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The Majlis

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SALAAT IN THE PLANE

The following is a question and the answer (fatwa) issued by Darul Ifta of Jamia-tur-Rasheed, Karachi, Pakistan:

Question
I am the captain of Shaheen Airlines (Pakistan). During the journey when it is time for Salaat, I announce for the passengers: *"Perform Salaat in your seats facing a certain direction (the Qiblah)."* The reasons for this are:

(1) Space for standing to perform Salaat is available only in front of the doors where the planes staff attending to the passengers perform their duties. Performing Salaat standing over there is totally prohibited for security reasons. Even I, although being the captain, cannot perform Salaat there standing.

(2) Standing for Salaat in this space, constitutes a severe obstacle for the staff engaging in their work. The staff has to feed the passengers within a specific time and then gather the utensils.

(3) The females of the staff also eat and rest in that place after completing their duties.

(4) A large group of passengers standing at once for performing Salaat presents a severe disruption in the system.

Is my announcement in this scenario proper?

The second issue is that the Qiblah is not at all times in front. Sometimes it is not possible to face the Qiblah whilst seated. According to the Molvi in Rawalpindi, this is a valid excuse for the Salaat to be valid without facing the Qiblah. What is your comment?

ANSWER

The first endeavour of the Musaafir should be to perform Salaat on the ground (before boarding the plane) if there is scope in the time. Or disembark from the plane to perform Salaat on the ground. If it is not possible to perform Salaat on the ground, then endeavour to perform Salaat standing inside the plane. Speak with the airline staff and make an effort to gain permission to stand for the Fardh Salaat. Some airlines have a special designated area for Salaat where Salaat may be performed standing with ease.

However, if on account of the factors mentioned in the question it is not possible to stand and perform Salaat, or permission is not granted for it, then adopt any one of the following options:

(1) In such situations of *majboori* (constraint/helplessness) there is scope to act according to the Fiqhi stance of the three Aimmah and the Jamhoor Aimmah. The Musaafir may resort to Jama' Bainas Salaatain (combining two Salaat). Zuhr and Asr may be combined and performed during Zuhr or Asr time. Maghrib and Isha may be combined and performed during Maghrib or Isha time. Therefore, before the plane takes off or afterwards (that is on landing), perform the two Salaat together.

(2) Perform Salaat seated. According to the Fuqaha, Fardh and Waajib Salaat will be discharged in such a *majboori* while sitting on the seat on condition that at least the chest should be in the direction of the Qiblah.

If the plane changes direction then if the Musaafir is aware, it will be incumbent for him to also change his direction towards the Qiblah. However, if he is not aware of the change, then his Salaat will be valid.

Nawaafil and Sunnats will be fulfilled sitting straight on the seat *('sitting straight' is a conundrum. The passenger does not sit crooked – The Majlis).* Facing the Qiblah and changing direction when the plane changes direction is not a condition. During safar (journey) Rasulullah (Sallallahu alayhi wasallam) would perform Salaat (Nafl) seated on the animal in whatever direction the animal happened to move. ... *(This applies exclusively to Nafl, not to Fardh Salaat – The Majlis)*

At the time of Salaat, Muslim airliners should make the follow announcement:

"The time of Zuhr (for example) has entered. At this time the direction of the Qiblah is on the right (or left). All passengers should remain in their seats, turn their faces slightly to the right (or left) and perform Salaat."

OR

"The Qiblah is behind, hence it is not possible to face the Qiblah sitting on the seat. Therefore, all passengers sitting on their seats should perform Salaat facing the direction infront of them."

(End of the Farul Ifta's fatwa)

OUR COMMENT

The fatwa is unbefitting a Darul Ifta. The function of a Mufti is to guide Muslims to gain proximity to Allah Ta'ala. The Mufti's primary function is to guard and defend the Shariah.

The question pertains to Salaat which, according to Rasulullah (Sallallahu alayh wasallam) is *Imaadud Deen (The Pillar of the Deen).* Salaat upholds the structure of Islam and Imaan. It is of primary and fundamental importance. However, the Darul Ifta's has relegated Salaat to a secondary position. It has made Salaat the handmaid of the dunya which has been given primary importance.

The fatwa mutilates Salaat, stripping it of its vital attributes, to ensure that the ascendency of worldly factors is maintained. Thus, the captain has proffered several nonsensical factors on the basis of which Salaat is disfigured and reduced to a secondary position in subservience to worldly factors which can be overcome to allow for proper performance of Salaat.

The excuses proffered by the captain are spurious. Over the past half a century we have journeyed in numerous planes of several airliners, mostly kuffaar. Alhamdulillah, we had always managed to stand for Salaat. The staff had always been co-operative. In situations where passengers in transit had to remain on the plane, we were allowed to alight and perform Salaat under the plane's wings. The staff even provided blankets to be used as musallas.

We were permitted to perform Salaat in the 'kitchen' area as well as in the wide space by the doorways. Thus the talk of security risks by the captain is imaginary bunkum designed to thwart proper performance of Salaat.

Salaat may not be made subservient to the duties of the staff as the captain desires. Furthermore, passengers standing do not interfere with the duties of the staff. Slight interference must be tolerated by the Muslim staff and the Muslim captain. The problem is that since their Imaan dangles on a thread and they are standing on the precipice to tumble into the cauldron of kufr, they are not prepared to exercise even a little patience towards slight 'inconvenience' emanating from musallis standing.

The inconvenience in reality is a deceptive argument. Firstly, the standing musalli does not stand in the aisle. No one's movement is blocked. He performs Salaat in the kitchen area when the staff is not working there nor resting there. We have personal and practical experience in this regard, hence captain sahib cannot bamboozle us with his silly and baseless excuses. The *shadeed rukaawat (severe obstacle)* mentioned by the captain is his imaginary false figment. It is a blatant lie.

Standing in the space at the doorways poses absolutely no security risk. The captain should explain this imaginary 'security risk'. We used to perform Salaat in such spaces in several planes, and no one objected. The objection has occurred recently in view of great deterioration of Imaan. Salaat has become intolerable for the staff who professes to be Muslims.

Also, all the passengers do not stand up together to perform Salaat. Firstly, the majority of Muslims on a plane do not perform Salaat even those proceeding for Umrah and Hajj despite there being a jamaat khaanah on Saudi planes. We are not aware if this arrangement is extant today. The few passengers who perform Salaat on the plane, perform in succession. Once a musalli has completed his Salaat, another will occupy that space, and so on will all perform there Salaat without any inconvenience to anyone.

It is no longer surprising to observe that Salaat has been demoted to many levels below the toilet. We have observed the inconvenience and congestion in the aisle during the early morning when dozens of passengers line up in the aisle for going to the toilet. The entire aisle is blocked with passengers lining up to enter the toilet. No one objects, and no one claimed this this is an inconvenience. Alas! A single musalli standing in a corner engaging in Salaat suddenly becomes a major issue – a security risk – an interference with the staff's duties. All silly excuses whispered by Iblees.

Passengers walking to and fro in the aisle is no inconvenience! Going to the toilet is no inconvenience! Sitting in the seats in the wide space located at the doorways is no inconvenience! Passengers moving about to converse with friends/relatives in other seats is no inconvenience! **The only 'inconvenience' for the captain and the staff is a passenger performing Salaat!** They need to examine the status of their Imaan.

Furthermore, Salaat is not necessarily performed whilst the staff is serving the passengers with food. Thus there is no obstruction caused by musallis. All the excuses and arguments proffered by the captain are dismissed with contempt. He becomes a cause for kufr. He will be held liable by Allah Ta'ala on the Day of Qiyaamah for preventing Muslim passengers from Salaat – correct discharge of the most important fundamental of Imaan.

The Darul Ifta's advice pertaining to the captain's announcement is haraam. The Darul Ifta is a passive partner of the captain in preventing musallis from proper Salaat performance. The only announcement the captain is allowed to make by the Shariah is to apprize the passengers of the Salaat times and the Qiblah direction. He should not acquit himself like one of these worldly muftis proffering spurious, baseless directives which prevent musallis from performing Salaat in the manner commanded by Allah Ta'ala and taught by Rasulullah (Sallallahu alayhi wasallam).

The Darul Ifta has not acquitted itself in the manner required by the Shariah. A Mufti's primary obligation is *Amr Bil Ma'toof Nahy Anil Munkar.* It is haraam and akin to kufr for him to demote an Islamic injunction; to make it subservient to the dunya, and to make it a handmaid of worldly occupation and profession. Everything should be made subservient to the Commands of Allah Ta'ala. The Commands of Allah Azza Wa Jal may not be bent and manipulated to conform to worldly acts and nafsaani desires. This has become the attitude of the Darul Iftas of this era.

The Darul Ifta has also completely ignored to provide naseehat to the captain on another two issues:

(a) His job. Working as a pilot is beset with many evils, especially the zina evil. The Darul Ifta should have advised him to keep his eyes open for a halaal opening to earn halaal income.

(b) The Darul Ifta did not comment at all on the female staff mentioned by the captain. All the Muslim females working as air hostesses come within the purview of the Hadith which labels them as 'adulteresses'. They are in a zina environment. Their appearance and their movements are zina contaminated.

The job of the Mufti has to be like the obligation of the Nabi whom Allah Ta'ala commanded to say: *"Upon us (Ambiya) it is only to deliver the Clear Message."* It was an obligation of the Darul Ifta to have proffered *naseehat* on the *hurmat* of the presence of the female staff in the plane regardless of the *naseehat* falling on deaf ears.

The obligation of a Mufti is not restricted to discussions of Fiqhi technicalities and details which mean *nil* to the laity *(Awaamun Naas).* The captain is an ordinary layman for whom the many Arabic quotations from the Fiqh kutub are hieroglyphics and meaningless. There is no need to exhibit *Ilmi* erudition when answering the queries of laymen. A simple answer suffices.

As far as the mas'alah of performing Salaat in the plane is concerned, the answer is quite simple.

(1) Salaat must be performed on the plane in whatever way it is possible.
(2) The Salaat performed on the plane should be repeated on the ground.

This is the only answer necessary for practical implementation. Everything else said in this regard is superfluous and uncalled for. The passengers have no concern with the technical and Fiqhi *ikhtilaafaat (differences)* of the Ulama.