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

It was narrated that Jaabir (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: "Mu'aadh led his companions in praying 'isha' and he made it lengthy. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: 'Do you want to be a cause of fitnah? When you lead the people in prayer, recite Wa'l-shamsi wa duhaahaa (al-Shams 91), Sabbih isma rabbik al-A'laa (al-A'laa 87), Iqraa' bismi Rabbik (al-'Alaq 96), and Wa'l-layli idha yaghshaa (al-Layl 92).'" (Agreed upon; this version narrated by Muslim).

Al-Haafiz said: Whoever follows the way of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) by being brief and complete, no one will complain that he is taking too long. The description of the prayer of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) is well-known. Therefore the briefness in prayer which is enjoined is something which is relative, and must be measured against what the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) did, persisted in and enjoined upon others, not the desires of the members of the congregation. It was narrated in al-Saheehayn that Anas said: "I never prayed behind anyone who made the prayer more brief and more perfect than the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him)."

He said in al-Mubdi': They evaluated the prayer of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and his sujood lasted the length of time it takes to say Subhaan rabbi al-A'laa ten times. His rukoo' was of a similar length. And he [the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him)] said: "pray as you have seen me praying."

Shaykh al-Islam [Ibn Taymiyah] said: he (the imaam) does not have the right to make the prayer longer than what is prescribed. He should usually do what the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) usually did, and make it longer or shorter according to the circumstances, just as the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) did.

Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr said: For imaams to keep the prayer brief is a matter on which there is scholarly consensus that it is mustahabb, as long as he meets the condition of making it complete.

The hadeeth of Jaabir quoted above indicates that reciting the soorahs mentioned or similar soorahs is what is considered to be moderate in prayer. What is prescribed is for the rukoo’ and sujood to be of similar length to the recitation.

And Allaah knows best.