



PREPARED BY THE IMAMS' OFFICE AT  
THE ISLAMIC ASSOCIATION OF RALEIGH

S O C I A L  
D I S T A N C I N G  
I N S A L A H

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



1

Does the establishment of prayer include closing the gaps, standing shoulder-to-shoulder, standing foot-to-foot, and completing the rows?

The Sunnah of establishing the prayer is to perform the prayer with the worshippers praying close together, filling the gaps, and completing every row before beginning a new one.

*It was narrated by Ahmad (5724) and Abu Dawood (666) from ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said:*

*“Straighten your rows, make your shoulders level, fill the gaps, be gentle in the hands of your brothers, and do not leave any space for the Shaytaan. Whoever completes a row, Allah will grant him His mercy, and whoever makes a gap in a row, Allah will cut him off (from His mercy).” This hadith was classed as Saheeh by Al-Albaani in Saheeh Abi Dawood.*



## 2

What is meant by “forming tight and straight rows”?

*Imam As-Sindi (may Allah have mercy on him) said: “The words ‘form tight rows’ refer to standing close to one another in straight rows. ‘Make them close together’ means to minimize the space between rows so that the rows are close to one another.”* ①

*Imam Ibn Al-Mundhir (may Allah have mercy on him) said: “Ali narrated that Abu ‘Ubayd said: Al-Kisaa’i said: ‘Forming tight rows (at-taraass) means that the worshippers stand very close to one another, so that there are no gaps between them. One example of a word from the same root may be seen in the verse in which Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, says what may be interpreted as: ‘as though they are a [single] structure joined firmly [bunyaan marsoos]’ [as-Saff 61:4]”. [From Al-Awsat by Ibn Al-Mundhir (4/19-20)]* ②



3

What is the prescribed way to straighten the rows?

The obligatory straightening of the rows refers to the worshippers standing next to each other in a straight line.

However, it is recommended to perfect the straightening of the rows by: forming tight rows, completing every row before beginning a new one, and closing the gaps.

*Imam An-Nawawi (may Allah have mercy on him) said, “Our companions and others agreed that it is mustahabb (recommended) and encouraged to be in the first row. There are many hadiths in as-Saheeh which speak of that. It is also recommended to be on the right of the imam, to fill gaps in the rows, to complete the first row, then the next, until the last row, and not to start a new row until the row in front of it is complete.” [From Al-Majmoo‘ (4/301)].* ③



continued...

*Imam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:*

*Prayer in congregation (jamaa'ah) is so called because the Muslims come together (ijtimaa') in time and place to do this action.*

*In fact, they are enjoined to form rows, and in fact the Prophet ﷺ instructed them to straighten the rows, with everyone standing in a straight line, to form tight rows, to fill gaps, and to complete the first row, then the next, by way of striving to make their gathering in the best manner possible. Were it not that forming straight rows is obligatory, it would be permissible for people to stand behind one another, and so on. It is common knowledge that this is not how the Muslims pray. If that were something permissible, the Muslims would have done it at least once. According to the teachings of Islam, it is obligatory to form rows. End quote from Majmoo' Al-Fataawa (23/394. 4)*



4

Is it mandatory to straighten the rows in congregational prayer?

It is mandatory to straighten the rows. There must be a valid reason for the worshippers to do otherwise. Neglecting the straightening of the rows without a valid reason is sinful as it is disobeying the instructions of our beloved Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.



5

Is it permissible to not close the gaps in congregational prayer for the purpose of taking health precautions?

It is permissible to not close the gaps for the purpose of taking health precautions. The prayer is still considered valid.

The majority of scholars consider filling in the gaps in a straight row in a prayer to be a highly-recommended act but not obligatory. The prayer is not invalidated by not filling in the gaps in a straight row.

In addition, the majority of scholars consider the prayer valid for a worshipper who stands in prayer alone behind the row formed in front of him. However, they consider this act to be disliked (makrooh) if there was no valid reason for doing so. If the prayer of a worshipper praying alone in a row is considered valid, then his prayer is considered valid if he prays in a row with other worshippers while maintaining social distancing.

*It is narrated by Al-Bukhari from Abu Bakrah, according to which he came to the Prophet ﷺ when he was bowing, so he bowed before he reached the row. He mentioned that to the Prophet ﷺ and he said: "May Allah increase you in keenness; Do not do it again."*



continued...

*It was narrated from 'Ali ibn Shaybaan that the Prophet ﷺ led them in prayer, then he finished. There was a man who prayed on his own behind the row, so the Prophet of Allah ﷺ noticed him when he finished, and said: "Repeat your prayer, for there is no prayer for the one who stands behind the row [on his own]."*  
[Narrated by Ibn Maajah]

Based on the Hadith above, the Hanbali school considers the prayer of one who prays an entire rak'ah in a row alone to be invalid. However, this school does not invalidate the prayer of one who prays in a spaced out row with others behind the Imam or to his right.

*It says in Mataalib Ooli an-Nuha Sharh Ghaayat Al-Muntaha (1/695): "The prayer is not invalidated if there is a gap in the row, regardless of where the row is, whether it is behind the imam or to his right, unless the row is to his left – that is, to the left of the imam – if the one who is standing by himself is standing at a distance of three men. In that case, his prayer is rendered invalid. This was stated by Ibn Haamid, and he stated that it is the correct view in ar-Ri'aayah Al-Kubra.' [From Majmoo' Al-Fataawa (23/394)].* ⑤





6

Is it permissible to pray at the Masjid while leaving gaps between worshippers?

According to the view of the majority of scholars who say that filling the gaps in a straight row is recommended but not obligatory, it is permissible to pray at the Masjid with social distancing if it helps protect the worshippers from spreading the virus among themselves. Praying in straight rows with social distancing is given preference over forsaking the congregational prayers at the Masjid, especially Salat-ul-Jumu'ah as it is considered decisively obligatory on all able adult Muslim males by consensus of all Muslim scholars.



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# F O O T N O T E D T R A N S L A T I O N S

The footnoted translations in this document were quoted from the following resource:

[islamqa.info/en/answers/333882/ruling-on-praying-with-gaps-in-the-rows-for-fear-of-catching-coronavirus-covid-19](https://islamqa.info/en/answers/333882/ruling-on-praying-with-gaps-in-the-rows-for-fear-of-catching-coronavirus-covid-19)