

Questions and Answers on the Sutra

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Q1 : What is a Sutra?

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

Q2 : What is its ruling?

A : It is compulsory, and whoever disregards it, has committed a sin. This is based on the saying of the Messenger Muhammad e,,: "If any of you wish to perform Salaah, then he must perform it towards a Sutra (ie:with a Sutra in front of him) and draw close to it". [Aboo Daawood and Ibn Maajah..among others]

And his saying: "Do not perform Salaah except that there is a Sutra in front of you". (Muslim)

And his saying: "If any of you wish to perform Salaah, then let him place a Sutra in front of him and draw close to it for indeed (shaytaan) the evil-one passes in front of him". [Ibn Khuzaymah]

And his saying: "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 Salaah". [Ibn Jaarood]

Q3 : 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 Salaah in a position to have it spoilt by shaytaan. This is evident from the hadeeth of the Messenger of Allaah (sallallaahu alayhi wasallam) ,,: "And let him draw close to it and don't let shaytaan break his Salaah." [Ahmad, Aboo Daawood, Ibn Khuzaymah Ibn Hibbaan, Al-Haakim, and others]

And the hadeeth: "And let him draw close to it for indeed shaytaan passes between him and it (the Sutra)". [Ibn Hibbaan]

And the hadeeth: "And let him draw close to the Sutra for indeed shaytaan passes in front of him". [Ibn Khuzaymah]

And the hadeeth: "There was, between the spot on which the Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wasallam) performed Salaah and the wall, the distance of the path of one sheep". [Al-Bukhaaree and Muslim]

And in another hadeeth it states that: "When the Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wasallam) entered the Ka'bah he put a distance of three forearms between himself and the wall then performed Salaah". [Al-Bukhaaree]

Q4 : What is the smallest size that the Sutra can be?

A : It is the height of one forearm (*2) above the place of Salaah - that is 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 Qur'aanic saying in surah At-Taghaabun verse 16:

"So keep your duty to Allaah (and fear Him) as much as you can..."

And from the hadeeth of the Messenger of Allaah (sallallaahu alayhi wasallam) ;: "If I order you to do something then do as much of it as you are able to". [Muslim]

The Prophet Muhammad e also said: "If any of you places something like (the size of) the rear of a camel's saddle in front of him, then performs Salaah, then do not bother about whoever passes beyond that". [Muslim]

The Prophet Muhammad e was also asked during the battle of Tabook, about the Sutra of a person performing Salaah, so he said: "Like the rear end of a camel's saddle". [Muslim]

He e also said: "If there is something like (the size) of the rear end of a camel's saddle between you and the pathway, then whoever passes in front of you would not harm you: (i.e. invalidate your Salaah)". [Ibn Abi Shaybah/Abdur-Razaak and others]

. and other hadeeths some of which are to come.

In addition the Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wasallam) performed Salaah with a spear, or sometimes a bow in front of him. [as reported in Muslim]

It is not therefore the width of the Sutra that is considered, as we previously mentioned.

Q5 : Is there any one exempted from placing a Sutra in front-of him while making Salaah

A : Yes, only those performing Salaah behind an Imaam. We gather this from the fact that the Prophet Muhammad e when he led the Salaah, placed a Sutra in front of him and no one performing Salaah behind him did so. [As has been mentioned in a number of hadeeths in both Al-Bukhaaree and Muslim]

Q6 : 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 e, :
"Like (the size of) the rear end of a camel's saddle."

It has also been authentically reported on the Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wasallam) that he performed Salaah 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 Salaah with a grave in front of you. As is evident from the hadeeth in which the Prophet Muhammad e prevented such actions, he said: "Do not perform Salaah with graves in front of you, nor sit on them." [Muslim]

In addition, it is disliked to perform Salaah in front of that which distracts. For the Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wasallam) said to `Aaishah:

"Remove your curtain! for indeed its pictures keep appearing during my Salaah". [Al-Bukhaaree]

Q7 : 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 (sallallahu alayhi wasallam) placed a spear in front of him in the plain of Makkah (*1) and then performed Salaah-ul-Dhur and Asr. (*1) When he entered the Ka'bah too, he used its wall as a Sutra. When he made Tawaaf around the Ka'bah, he placed the Maqaam (station) of Ibraheem between himself and it, then performed Salaah. (*2) This was what was done also, by the Sahaaba's after him.

Q8 : What is the verdict on someone passing in front of a person performing Salaah?

A : Passing in front of a person performing Salaah 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 Salaah, or closer than three forearms¹ length to the person who has no Sutra in front of him. Because three forearms¹ length is the furthest distance which one can stay away from a Sutra. The evidence supporting this, is the hadeeth of the Messenger of Allaah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam) : "If only the one passing in front of another performing Salaah, 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-Bukhaaree]

Q9 : Is anyone exempted from this verdict?

A : Yes, the one passing through the rows in congregational Salaah, is exempted: For it has been reported that Ibn 'Abbaas said: "Fodle and I came riding on a female donkey, while the Messenger of Allaah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam) was at `Arafah, so we passed in front of some of the rows, then we dismounted and we left the donkey to graze. We then entered (the Salaah) with the Messenger of Allaah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam) , and the Messenger of Allaah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam) did not say anything to us (about it)." [Al-Bukhaaree, Muslim, Al-Humaydee]

And in another version it states that the female donkey passed in-front-of part of the first row.

Abdullaah Ibn 'Amr said: "We rested with the Messenger of Allaah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam) from Thanyatu (the mountain pass) of Azaakhir. The time for Salaah came, so he performed Salaah 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, Aboo Daawood]

Q10 : What must the person performing Salaah do if someone tries to pass in front of him?

A : If anyone tries to pass in front of a person performing Salaah, 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, 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 Salaah, 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 Salaah, is possessed by evil. The evidence in support of this, is the hadeeth of the Messenger of Allaah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam) : "If any of you perform Salaah 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]

Aboo Saaleh said: "I saw Aboo Sa'eed Al-Khudree, on the Day of Jum'ah, performing Salaah in front of something which he used as a Sutra. A youth from the tribe of Bane Abi Mu'ayt wanted to pass in front of him, so Aboo Sa'eed repulsed him with a push on his chest. The youth, looking

around, saw no other place to pass, except in front of Aboo Sa'eed. He therefore tried to pass again. Aboo Sa'eed this time pushed him even harder. The youth Abused Aboo Sa'eed and went to Marwaan to lodge a complaint against Aboo Sa'eed. Aboo 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 Aboo Sa'eed?" Aboo Sa'eed said: I heard the Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wasallam) say: "If any of you perform Salaah, with a Sutrah blocking you from the people, and someone tried to pass in front of you, then fight him, for indeed he is (shaytaan) evil". [Al-Bukhaaree]

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 shaytaan". [Ibn Khuzaymah]

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

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

The Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wasallam) also repelled shaytaan when he wanted to cut across his Salaah. The Messenger of Allaah (sallallaahu alayhi wasallam) also repelled the animal when it wanted to pass in front of him, as we previously mentioned. The one performing Salaah 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 Sutrah, as has been authentically reported on the Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wasallam) , 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 t, used to perform Salaah in the Ka'bah and never let anyone pass in front of him. As for the one who passes between the rows of a congregational Salaah, he is exempted from that which was previously mentioned.

Q11 : Why is the one, attempting to pass in-front-of one performing Salaah, repelled and fought?

A : The one attempting to pass is repelled and fought, because he decreases the blessing of the Salaah. Sometimes, he even destroys it altogether. Ibn Mas'ood said: "Whoever from amongst you is able to perform Salaah without anyone passing in front of him, then do so. For indeed the person passing in front of the one making Salaah receives less blessings than the one in front of whom he passed". [Abdur-Razaak, Ibn Abi Shaybah]

This is further emphasized by the hadeeth of the Messenger of Allaah (sallallaahu alayhi wasallam) 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 effect your Salaah)

In addition, the one attempting to pass, is repelled 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.

Q12 : You said that the one passing, sometimes invalidates the Salaah. So what exactly invalidates the Salaah?

A : Among the things that invalidate the Salaah by their passing are:

- 1 - The shaytaan
- 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 Allaah (sallallaahu alayhi wasallam) concerning Sutra. In which he said: "Let him draw close to it, and don't let shaytaan break his Salaah".

And another hadeeth which he e said: "Indeed a malicious Jinn pounced on me last night trying to break my Salaah". [Muslim]

In another version it says: "Indeed shaytaan wanted to pass in-front-of me, so I choked him until I felt the coldness of his tongue on my hand". [Ahmad]

Preventing shaytaan from breaking one's Salaah therefore, is done by drawing close to the Sutra, as was mentioned in the previous hadeeths.

Preventing other than shaytaan, is achieved by repulsion or by the placing of a Sutra, from the types mentioned before, in front of you. The Messenger of Allaah (sallallaahu alayhi wasallam) said: "A woman, donkey and a dog all invalidate Salaah (if they pass in front of a person performing Salaah) 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: "Salaah is invalidated by (the passing of) a black dog or a menstruating woman, (i.e. a woman who has reached puberty)." [Ahmad and Aboo Daawood]

It was reported by Abdullaah Ibn Saamit, that Aboo Dhar said, that the Messenger of Allaah (sallallaahu alayhi wasallam) said: "If any of you wish to perform Salaah, he is indeed shielded, if he has, in-front-of him, something the size of the rear end of a camel's saddle, in-front-of him, however, then (the passing of) a donkey, a woman or a black dog can invalidate his Salaah."

I said: "Oh Aboo 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 Allaah (sallallaahu alayhi wasallam) just as you have asked me, and he said: "A black dog is shaytaan". [Muslim]

And in another version it states: "Salaah is repeated due to the passing of a donkey, a woman or a black dog". [Ibn Khuzaymah]

This does not apply, however, if these things, mentioned above, are in-front-of the person performing Salaah but not moving across him. The Messenger of Allaah (sallallaahu alayhi wasallam) used to perform Salaah in-front-of a bed with `Aaishah lying on it (as is mentioned in the hadeeth of question 13). (*) In addition Maymoona, the wife of the Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wasallam) said: "The Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wasallam) used to pray while I used to sleep beside him during my periods (menses) and in prostration his garment used to touch me". [Al-Bukhaaree]

Q13 : Is it permissible to touch or push one's wife while in prostration, in order to prostrate properly?

A : Yes. This is evident from the hadeeth narrated by `Aaishah t: "It is not good that you people have made us (women) equal to dogs and donkeys. No doubt, I saw Allaah's Apostle e praying while I used to lie between him and the Qiblah and when he wanted to prostrate, he pushed my legs and I withdrew them". [Al-Bukhaaree]

Refer also to last hadeeth of question 12.

Q14 : 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.

This topic has been dealt with in some detail in the author's book, of some 184 pages in Arabic - "Rulings pertaining to the Sutra in Makkah and elsewhere and the verdict on passing in-front-of the person performing Salaah" -

*Question 13 along with its answer has been added by the translator; It was taken from Saheeh Al-Bukhaaree: Vol.1 / book 9 / chapter 19.