232860 - Ruling on the worshipper doing the actions of prayer at the same time as the imam

the question

I was praying behind the imam in Maghrib prayer, and when he rose from bowing, I rushed to rise from bowing and I do not know whether I did that at the same time as him or shortly after him. Hence I do not know whether the prayer was valid or not, because I read on your website that this is makrooh, as the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) forbade that. But if the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) forbade it, how can it be makrooh? Isn't it more likely that it would be haram? I hope that you can clarify.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

Your prayer is valid:

1 –

because bowing or prostrating at the same time as the imam is makrooh, and it does not invalidate the prayer, as we have explained in fatwa no. 33790.

2 –

what appears to be the case from what you say is that you were following the imam, and you started to rise from bowing after the imam began to rise, so you were still basically following him, and you did not go ahead of him or do the act at the same time as him. Therefore uncertainty in this case does not count for anything, because certainty cannot be dispelled by uncertainty.

Secondly:

The basic principle with regard to things forbidden by the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) is that they are to be understood as meaning that the thing forbidden is haram.

Ibn an-Najjaar (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

If it says that something is forbidden (in a text of the Quran or Sunnah), then it is understood to be haram according to the four imams and others. Ash-Shaafa'i (may Allah have mercy on him) emphatically rejected the view of those who say that it means it is makrooh.

End quote from Sharh al-Kawkab al-Muneer (3/83)

This is applicable whether the prohibition is mentioned in the texts of the Quran or in the texts of the Sunnah.

That is because Allah, may He be exalted, has emphasised that it is obligatory to shun and refrain from that which the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) forbids.

Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

"And whatsoever the Messenger (Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)) gives you, take it, and whatsoever he forbids you, abstain (from it), and fear Allah. Verily, Allah is Severe in punishment"

[al-Hashr 59:7].

That is because taking the fact that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) forbade something as proof that it is haram is the way of the believers, namely the Sahaabah and Taabi'een.

But the wording of something being forbidden may be regarded as meaning that it is makrooh, and not haram, if there is proof to that effect. There may be many indications that the prohibition

mentioned in a text means that something is makrooh rather than haram.

Thirdly:

With regard to the prohibition mentioned in the hadith of Abu Hurayrah, in which it tells us that the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “The imam has only been appointed to be followed, so when he says takbeer then say takbeer, and do not say takbeer until after he has said takbeer; and when he bows then bow, and do not bow until after he has bowed; … and when he prostrates then prostrate, and do not prostrate until he has prostrated…” Narrated by Abu Dawood (603); classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Irwa’ al-Ghaleel (2/121)

Some of the scholars looked at the wording of the hadith and understood the prohibition according to the basic principle, i.e., that it indicates that it is haram. Hence they said: It is obligatory to follow the imam, and it is haram to go ahead of him, and it is also haram to do the actions at the same time as him.

Shaykh Muhammad ibn ‘Ali ibn Adam al-Ethiopi said:

Al-‘Allaamah ash-Shawkaani (may Allah have mercy on him) said, commenting on the hadith of Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him), in which it says: “When he says takbeer then say takbeer”:

This indicates that the worshipper who is praying behind the imam should not start to say the takbeer until after the imam has finished saying it. The same applies to bowing, rising from bowing, and prostrating. This is also indicated by his words in the second report: “Do not say takbeer, do not bow, and do not prostrate”, and by all the other reports which mention this prohibition or forbidding.

There was a difference of opinion concerning that, as to whether it is obligatory or recommended. What appears to be the case is that it is obligatory, without differentiating between the opening takbeer (takbeerat al-ihram) and others. End quote.

Al-Jaami‘ said:

What ash-Shawkaani said about the command meaning that it is obligatory is the view that was regarded as most likely to be correct by as-San'aani in his 'Iddah, vol. 2, p. 241. It is also more likely to be correct in my view. So it is haram for the worshipper to go ahead of his imam, or do the actions at the same time as him, because the clear prohibition mentioned above in the report of Abu Dawood indicates that it is haram. And Allah knows best.

End quote from Sharh Sunan an-Nasaa'i (10/112-113)

Most of the scholars said that the prohibition on doing actions of the prayer at the same time as the imam indicates that it is only makrooh.

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

What is recommended is for the worshipper to start doing the actions of prayer, such as moving up and down, after the imam has done them, and it is makrooh for him to do them with the imam, according to most of the scholars.

End quote from al-Mughni (2/208)

Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymeen (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Doing the actions of prayer at the same time as the imam is makrooh, and it was said that it is contrary to the Sunnah, but the more correct view is that it is makrooh.

Examples of doing things at the same time as the imam include:

when the imam says "Allahu akbar" for rukoo' (bowing), and starts to bow down, and you and the imam bow down at the same time. This is makrooh because the Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "When he bows then bow, and do not bow until he has bowed."

In the case of sujood (prostration), when the imam says takbeer for prostration, and you prostrate and you and the imam reach the floor at the same time. This is makrooh because the Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "Do not prostrate until he (the imam) has prostrated."

Al-Bara’ ibn ‘Aazib said: After the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said “Sami‘a Allahu liman hamidah (Allah hears those who praise Him)” [and we had all risen from bowing], not one of us would bend his back (in order to prostrate] until the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) went down in prostration, then we would go down in prostration after him.

End quote from ash-Sharh al-Mumti‘ (4/189).

Perhaps the indication that the prohibition mentioned in the text – concerning the one who does the actions of the prayer at the same time as his imam – is makrooh and not haram, in their view, is two things:

1.

That the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) denounced in the strongest terms only the one who goes ahead of the imam.

It was narrated from Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Does not one of you fear, if he raises his head before the imam, that Allah may turn his head into the head of a donkey, or that Allah may change his form into the form of a donkey?” Narrated by al-Bukhaari (691) and Muslim (427). No such stern denunciation came concerning doing the actions of prayer at the same time as the imam, so the ruling thereon is less strict.

Ibn al-Mulaqqin (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The apparent meaning of the hadith indicates that it is haram to go ahead of the imam and the implicit meanings is that it is permissible to do the actions of prayer at the same time as the imam. However, there is no doubt that it is makrooh to do so, and it causes one to miss out on the virtue of praying in congregation.

End quote from al-I‘laam bi Fawaa’id ‘Umdat al-Ahkaam (2/552)

Some of the scholars objected to understanding this hadith as meaning that it is permissible to do

the actions of prayer at the same time as the imam; rather when taken as a whole, the hadiths indicate that this is not permissible.

Al-'Iraaqi (may Allah have mercy on him) said: The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said, in the hadith of Abu Hurayrah that was narrated by Abu Dawood – "When he says takbeer then say takbeer, and do not say takbeer until he has said takbeer"; and concerning bowing: "Do not bow until he has bowed"; and concerning prostration: "Do not prostrate until he has prostrated" – what this additional material that was reported by Abu Dawood indicates is that it is not possible that doing the actions with the imam could be permissible

End quote from Tarh at-Tathreeb (2/330)

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

Abu Dawood added: "and do not bow until he has bowed, and do not prostrate until he has prostrated." This is a good addition, which rules out the possibility that what was meant by his words "when he says takbeer then say takbeer" was doing it at the same time as the imam.

But this report of Abu Dawood clearly rules out doing these actions before the imam or at the same time as him. And Allah knows best.

End quote from Fath al-Baari (2/179)

In 'Umdat al-Qaari (5/217) it says:

The report of Abu Dawood clearly rules out doing any of (the actions of prayer) before the imam or at the same time as him. End quote.

2.

Perhaps the majority regarded the reason for this prohibition as being the fact that it is obligatory to follow the imam and not differ from him, as is explained at the beginning of the hadith of Abu Hurayrah quoted above. It was also narrated by al-Bukhaari (722) and Muslim (414) as follows: The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "The imam is appointed to be followed,

so do not differ from him.”

The precise meaning of being an imam is that the imam is to be ahead of those who are praying behind him both in the place where he stands and in his actions and words.

If a person bows at the same time as the imam, for example, even though he has not properly followed the imam, he has not completely abandoned the idea of following, which is in contrast to the case of one who bows before the imam. The latter has done an action that is diametrically opposed to following the imam.

Hence doing actions at the same time as the imam is makrooh because it detracts from the proper meaning of following the imam, which is required, but it is not entirely contrary to it, unlike doing actions before the imam, which is haram because it is entirely contrary to the idea of following the imam, which is obligatory.

And Allah knows best.