

Dr. Yusuf Al-Qaradawi's Comments on

Females Leading Co-gender Friday Prayers and on Women Leading Other Women

Question

In an unprecedented step in history, a Muslim woman announced that she will lead a public, mixed-gender Friday Prayer on March 18, 2005, in New York City. Could we please have the opinion of Dr. Yusuf Al-Qaradawi on this issue, as he is known for his moderate opinions?

Answer

Throughout Muslim history it has never been heard of a woman leading the Friday prayer or delivering the Friday sermon, even during the era when a woman, Shagarat Ad-Durr, was ruling the Muslims in Egypt during the Mamluk period.

It is established that leadership in prayer in Islam is to be for men. People praying behind an imam are to follow him in the movements of prayer, bowing, prostrating, etc., and listen attentively to him reciting the Quran in Prayer.

Prayer in Islam is an act that involves different movements of the body; it does not consist merely of saying supplications as it is the case with prayer in Christianity. Moreover, it requires concentration of the mind, humility, and complete submission of the heart to Almighty Allah. Hence, it does not befit a woman, whose structure of physique naturally arouses instincts in men, to lead men in Prayer and stand in front of them, for this may divert the men's attention from concentrating in the prayer and the spiritual atmosphere required.

Islam is a religion that takes into account the different aspects, material or spiritual, of man's character. It does not treat people as super angels; it admits that they are humans with instincts and desires. So it is wise of Islam to lay down for them the rulings that avert them succumbing to their desires, especially during acts of worship where spiritual uplifting is required.

Hence, it is to avoid the stirring the instincts of men that the Shari`ah dictates that only men can call for prayer and lead people in the Prayer, and that women's rows in prayer be behind the men. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) was reported to have said, "The women's best rows (in Prayer) are the last ones, and the worst of theirs are the first ones, while the men's best rows (in Prayer) are the first ones and the worst of theirs are the last ones."

Rulings pertaining to leadership in prayer are established by evidence of authentic hadiths as well as the scholarly unanimity of Muslims. They are based on religious teachings, not on social customs as it is has been claimed.

The different juristic schools agree that it is not permissible for women to lead men in the obligatory prayer, though some scholars voice the opinion that the woman who is well-versed in the Quran may lead the members of her family, including men, in prayer on the basis that there is no room for stirring instincts in this case.

However, there is no single Muslim jurist ever heard to have agreed to the woman's leading people in the Friday Prayer or delivering its sermon, *though if we review the religious texts pertaining to the rulings of Prayer, we will not find a text that states pointblank that women are not permitted to lead people in prayer or deliver the Friday sermon.*

There is only one hadith, which is not well-authenticated, reported by Ibn Majah on the authority of Jabir ibn `Abdullah in this connection; it is to the effect that: "A woman may not lead a man in prayer, nor may a Bedouin lead a believer of the Muhajirun or a corrupt person lead a committed Muslim in prayer." The eminent scholars of Hadith say that the chain of reporters of this hadith is extremely weak, and hence, it is not to be taken as evidence in the question in hand.

Furthermore, there is another hadith that contradicts this one. It is reported by Imam Ahmad, Abu Dawud, and others on the authority of Umm Waraqah, who said that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) appointed a muezzin for her, and ordered her to lead the members of her household (who included both men and women) in prayer.

Though scholars of Hadith also regard the chain of reporters of this hadith as weak, yet it has to do with a special case in which a woman well-versed in the Quran led the members of her family in prayer where usually would be no place for arousing instincts among them.

Furthermore, Ad-Darqatani reported that the order the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) gave to Umm Waraqah here was that she lead the women among her household in Prayer. Commenting on this report of Ad-Darqatani, Ibn Qudamah said in his book *Al-Mughni*, "This addition of Ad-Darqatani must be accepted even if it had not been mentioned pointblank in the hadith in question. It is to be logically deduced from the hadith that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) ordered Umm Waraqah to lead the women of her household in obligatory Prayer, for (according to the hadith) he (peace and blessings be upon him) appointed her a muezzin, and the Adhan is practiced only in the obligatory Prayer; besides, there is no scholarly disagreement regarding it being impermissible for women to lead men in obligatory prayers."

Ibn Qudamah then said, "Even had Umm Waraqah been ordered to lead both men and women of her household in Prayer, this would have been peculiar to her, for no other woman was appointed a muezzin (by the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him) as was the case with her, and hence, it would have followed from this that leading men of her household in Prayer had been peculiar to her." Ibn Qudamah, moreover, supported his view by saying that since women are not permitted to call the Adhan for prayer for men, they are also not allowed to lead them in prayer.

But I do not agree with Ibn Qudamah that it is probable that the permission given to Umm Waraqah to lead her household, including men, in prayer was peculiar to her. I believe that any woman well-versed in the Quran like Umm Waraqah may lead her family members, including men, in both obligatory and supererogatory prayers, especially the Tarawih Prayers.

There is a dependable opinion in the Hanbali School of jurisprudence that says that women can lead men in the Tarawih Prayers. Az-Zarkashei said in this respect, "According to Imam Ahmad and the majority of his followers, it is permissible for women to lead men in the Tarawih Prayers." This has been also reported by Ibn Hubairah to have been held by Imam

Ahmad (Al-Ifsah `an Ma`ani As-Sihah, vol. 1, p. 145). But it is to be kept in mind that this applies only to women who are well-versed in the Quran when it comes to leading their household and relatives in prayer. Moreover, some scholars see that this is confined to women who are advanced in age.

A Woman Leading Other Women in Prayer:

Regarding a woman leading ONLY women in Prayer, there are a number of hadiths such as these:

The hadith of `Aishah and Umm Salamah (may Allah be pleased with them). `Abdur-Raziq (5086), Ad-Daraqutni (1/404) and Al-Bayhaqi (3/131) reported from the narration of Abu Hazim Maysarah ibn Habib from Raitah Al-Hanafiyah from `Aishah that she led women in Prayer and stood among them in an obligatory Prayer. Moreover, Ibn Abi Shaybah (2/89) reported from the chain of narrators of Ibn Abi Layla from `Ata that `Aishah used to say the Adhan, the Iqamah, and lead women in Prayer while standing among them in the same row. Al-Hakim also reported the same hadith from the chain of narrators of Layth Ibn Abi Sulaim from `Ata, and the wording of the hadith mentioned here is Al-Hakim's.

Furthermore, Ash-Shafi`i (315), Ibn Abi Shaybah (88/2) and `Abdur-Raziq (5082) reported from two chains of narrators that report the narration of `Ammar Ad-Dahni in which he stated that a woman from his tribe named Hujayrah narrated that Umm Salamah used to lead women in Prayer while standing among them in the same row.

The wording of `Abdur-Raziq for the same hadith is as follows: "Umm Salamah led us (women) in the `Asr Prayer and stood among us (in the same row). In addition, Al-Hafiz said in Ad-Dirayah (1/169), Muhammad ibn Al-Husain reported from the narration of Ibrahim An-Nakh`i that `Aishah used to lead women in Prayer during the month of Ramadan while standing among them in the same row. Further, `Abdur-Raziq reported (5083) from the narration of Ibrahim ibn Muhammad from Dawud ibn Al-Husain from `Ikrimah from Ibn `Abbas that the latter said, "A woman can lead women in prayer while standing between them."

Would that our sisters who are so enthusiastic about women's rights revive this act of Sunnah a woman leading other women in prayer instead of innovating this rejected novelty: a woman leading men in prayer.

The following is stated in Al-Mughni:

The narrations differ as to whether it is desirable for a woman to lead other women in congregational Prayer. It is reported that the matter is desirable, as the following scholars said that a woman can lead other women in Prayer: `Aishah, Umm Salamah, `Ata, Athawri, Al-Awza`i, Ash-Shafi`i, Ishaq, and Abu Thawr. Furthermore, it is narrated that Ahmad ibn Hanbal (may Allah be merciful to him) said that the matter is desirable. However, ahul ar-rai (scholars who mostly depend on reason in deducing rulings) regard the matter as undesirable, but if such congregational prayer is done, it will be sufficient for the women who perform it. As for Ash-Sha`bi, An-Nakh`i and Qatadah, they say that women can perform prayer this way in supererogatory prayers but not in obligatory ones.

It is important here to state that the original judgment concerning acts of worship is that anything not prescribed in Shari`ah in explicit texts is prohibited, so that people may not innovate matters in religion not ordained by Allah. Thus, people may not innovate a certain act of worship, change or add things in the ordained ones according to their own fancies or only because they think such matters are desirable. Whoever innovates anything in religion or adds to it whatever is not in it that addition or innovation is rejected. That is exactly what Allah has warned us from in the Quran when He dispraised the disbelievers saying, (Or have they partners (of Allah) who have made lawful for them in religion that which Allah allowed not?) (Ahs-Shura 42: 21)

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) also warned against the same wrongdoing in the hadith which states, "Whoever innovates in this matter of ours (i.e., in our religion) whatever is not in it, that innovated thing is rejected (Al-Bukhari and Muslim). The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) also said, "Beware of innovated matters, for every novelty is perversity" (Ahmad in his Musnad and regarded as authentic). All scholars are resolved that acts of worship are unchangeable and must be taken exactly as Allah has ordained them.

Other religions were distorted and their acts of worship and rituals were changed when people innovated in them, and their men of religion did not stand against innovators. However, as regards matters like transactions and worldly affairs, the original judgment concerning them is that they are permitted, for the Islamic rule is following in religious matters and innovating in worldly matters. This was the rule to which Muslims adhered during the times of their superiority in civilization. They followed in religion and innovated in life, and that was how they created a lofty civilization. But when their condition worsened, they reversed the matter; they innovated in affairs of religion and kept the worldly affairs.

A last word to conclude this issue: What is the necessity of making all this fuss? Is that what the Muslim woman lacks to lead men in Friday prayer? Was that one of the Muslim women's demands at any time?

We see other religions specifying many matters for men and their women do not protest. So why do our women do so, exaggerating in their demands and arousing what will cause dissension among Muslims at such time when they need their unity the most to face afflictions, hardships, and major plots that aim at their complete destruction?

My advice to the sister referred to in the question is that she should revert to her Lord and religion and extinguish this strife which is unnecessary to be lit. I also advise my Muslim brothers and sisters in the United States not to answer this stirring call and to stand as one in front of these trials and conspiracies woven around them.

I ask Allah to inspire our sons, daughters, brothers, and sisters everywhere sound judgment in speeches and right guidance in deeds. I also ask Him to make them all see what is right and grant them to abide by it, and see what is wrong and grant them to avoid it. Ameen. (Our Lord! Cause not our hearts to stray after Thou hast guided us, and bestow upon us mercy from Thy Presence. Lo! Thou, only Thou art the Bestower) (Aal `Imran 3: 8).