65685 - Is it permissible to make a player-place in which women will be in front of the imam?

the question

What is the ruling on making a place for women to pray (Taraweeh) in front of the mosque (i.e., the prayer-place will be in front of the imam and they will be separated by the wall of the mosque)? There is no other place for the women to pray.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

It is better for a woman to pray in her house. It was narrated from Umm Humayd, the wife of Abu Humayd al-Saa'idi, that she came to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and said: "O Messenger of Allaah, I love to pray with you." He said: "I know that you love to pray with me, but your praying in your room is better for you than your praying in your house, and your praying in your house is better for you than your praying in your courtyard, and your praying in your courtyard is better for you than your praying in the mosque of your people, and your praying in the mosque of your people is better for you than your praying in my mosque." So she gave orders that a 'mosque' be built for her in the innermost and darkest part of her house, and she used to pray there until she met Allaah (i.e., died).

Narrated by Ahmad, 26550; classed as saheeh by Ibn Khuzaymah, 1689; classed as hasan by al-Albaani in Saheeh al-Targheeb, 340.

'Abd al-'Azeem Abaadi (may Allaah have mercy on him) said:

The reason here is that women's praying at home is better so as to avoid fitnah, and that was more strongly emphasized after the tabarruj (wanton display) that women introduced.

‘Awn al-Ma’bood, 1/193.

However, if a woman wants to go to the mosque to pray, it is not permissible for anyone to stop her, if she adheres to the conditions stipulated for her to go out, because the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “Do not stop your womenfolk from going to the mosques if they ask you for permission.” Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 865; Muslim, 442.

See also question no. 9232.

Secondly:

The basic principle concerning prayer in congregation is that the members of the congregation should be behind the imam. The scholars differed concerning the ruling on one who prays in front of the imam. The most correct of the views is that it is permissible when there is an excuse.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allaah have mercy on him) was asked:

Does prayer count if one prays in front of the imam or behind him in the mosque with a barrier between them, or not?

He replied:

If a person prays in front of the imam, there are three scholarly views:

1 – The prayer is valid in all cases, even though it may be makrooh. This is the well-known view of the madhhab of Maalik, and is the former view of al-Shaafa’i.

2 – It is not valid in all cases, as is the view of Abu Haneefah, and of al-Shaafa’i and Ahmad according to the well-known views of their madhhabs.

3 – It is valid if there is an excuse, but not otherwise, such as if there is crowding and a person cannot offer Friday prayer or the funeral prayer except by standing in front of the imam. In that case, praying in front of the imam is better than not praying at all.

This is the view of a number of scholars, and it is an opinion in the madhhab of Ahmad and others. It is the fairest view and is the most likely to be correct, because the most that can be said about not standing in front of the imam is that it is one of the obligatory duties of praying in congregation, and all the obligatory duties may be waived when there is an excuse, even if they are essential parts of the prayer. So it is more appropriate to say that the obligatory duties that are specific to prayer in congregation prayer may be waived. Hence things that the worshipper is unable to do are waived in his case, such as standing, reciting, clothing himself, purity (tahaarah) and so on.

In the case of prayer in congregation, he may sit in the odd-numbered rak'ahs for the purpose of following the imam (i.e., he may sit after the first and third rak'ahs – this applies to one who joins the prayer late, after one rak'ah). If he does that deliberately when he is praying alone, his prayer is invalid. If he catches up with the imam when he is prostrating or sitting, then he should say takbeer and prostrate with him or sit with him, in order to follow him, even though that will not count for him. And he should do the prostration of forgetfulness with the imam, even though he is not the one who forgot.

Also, during the fear prayer, he does not have to face towards the qiblah, and he does many actions, and he leaves the imam before the salaam, and he makes up the first rak'ah before the imam says the salaam, and he does other things that are done in order to be part of the congregation. But if he does them with no excuse, then his prayer is invalid.

The point here is that one prays in congregation according to what one is able to do. If the member of the congregation cannot follow the imam except by standing in front of him, the most that can be said is that he has not stood where he should in order to be part of the congregation, and this is less serious than other options.

The same applies to praying behind a row standing alone. If a person cannot find someone to join him, and he did not pull someone out of the row to stand with him, then he should pray standing alone behind the row; he should not leave the congregation. Similarly, if a woman cannot find another woman to stand with her, then she should stand on her own behind the row. This is

according to the consensus of the imams, because standing with another person in a row is enjoined when it is possible, not when it is not possible.

Al-Fataawa al-Kubra, 2/331-333

Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen (may Allaah have mercy on him) was asked: Is it permissible for a member of the congregation to stand in front of the imam?

He replied:

The correct view is that it is obligatory for the imam to stand in front, and it is not permissible for a member of the congregation to stand in front of the imam, because the imaam is supposed to be an example and his place is in front of the members of the congregation, so it is not permissible for a person to pray in front of the imam. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) used to pray in front of the Sahaabah (may Allaah be pleased with them), and based on that, the prayer of those who pray in front of the imam does not count, and they have to repeat their prayer. But some scholars made an exception in cases of necessity, such as if the mosque is small and there is not enough room for everyone; in that case they may pray to the right and the left of the imam, and in front of him and behind him, because of necessity. End quote.

Majmoo’ Fataawa Ibn ‘Uthaymeen, 13/44

Based on this, you should try hard to make the place for women behind the imam; if there is no place and you cannot bring the imam forward, then there is no sin in it, in sha Allaah.

And Allaah knows best.