

13 Q&A about the Sutrah



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TRANSLATOR'S FORWARD

IN THE NAME OF ALLAH, THE RAH'MAAN THE RA'HEEM.

All praise is due to ALLAH. We praise HIM, depend on HIM and seek HIS forgiveness. We seek refuge in ALLAH, from the evil of ourselves and from our bad deeds. Whomsoever is guided by ALLAH, cannot be led astray, and whomsoever is left, by ALLAH, to go astray, no one can guide him. I bear witness that nothing deserves to be worshipped except ALLAH alone, ascribing no partners to HIM. I bear witness also that Muhammad ﷺ is the slave and messenger of ALLAH .

Indeed the most truthfull of speeches is the speech of ALLAH. And the best of guidances is that of Muhammad ﷺ. And the most evil of all deeds are the newly invented matters. And every newly invented matter is *Bid'a*.^(*1) And all *Bid'a* is a straying from the right path. And all straying from the path leads to the Hell -Fire.

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This booklet deals with some common questions, and their answers, about *The Sutra*. All the Hadeeths used in this book, have attained the level of authenticity that they can be safely used as evidence. The author, Muhammad Ibn Rizq At-Tarhoony, (may Allah preserve and protect him) in his book :

" أحكام السترة في مكة وغيرها و حكم المرور بين يدي المصلي "

(" **Rulings on the Sutra in Makka and elsewhere and the verdict on passing in-front-of the person performing Salat**"), has gone into some detail about each of these Hadeeths. He chose, however, to simply mention the source of the Hadeeths in this booklet. This is in keeping with his intention to keep this booklet to a limited size, so that it can be easily read and understood by the average Muslim.

I have not changed this procedure. I advise those seeking more detail however, to refer to the book mentioned above, for in it, one finds a wealth of information.

I ask ALLAH to accept, of me, this humle effort. I also ask Him to bless the author of this book with good health, long life and ever increasing Iman, that he may continue to benefit the Muslims with his knowledge.

AMEEN

(*1) "*Bid'a* is defined as: 1 : Any matter, newly introduced to the Religion. This matter, though it may resemble some established aspect of the Religion, in fact goes against the Religion. The purpose of the one indulging in these acts, is to perform extra in his worship. This , he thinks, would draw him closer to ALLAH. 2: Anything introduced into the deen, in contradiction to that which has been proven to be authentic on the Messenger of ALLAH ﷺ, be it in the form of knowledge, action or situation. It may either resemble some established part of the Religion, or it may be justified as being a *good act*, and it is made part of the Religion and part of the straight way." - see "*Ilm Usool Al-Bida*" Ali Hasssan Al-Halaby pg. . 24

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT THE SUTRA

Q:1 What is a Sutra?

A: Something used by a person performing Salaat (as a barrier) between himself and one passing in-front-of him.

Q:2 What is its legal ruling?

A: It is compulsory, and whoever disregards it, has committed a sin. This is based on the saying of the Messenger Muhammad ﷺ

{ إذا صلى أحدكم فليصل إلى السترة و ليدن منها } أخرجه أبو داود وابن ماجه وابن حبان و غيرههم و إسناده صحيح

"If any of you wish to perform Salaat, then he must perform it towards a Sutra (ie:with a sutra in front of him) and draw close to it"

(Abu Dawood, Ibn Majah and Ibn Hibbaan, among others and its Isnaad (chain of narrators) is Saheeh.)

And his saying:

{ لا تصل إلا إلى سترة }

(أخرجه مسلم مختصراً و ابن خزيمة والحاكم و غيرههم)

"Do not perform Salaat, except that there is a Sutra in front of you.(Muslim)

And his saying:

{ إذا صلى أحدكم فليستتر و ليقترّب من السترة فإن الشيطان يمر بين يديه } (أخرجه ابن خزيمة و غيره بسند صحيح)

"If any of you wish to perform Salaat, then let him place a Sutra in front of him and draw close to it for indeed (Shaitan) the evil-one passes in front of him. (Ibn Khuzaima)

And his saying:

{ ليجعل أحدكم بين يديه مثل مؤخرة الرحل و يصلى } (أخرجه بهذا اللفظ ابن الجارود بسند صحيح)

"Let any one of you place something similar to (the size of) the rear of a camel's saddle (in front of him) then perform Salaat (Ibn Jaarood).

Q:3 Is it permissible to stay far away from it (the Sutra)?

A:-No! And whoever stays further than three forearms¹ length away from it, has sinned and has placed his Salaat in a position to have it spoiled by Shaitan. This is evident from the Hadeeth of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ

{ فليدن منها لا يقطع الشيطان عليه صلاته }

(أخرجه أحمد و أبو داود و ابن خزيمة و ابن حبان و الحاكم و غيرهم و إسناده صحيح)

"And let him draw close to it and don't let Shaitan break his Salaat." (Ahmad, Abu Dawood, Ibn khuzaima Ibn Hibbaan ,Al-Haakim ,and others)

And the Hadeeth:

{ و ليدن منها فإن الشيطان يمر بينه و بينها }

" And let him draw close to it for indeed Shaitan passes between him and it (the Sutra). (Ibn Hibbaan)

And the Hadeeth:

{ و ليقرب من السترة فإن الشيطان يمر بين يديه }

"And let him draw close to the Sutra for indeed Shaitan passes in front of him (Ibn Khuzaima)

And it was mentioned in a Hadeeth that.....

{ كان بين مصلى النبي (صلى الله عليه و سلم) و بين الجدار ممر شاة } (أخرجه البخاري و مسلم)

"There was, between the spot on which the Prophet ﷺ performed Salaat and the wall, the distance of the path of one sheep. (Al-Bukhari and Muslim)

And, in another Hadeeth it states that:

{ أنه (صلى الله عليه و سلم) لما دخل الكعبة جعل بينه و بين الجدار ثلاثة أذرع ثم صلى } (أخرجه البخاري)

"When the Prophet ﷺ entered the Ka'ba he put a distance of three forearms between himself and the wall then performed Salaat". (Al-Bukhari)

Q:4 What is the smallest size that the Sutra can be?

A: It is the height of one forearm^(*1) above the place of Salaat -- because that is about the height of the rear end of a camel's saddle. As for its width, there is no stipulated size. One can, therefore, use something even as thin as an arrow or a spear. It is not permissible, however, to take a sutra less than the height of the rear of a camel's saddle. If on the other hand, after some effort to find one, none is found, one may use whatever is available, whatever the size. This is taken from the Quranic injunction.

¹About 45 cm
(*1) About 15 cm

{ فاتقوا الله ما استطعتم } سورة التغابن: ١٦

{ And fear Allah to the best of your ability }

(Sura At-Taghabun : 16)

And from the Hadeeth of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ

{ إذا أمرتكم بشيء فأتوه منه ما استطعتم } أخرجه مسلم

(*If I order you to do something then do as much of it as you are able to*) (Muslim)

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ also said:

{ إذا وضع أحدكم بين يديه مثل مؤخرة الرحل فليصل ولا يبالي من مر وراء ذلك } أخرجه مسلم

(*If any of you places something like (the size of) the rear of a camel's saddle in front of him, then performs Salaat, then do not bother about whoever passes beyond that.*) (Muslim)

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, was also asked, during the battle of Tabuk, about the Sutra of a person performing Salaat. He said:

{ كمؤخرة الرحل } (أخرجه مسلم)

"*Like the rear end of a camel's saddle*" (Muslim)

He ﷺ also said:

{ إذا كان بينك وبين الطريق مثل مؤخرة الرحل فلا يضرك من مر عليك }

(أخره ابن أبي شيبه و عبد الرزاق و غيرهما بسند صحيح)

"*If there is something like (the size) of the rear end of a camel's saddle between you and the pathway, then who ever passes in front of you would not harm you :(i.e. invalidate your Salaat)* (Ibn Abi Shaiba / Abdur-Razaak and others)

...and other Hadeeths some of which are to come.

In addition the Prophet ﷺ performed Salaat with a spear or sometimes, a bow in front of him. (As reported in Muslim)

So, it is not the width of the Sutra that is considered, as we previously mentioned.

Q:5 Is there any one exempted from placing a Sutra in front-of him while making Salaat?

A:- Yes, only those performing Salaat behind an Imaam. We gather this from the fact that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ when he led the Salaat, placed a Sutra in front of him and no one performing Salaat behind him, did so. (As has been mentioned in a number of Hadeeths in both Al-Bukhari and Muslim.)

Q:6 What are the different types of Sutra?

A:- Everything that is the height of one arm's length. As is evident from the saying of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ

{ مثل مؤخرة الرجل }

"Like (the size of) the rear end of a camel's saddle."

It has also been authentically reported on the Prophet ﷺ that he performed Salaat with a wall in front of him, as well as a spear, a lance, a pole, a camel, a tree, a bed, with a woman sleeping on it, and the wall of a room.

It is not permissible, however, to perform Salaat with a grave in front of you. As is evident from the Hadeeth in which the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ prevented such actions, he said:

{ لا تصلوا إلى القبور و لا تجلسوا عليها } (أخرجه مسلم)

"Do not perform Salaat with graves in front of you, nor sit on them." (Muslim.)

In addition, it is disliked to perform Salaat in front of that which distracts. For the Prophet ﷺ said to Aisha:

{ أميطي عنا قرامك هذا فإنه لا تزال تصاويره تعرض في صلاتي } (أخرجه البخاري)

"Remove your curtain! for indeed its pictures keep appearing during my Salaat." (Al Bukhari)

Q:7 Is the Sutra (wajib) compulsory in Makkah or not?

A: The Sutra is (wajib) compulsory in Makkah as elsewhere. There is, too, no evidence to support any differentiation between Makkah and other places. In addition, the Prophet ﷺ placed a spear in front of him in the plain of Makkah^(*1) and then performed Salat-ul-Dhur and Asr.^(*2) When he entered the Ka'ba too, he used its wall as a Sutra.^(*3) When he made Tawaf around the Ka'ba, he placed the Maqaam (station) of Ibraheem between himself and it, then performed Salaat.^(*4) This was what was done also, by the Sahabas after him ﷺ

Q:8 What is the verdict on someone passing in front of a person performing Salaat:?

A: Passing in front of a person performing Salat is among the major Sins that warrant the punishment of the Hell fire. This verdict applies, if he passes between the Sutra and the person performing Salaat, or closer than three forearms' length to the person who has no Sutra in front of him. Because three forearms' length is the furthest distance which one can stay away from a Sutra. The evidence supporting this, is the Hadeeth of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ .

(*1) Known as Al-Bat'haa

(*2) Reported by Al-Bukhari

(*4) Reported by Muslim

{ لو يعلم المار بين يدي المصلي ماذا عليه من الإثم لكان أن يقف أربعين خريفاً خيراً له من أن يمر بين يديه } (أخرجه البخاري)

"If only the one passing in front of another performing Salaat, knew the magnitude of the sin that he committed, he would prefer to wait for (forty days, months or years) rather than to pass in front of him-" (Al Bukhari:)

Q:9 Is anyone exempted from this verdict?

A: Yes, the one passing through the rows in congregational Salaat, is exempted :
For it has been reported that Ibn Abbas said :

{ جئت أنا و الفضل على أتان و رسول الله (صلى الله عليه و سلم) بعرفة فمررنا على بعض الصف فنزلنا فتركناها ترتع و دخلنا مع رسول الله (صلى الله عليه و سلم)

في الصلاة فلم يقل لنا رسول الله (صلى الله عليه و سلم) شيئاً }

"Fodle and I came riding on a female donkey, while the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) was at Arafat, so we passed in front of some of the rows, then we dismounted and we left the donkey to graze. We then entered (the Salaat) with the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) , and the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) did not say any thing to us (about it)."
(Al-Bukhari , Muslim, Al-Humaidi...)

And in another version it states that the female donkey passed in-front-of part of the first row.
Abdullah Ibn Amr said:

{ هبطنا مع رسول الله (صلى الله عليه و سلم) من ثنية أذاخر فحضرت الصلاة ، فصلى إلى جدار فاتخذته قبلة و نحن خلفه فجاءت بهيمة تمر بين يديه فما زال يدارتها حتى لصق بطنه بالجدار و مرت من ورائه } أخرجه أحمد و أبو داود و البزار و غيرهم و سنده صحيح

"We rested with the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) from Thany-atu(the mountain pass) of Adhaakhir. The time for Salaat came, so he performed Salat facing a wall in the direction of the Qib'la, and we were behind him. Then an animal came and tried to pass in front of him. He kept on warding it off, until he stuck his stomach to the wall and the animal passed behind him." (Ahmad , Abu Dawood)

Q:10 What must the person performing Salaat do if someone tries to pass in front of him?

A: If anyone tries to pass in front of a person performing Salaat, he must prevent him from doing so. If he insists, then push him away, and if he persists, then fight him without using a weapon. If, in the event of his fighting him to prevent him from passing, he dies(accidentally), then there is no sin on the one who caused his death, and no penalty nor blood money nor expiation is demanded of him. This is so, whether the person was performing Salaat, towards a Sutra, or without a Sutra. If they dispute with each other, the matter is taken to court. (i.e.

before the judge). This is because that person (deliberately) passing in front of another who is performing Salaat, is possessed by evil.

The evidence in support of this, is the Hadeeth of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ

{ إذا كان أحدكم يصلي فلا يدع أحداً يمر بين يديه فإن أبي فليقاتله فإن معه القرين } (أخرجه مسلم)

If any of you perform Salaat then do not let anyone pass in front of you. And if someone insists (on passing) then fight him, for indeed he is possessed. (Muslim)

{ و عن أبي صالح قال : رأيت أبا سعيد في يوم الجمعة يصلي إلى شيء يستره من الناس فأراد شاب من بني أبي معطي أن يجتاز بين يديه فدفعه أبو سعيد في صدره فنظر الشاب فلم يجد مساعاً إلا بين يديه فعاد ليجتاز فدفعه أبو سعيد أشد من الأولى فنال من أبي سعيد ثم دخل على مروان فشكا إليه ما لقي من أبي سعيد و دخل أبو سعيد خلفه على مروان فقال : ما لك و لابن أخيك يا أبا سعيد قال : سمعت النبي (صلى الله عليه و سلم) يقول : إذا صلى أحدكم إلى شيء يستره من الناس فأراد أحد أن يجتاز بين يديه فليدفعه فإن أبي فايقاتله فإنما هو شيطان }

Abu Saleh said: " I saw Abu Saeed (Al-Khudri) , on the Day of Jum'a, performing Salaat in front of something which he used as a Sutra. A youth from the tribe of Bani Abi Mu'ait wanted to pass in front of him, so Abu Sa'eed warded him off with a push on his chest. The youth, looking around, saw no other place to pass, except in front of Abu Sa'eed. He therefore tried to pass again. Abu Sa'eed, this time, pushed him even harder. The youth abused Abu Sa'eed and went to Marwan to lodge a complaint against Abu Sa'eed. Abu Sa'eed then entered after him. When he came in, Marwaan asked him: "What is it, that you have with the son of your brother, Oh Abu Sa'eed?" Abu Sa'eed said: "I heard the Prophet ﷺ say:

"If any of you perform Salaat, with a Sutra blocking you from the people, and someone tried to pass in front of you, then repel him and if he insists on passing, then fight him, for indeed he is (Shaitan) evil. (Al Bukhari)

In another version it says: "***Shove him away by his neck***"

And in another narration it says:

"...Try to stop him twice and if he refuses then fight him."

And in yet another version, it is added:

"..Indeed you have hit Shaitan ."(Ibn Khuzaima)

Many other narrations were reported without (stipulating) limiting it to having a Sutra.

And in another version it says: (***Indeed Shaitan is with him.***)

The Prophet ﷺ also repelled Shaitan when he wanted to cut across his Salaat. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ also repelled the animal when it wanted to pass in front of him, as we previously mentioned.

The one performing Salaat therefore, must not allow anything to pass in front of him, whether it may be big or small, whether it be a person or otherwise. Even if, it means that he must move (forward), until his stomach sticks to his Sutra, as has been authentically reported on the Prophet ﷺ as we previously mentioned.

There is too, no difference between Makkah and any other place, when it comes to preventing someone from passing in front of you. The son of (Ibn) Umar (*may Allah be pleased with them both*), used to perform Salaat in the Ka'ba and never let anyone pass in front of him. As for the one who passes between the rows of a congregational Salaat, he is exempted from that which was previously mentioned.

Q:11 Why is the one, attempting to pass, in-front-of one performing Salaat, warded off and fought?

A: The one attempting to pass is warded off and fought, because he decreases the blessing of the Salaat. Sometimes, he even destroys it altogether. Ibn Mas'ood said:

"Whoever from amongst you is able to perform Salaat without letting anyone pass in front of him, then do so. For indeed the person passing in front of the one making Salaat receives less blessings than the one in front of whom he passed." (Abdur-Razaak, Ibn Abi Shaiba)

This is further emphasized by the Hadeeth of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ when he said:

(If) Similar to (the size of) the rear end of a camel's saddle is in front of anyone of you all, then whatever passes in-front of you would not harm you. (I.e., would not affect your Salaat)

In addition, the one attempting to pass, is warded off as an act of enjoining right and forbidding wrong. This is because, if he passes, he would be committing a major sin. He must therefore, be prevented from doing so.

Q:12 You said that the one passing, sometimes invalidates the Salaat. So what exactly invalidates the Salaat?

A: Among the things that invalidate the Salaat by their passing are: (1) The Shaitaan (2) A black dog (3) A donkey (4) A woman passed puberty.

The evidence in support of this is taken from the Hadeeth of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ concerning Sutra. In which he said:

"Let him draw close to it, and don't let Shaitaan break his Salaat."

And from the Hadeeth in which he ﷺ said:

{ إن عفريتاً من الجن تغلت علي البارحة ليقطع علي الصلاة } أخرجه مسلم)

"Indeed a malicious Jinn pounced on me last night trying to break my Salaat." (Muslim)

In another version it says:

{ إن الشيطان أراد أن يمر بين يدي فخنقته حتى وجدت برد لسانه علي يدي } أخرجه أحمد و الطبراني و غيرها و إسناده حسن)

"Indeed Shaitaan wanted to pass in-front-of me, so I choked him until I felt the coldness of his tongue on my hand." (Ahmad)

Preventing Shaitaan from breaking one's Salaat therefore, is done by drawing close to the Sutra, as was mentioned in the previous Hadeeths. Preventing other than Shaitaan, is achieved by warding off or by the placing of a Sutra, from the types mentioned before, in front of you. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said:

{ يقطع الصلاة المرأة و الحمار و الكلب و بقي ذلك مثل مؤخرة الرجل } (أخرجه مسلم)

" A woman, donkey and a dog all invalidate Salaat (if they pass in front of a person performing Salaat) and this is prevented by (placing) something similar in size to the rear end of a camel's saddle (in front of you) ." (Muslim)

He also said:

{ يقطع الصلاة الكلب الأسود و المرأة الحائض } (أي البالغة)

"Salaat is invalidated by (the passing of) a black dog or a menstruating woman.(i.e. a woman who has reached puberty.)" (Ahmad and Abu Dawood)

It was reported by Abdullah Ibn Samit, that Abu Dhar said, that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said:

{ إذا قام أحدكم يصلي فإنه يستره إذا كان بين يديه مثل آخرة الرجل فإذا لم يكن بين يديه مثل آخرة الرجل فإنه يقطع صلاته الحمار والمرأة و الكلب الأسود }

" If any of you wish to perform Salaat, he is indeed shielded, if he has, in-front-of him, something the size of the rear end of a camel's saddle. If there isn't something, the size of the rear a camel's saddle, in-front-of him, however, then (the passing of) a donkey, a woman or a black dog can invalidate his Salaat."

I said : Oh Abu Dhar ! What is it with a black dog as opposed to a red or yellow dog ?!" He said: Oh my son of my brother! I asked the Messenger of Allah ﷺ just as you have asked me, and he said:

{ الكلب الأسود شيطان } (أخرجه مسلم)

" A black dog is Shaitaan." (Muslim)

And in another version it states :

{ تعاد الصلاة من ممر الحمار و المرأة و الكلب الأسود } (أخرجه ابن خزيمة بإسناد صحيح)

"Salaat is repeated due to the passing of a donkey, a woman or a black dog." (Ibn Khuzaima)

This does not apply, however, if these things, mentioned above, are in-front-of the person performing Salaat but not moving across him. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) used to perform Salaat in-front-of a bed with Aisha lying on it (as is mentioned in the Hadeeth of question 13).^(*) In addition Maimuna, the wife of the Prophet (ﷺ) said:

" The Prophet (ﷺ) used to pray while I used to sleep beside him during my periods (menses) and in prostration his garment used to touch me. "

(Al-Bukhari)

Q:13 Is it permissible to touch or push one's wife while in prostration, in order to prostrate properly?^(*1)

A: Yes. This is evident from the Hadeeth narrated by Aisha:

" It is not good that you people have made us (women) equal to dogs and donkeys. No doubt, I saw Allah's Apostle (ﷺ) praying while I used to lie between him and the Qibla and when he wanted to prostrate, he pushed my legs and I withdrew them." (Al-Bukhari).
Refer also to the last Hadeeth of question 12.

Q:14 Is there any difference between a man and a woman, (concerning what was mentioned here)?

A: No, there is no difference between a man and a woman, concerning all that was mentioned here. (Thus the previous rulings apply to both men and women) We take this position due to lack of evidence suggesting otherwise.

{ و السلام عليكم و رحمة الله و بركاته }

This topic has been dealt with in some detail in the author's book:

{ **Rulings pertaining to the Sutra in Makka and elsewhere and the verdict on passing in-front-of the person performing Salaat** }

{ أَحْكَامُ السُّتْرَةِ فِي مَكَّةَ وَ غَيْرِهَا . وَ حَكْمُ الْمُرُورِ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ الْمُصَلِّي }

of some 184 pages, in Arabic.

* Question # 13, along with its answer, has been added by the translator. It was taken from Sahih Al-Bukhari :Vol. 1 / book 9 / ch.19

* added by the translator.

(*) added by the translator

(*1) Added by the translator