



*AMJA Declaration Regarding Taraweeh Prayers  
in the Midst of the Coronavirus Pandemic*

Prepared by Office of the Imam  
Islamic Association of Raleigh  
April 26<sup>th</sup>, 2020

**Q. Concerning Taraweeh prayers in the midst of the COVID-19/coronavirus pandemic:**

**A. All praise is due to Allah, and may His peace and blessings be upon His Messenger, his family, his Companions, and those who followed.**

The Resident Fatwa Committee of AMJA has received several questions concerning Taraweeh (tarāweeh) prayers in the midst of the COVID-19/coronavirus pandemic as well as the stay-at-home orders which have been imposed on people to varying degrees. We ask Allah to relieve the world of this disease and to bring about from it a good outcome.

**First**, there is a consensus among Islamic scholars that Taraweeh prayer is a recommended supererogatory act of worship as well as a confirmed Sunnah. Muslims, past and present, have been very keen on performing this act of worship in compliance with the hadith of the Prophet Mohammad (pbuh), which is narrated in both Bukhari and Muslim, in which he said, “Whoever stands up for prayers during (any) nights of Ramadan out of sincere faith and hoping for a reward from Allah (SWT), then all their past sins will be forgiven.”

**Second**, performing Taraweeh prayers in a congregation inside the mosque is a supererogatory Sunnah. The scholars have differed as to whether praying it individually in one’s home is superior to praying it in a congregation inside the mosque. However, the correct opinion is that performing it in a congregation inside the mosque is superior to performing it individually at home. This view is held by a majority of Muslim jurists from the Hanafi, Shāfi‘i, and Hanbali schools of thought (madhāhib), as well as some Māliki jurists. Nevertheless, contrary to the view held by some, performing Taraweeh prayers in congregation inside the mosque is not a condition for the prayer’s validity.

The proofs demonstrating that praying Taraweeh in a congregation is legislated in Islam are:

- The fact that the Prophet (pbuh) – as mentioned in the hadith narrated by ‘Āishah (may Allah be pleased with her) that was recorded by both Bukhari and Muslim – was the first to establish praying Taraweeh in a congregation inside the mosque. He prayed it that way for about three or four nights, and then stopped doing it, as he explained, because he feared it might become

obligatory for his Ummah to pray it in that manner (i.e., inside the mosque and in congregation).

- The hadith compiled by al-Tirmidhi and narrated by Abu Dharr, may Allah be pleased with him, in which the Prophet (pbuh) said, “Whoever stands with the imam (in Taraweeh prayer) until he finishes, it is equivalent to spending the whole night in prayer.” This hadith was used as a proof by Imam Ahmad that praying Taraweeh in congregation is superior to praying it individually.
- The performance of Taraweeh prayers in this manner was also the way of the rightly guided Caliphs, starting with ‘Umar, and this tradition was maintained by our righteous predecessors who succeeded the Companions, may Allah be pleased with them all. Bukhari narrates in his Saheeh, that “when ‘Umar, may Allah be pleased with him, saw the people praying independently in scattered groups, he united them behind one imam.”

**Third**, the current circumstances resulting from the novel coronavirus pandemic have resulted in restrictions being placed on gatherings, as well as rules being set in place obligating people to maintain social distancing while wearing face masks in public. These guidelines were set in order to prevent contagion and to limit the spread of COVID-19/Coronavirus. Based on these circumstances, we believe that everyone should follow the guidelines set by their specialized and reliable health and government agencies with regard to the number of people that may gather in one place and the manner in which they may gather. We should stick to these guidelines even if that were to result in being unable to host Taraweeh prayers in the mosque, or being permitted to do so while having to greatly limit the number of congregants allowed inside the mosque at any given time. The latter, if permitted, should be done in order to ensure that the mosques remain filled with the remembrance of Allah and the establishment of salat (prayer) in this blessed month, all the while following the guidelines set by the local authorities.

**Fourth**, for anyone who is unable to pray Taraweeh in congregation inside the mosque, that person may pray it at home, either individually or in a congregation with the members of his/her household. And we hope that those who do so with the right intention will earn a multiplied reward while praying at home, because they were prevented (from going to the mosque) by a valid excuse after having been accustomed to attending congregational Taraweeh prayers before. That is in addition to the reward they will gain for leading the members of their household in prayer, as well as for the care one demonstrates for them by doing so. He/She will

also be rewarded for lessening the harm which could reach other Muslims (from the virus), as well as for limiting the overall spread of this disease as much as possible (by staying at home).

Muslims should bear in mind in these circumstances that the Prophet (pbuh) used to pray Taraweeh in his house, as mentioned previously in the hadith of ‘Āishah (may Allah be pleased with her), except for the few nights that he prayed it in the mosque for the purpose of demonstrating to the Ummah the permissibility of doing so. They should also bear in mind, as previously mentioned, that the Companions would pray Taraweeh individually and severally in scattered groups until ‘Umar gathered them under one imam. As Ibn Shihāb mentioned, “The Prophet (pbuh) passed away, and the people were doing this (i.e., not praying Taraweeh in congregation behind a single imam). This continued throughout the Caliphate of Abu Bakr, and the early years of the Caliphate of ‘Umar, may Allah be pleased with them both.”

**Fifth**, completing the recitation of the entire Quran in Taraweeh prayers is not a must, though it is preferred to do so whenever possible, as demonstrated in the narration by Abu Hurairah, may Allah be pleased with him, in which he said, “Gabriel would review the Quran with the Prophet (pbuh) once every year, but in the year in which he passed away, he reviewed it with him twice.” Ibn al-Atheer said in his book, *Al-Jāmi‘ fi Ghareeb al-Hadīth*, that this means “Gabriel would review with him (pbuh) everything that was revealed of the Quran.” (Bukhari)

We also know, through mass concurrent reporting, that the pious predecessors were very keen on reciting the Quran often, frequently completing it from cover to cover, in the month of Ramadan. However, we do not know of any scholar who has stated that it is mandatory to complete the Quran in Taraweeh prayers or in the night prayers of Ramadan, nor has anyone made the claim that it is a condition for the prayers to be valid.

In addition, it is permissible to recite the shorter soorahs in his/her prayer, or any verses (āyāt) that are easy for him/her to recite. He/She can even repeat the verses over and over in their prayer based on their own individual ability and capacity, because Allah (SWT) says, “Allah does not burden a soul with more than it can bear.” This is also proven from the āyah (verse) in which Allah (SWT) says, “Indeed, your Lord knows [O Muhammad], that you stand [in prayer] almost two-thirds of the night or half of it or a third of it, and [so do] a group of those with you.

And Allah determines [the extent of] the night and the day. He has known that you [Muslims] will not be able to do it and has turned to you in forgiveness, so recite what is easy [for you] of the Quran...” (al-Muzzammil 73:20). Furthermore, the Prophet (pbuh) said, “When I command you to do something, do it to the best of your ability.”

It is also narrated by ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amr ibn al-‘Ās, that the Prophet (pbuh) said, “If anyone prays at night reciting ten verses, he will not be recorded among the negligent; if anyone prays at night and recites a hundred verses, he will be recorded among those who are obedient to Allah; and if anyone prays at night reciting one thousand verses, he will be recorded among those who receive huge rewards.” (Abu Dāwood)

It is also permissible to repeat the soorah, or the āyāt (verses) that they recited, in both units of prayer (rak‘āt). In addition, they may compensate for their shorter recitations by making plenty of du‘a (supplication), tasbeeh (glorification), and by prolonging their rukoo‘ (bowing) and sujood (prostration), as well as by increasing their levels of khushoo‘ (submissiveness and attentiveness) in prayer.

Bukhari records on the authority of Abu Sa‘eed al-Khudri, may Allah be pleased with him, that a man heard another man reciting Soorat al-Ikhlāṣ repeatedly. The next morning, he came to the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) and informed him about (what he had heard), as if he considered it to be of little reward. On that the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) said, "By Him in Whose Hand is my soul, this soorah is equal to one third of the Qur'an." It was also reported in another narration that Abu Sa‘eed said, “A man performed the night prayer late at night, during the lifetime of the Prophet (pbuh) and he read 'Say: He is Allah, (the) One,' (112:1) and read nothing beside that...”.

It was also reported authentically by al-Nasā‘i as well as Ibn Mājah, on the authority of Abu Dharr, may Allah be pleased with him, that the Prophet (pbuh) stood reciting a verse and repeating it until morning came. That āyah was: “If You punish them, they are Your slaves, and if You forgive them, verily You, only You, are the Almighty, the All-Wise” (Al-Mā‘idah 5:118).

**Sixth**, it is permissible, according to the more correct view of the scholars, for the person praying Taraweeh – whether leading others as an imam or while praying alone – to recite the Quran in their prayer while reading from a muṣ-ḥaf (printed copy of the Quran). This opinion is held by Māliki, Shāfi‘i, as well as Ḥanbali

jurists. The proof for this opinion is found in the narration mentioned in Bukhari (which he transmits in a seemingly suspended [mu‘allaq] chain, though it is in fact connected based on Bukhari’s affirmative word) as well as by al-Baihaqi, in a connected chain of narration attributed to ‘Āishah, may Allah be pleased with her, that her male servant, Dhakwān, would lead her in prayer in Ramadan while reading from a muṣ-ḥaf. In addition, al-Zuhri stated, “The best of us would recite the Quran while reading from a muṣ-ḥaf.” If he/she were to place the muṣ-ḥaf in front of them while praying – and recite from it without holding it or making any extra movements in their prayer – their prayer would be valid according to the majority of Muslim jurists from the various schools of thought (madhāhib).

**Seventh.** it is not permissible for a woman to lead a man in Taraweeh prayers, according to the correct opinion among scholars, even if the man she is leading is unmarriageable to her (maḥram). Al-Shāfi‘i mentioned in Al-Umm, “If a woman were to lead men, other women, and male children in prayer, then the prayer of the women would be valid, however the prayer of the men and male children would be invalid.” She can, however, lead woman and children who are still under the age of discernment, according to the correct scholarly opinion, because it is related that ‘Āishah and Umm Salamah, may Allah be pleased with them both, led other woman in prayer (as reported authentically by al-Dāraquṭni and al-Baihaqi).

The Sunnah in this regard is for the woman to pray in her own row – even if she is praying with an unmarriageable man (maḥram) – based on the narration in Bukhari and Muslim reported on the authority of Mālik, from Is-ḥāq ibn Abi Ṭalḥa, from his father, from Anas ibn Mālik, in which he describes the prayer in which the Prophet (pbuh) led him (Anas), the orphan, and Anas’ grandmother, Maleekah. He said, “Allah’s Messenger (pbuh) stood up while I and the orphan formed a row behind him (the Prophet) and the old woman (Maleekah) was behind us: the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) led us in two units of prayer and then went back (home).” If a woman were to pray at the side of (instead of behind) her maḥram, whether in an obligatory or supererogatory prayer, then her prayer is valid according to the vast majority of scholars, though it would not be in line with the Sunnah.

**Eighth.** it is not correct to pray behind a remote imam, even if the prayer is being broadcast live with video and audio via television or the Internet. The only exception would be if this is done within the confines of the mosque or in an enclosure(s) attached to the mosque, or if the gap between the imam and the

congregation is relatively small, though Muslim jurists have disagreed over the permissible length of that gap.

This view is not meant to discourage the use of modern technology and the latest methods of communication; rather, we encourage using it in a manner that is in line with the spirit of Islamic law (Shari'a) and its objectives. However we forbid using it for the purpose of praying behind a remote imam or to pray with a virtual congregation that he/she (the worshipper) is physically disconnected from and is only connected with through a broadcast live feed. This is for the following reasons:

- 1) The understood implication of a "congregational prayer" necessitates that the congregants gather in the same place, and not simply at the same time. This understanding is not actualized in a "virtual congregation," which entails a physical separation of the worshippers and results in them not having witnessed the actual congregational prayer in the mosque: in reality, they are absent from it.
- 2) This form of prayer goes against the objectives for which the Shari'a legislated congregation prayers, because it:
  - a) does not involve the ritual walk one takes to get to the mosque;
  - b) does not lead to bringing about unity and harmony among Muslims by congregating them together for it; and
  - c) does not promote "the mutual enjoining of righteousness and God-consciousness" (al-ta'awun 'ala al-birri wa al-taqwā).
- 3) It is not permissible for the gap between the rows in salat to be such a long distance, with buildings and roads acting as dividers between them, and resulting in the "virtual congregants" not being a part of the actual congregation, either in a literal or an Islamically legal sense. Acting upon this understanding has been the practice of the Muslims throughout history. This is also the opinion of the four followed madhāhib (with the exception of a few Māliki jurists). It has been a while since the advent of radio and television broadcasting, and since then you would hardly find a major scholar, legal expert (mufti), or fiqh committee anywhere permitting this innovated form of prayer, with the exception of a handful of people of knowledge who inferred its permissibility from the madh-hab of Imam Mālik. However, this view never became widespread, nor was it ever acted upon

throughout the Muslim world, to the point that this matter (of not permitting such a view) has reached a level closer to the practical consensus of the Muslims. It has always been the case around the world that if Muslims wish at any time to pray in congregation, they would go to a mosque, not to a radio or television set. We appreciate the view of those who say that this ijtihād (reasoning) is specific to the current pandemic; however, we nonetheless disagree with this view and prohibit it because it is an innovation in religion. The Islamic Shari'a offers expansive ease and alternatives that are enough for us not to have to resort to such an ijtihād. All the benefits this view claims to offer are hypothetical, and can be attained in other than this form of prayer, which in itself contradicts the Islamic understanding of congregational prayer. In addition, anyone who permits such virtual congregations must be willing to allow worshippers to pray behind the imam of any mosque that shares his/her time zone, even if that mosque is in a different country altogether. Simply being able to entertain such an idea as a result of holding this opinion should be enough to demonstrate its weakness and deviation from what is accepted.


- 4) The worshipper joining in on a virtual congregational prayer does not know his/her position in relation to the imam and whether or not he/she is standing 'in front' of him during the prayer. This is consequential, because standing in front of the imam nullifies the prayer according to many Muslim jurists. We cannot use the Haram Mosque (in Mecca) as a basis to deduce a proof by analogy (qiyās) in order to permit such a prayer. Such an analogy would be flawed because the Haram Mosque has clear distinct features about it that make it incomparable with any other mosque.
- 5) There is a possibility that the live broadcast can be interrupted or cut off altogether (due to technical difficulties). In addition, there is usually a buffer involved in transmitting sound via broadcast, which results in a delay from the time the imam actually performs his rukoo' and sujood and the time the worshipper at home actually hears it, thereby resulting in the inability to properly follow the imam in prayer.
- 6) Furthermore, if we permit virtual congregational prayers through broadcast at this time, it will be used as a pretext to continue permitting these forms of prayer even after this pandemic ends. People will choose to attend Jumu'ah and other congregational prayers through broadcast in their places of residence and/or work, thereby resulting in a failure to fulfill the intent of the Legislator (Allah) in



congregating the Muslims in the houses that He has permitted to be raised so that His Name be mentioned therein (i.e., the mosques).

- 7) It should not be said this is a temporary concession, limited to Taraweeh, and is only being done out of fear of spreading the Coronavirus. Truly, there is no need for such innovations that are contrary to the intents of the Shari'a, because Taraweeh prayer, at the end of the day, is a Sunnah that we are permitted to perform at home. We have also demonstrated how the expansive ease of the Shari'a has made it possible for most Muslims to perform this prayer in their homes, with their families.
- 8) The fact that there are prayer spaces (muṣallah) situated around the Ḥaram of Mecca wherein people pray while following the Imam of the Ḥaram – though they are disconnected from the actual mosque – is a unique situation specific to the Ḥaram Mosque and cannot be used as a basis to validate, by analogy, “virtual congregations” via Internet or television broadcast. We say that for the following two reasons:
  - a) The aforementioned salat which take place in prayer spaces around the Ḥaram's vicinity are restricted to the hotels overlooking and surrounding the Ḥaram. Those who permit this type of salat do so due to the intense congestion in the Ḥaram, and because the prayer rows are still connected with one another in this case. They do not permit it simply because the broadcast is being transmitted live from the Ḥaram Mosque.
  - b) Following the Imam of the Ḥaram in this case is not being made possible through television or radio broadcast, rather it is because the sound is reaching them in the surrounding hotel prayer spaces directly from the Ḥaram itself. So it is as if these hotel prayer spaces are extensions of the Ḥaram. In addition, the administration of the Ḥaram Mosque does not provide this service to hotels located away from the Ḥaram, nor would you find anyone inside such remote hotels praying behind the Imam of the Ḥaram in any prayer.

In conclusion, we would like to say that we value the eagerness of many to participate in congregational Taraweeh prayers. However, Allah (SWT) sometimes tests His servants in order to extract from them various forms of servitude to Him. Thus, they have the opportunity to demonstrate different stations of devoutness and worship through which they may perfect their servitude



to Him, all the while remedying their souls and strengthening their faith. These objectives can be achieved by:

- Striving to make the performance of salat in and of itself our ultimate goal, with our ambitions directed toward it and away from that which can render our intentions impure, such as seeking to socialize with others in the congregation, which tends to occur in congregational Taraweeh prayers in the mosque.
- Using this situation as a catalyst to sit down and look at ourselves critically with respect to our relationship with the Quran. Indeed, this tribulation has demonstrated that we need to spend more time with the Quran, in learning it, memorizing it, and improving our recitation of it.

**And Allah the Exalted knows best.**

