

What is a masjid al-bayt? (Its rulings and virtues)

Darulifta Ahlesunnat

(Dawateislami)

Question

What do the honourable scholars of Islam say regarding the following:

What is a masjid al-bayt, and what are its virtues?

Does a masjid al-bayt also have finā' al-masjid (an appendage) just like normal masjids do? Moreover, if there was not a masjid al-bayt in the house before, and one is made now, can it be changed?

Can a woman observe nafl itikaf inside a masjid al-bayt? Questioner: Abdullah, Karachi

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الْجَوَابُ بِعَوْنِ الْمَلِكِ الْوَهَّابِ اللَّهُمَّ هِدَايَةَ الْحَقِّ وَالصَّوَابِ

1. The area designated inside a home to pray salah is referred to as masjid al-bayt. To specify such a place is mustahab (recommended). It is better for it to be relatively high and kept clean and fragrant, for the Beloved Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم instructed to make a masjid al-bayt and for it to be kept clean, and this itself suffices to demonstrate its virtue.

Allah Almighty has stated in the Holy Quran:

وَأَجْعَلُوا بُيُوتَكُمْ قِبْلَةً

Translation from Kanz al-Īmān: And make your houses as places of worship.¹

In the exegesis of this verse found in *Şirāṭ al-Jinān*, it states:

We come to know of five things from this verse:

2. To build a domestic masjid (known as masjid al-bayt) inside residential buildings is an ancient custom. Hence, Muslims should keep an area of their home clean for salah, and ladies should observe i'tikāf (the spiritual retreat) there.²

Regarding making a masjid al-bayt within homes, it is narrated from Sayyidatunā 'Āishah رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهَا:

أمر رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم ببناء المساجد في الدور وأن تنظف وتطيب.

Translation: "The Messenger of Allah صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ ordered to build masjids inside homes (masjid al-bayt) and for them to be kept clean and fragrant."³

Elaborating on the reason to ensure a masjid al-bayt is clean, 'Allāmah Badr al-Dīn al-'Aynī رَحِمَهُ اللهُ عَالِيَهُ writes:

بتنظيفها وتطيبها عن الأقدار؛ لأن لها حرمة لأجل إقامة الصلاة فيها، ولتشبهها بالمساجد المطلقة.

¹ Al-Quran, 10:87

² Şirāṭ al-Jinān, vol. 4, p. 368, Maktaba tul Madina, Karachi

³ Sunan Abī Dāwūd, Kitāb al-Şalāh, Bāb Ittikhāz al-Masajid fī al-Door, vol. 1, p. 124, Maktaba al-'Asriyya, Beirut

Translation: “[The command] to keep the masjid al-bayt free of filth is because of the sanctity afforded to it due to salah being offered inside it and its resemblance to a normal masjid.”⁴

It is stated in *Mirāt al-Manājīh*:

This is in reference to masjid al-bayt, meaning, a room or some part of the house should be designated for salah. Worldly activities should not take place there. The area should be kept clean and fragrant. We found our elders acting upon this. Now, this practice is ending.⁵ In *Bahār-i-Sharīat*, the following is mentioned:

It is recommended for a woman to designate an area for salah inside the home. Such a place should be kept pure. For it to be raised like a platform is better. Men should also specify an area for *Nafl* salah inside the home, for it is more excellent to offer such salah at home.⁶

2. The ruling of a normal masjid that is religiously endowed (*waqf*) does not apply to a masjid al-bayt. For the latter to be sold or gifted, for example, is permitted. Likewise, someone in a state of ritual impurity may also enter a masjid al-bayt. Buying and selling are also permitted without any *karāhah* (disliking). All of these matters are not permitted in relation to a masjid that is religiously endowed. Hence, a masjid al-bayt can also be changed.

The following ruling regarding a masjid al-bayt is found in *al-Hidāyah*:

ولا بأس بالبول فوق بيت فيه مسجد، والمراد ما أعد للصلاة في البيت؛ لأنه لم يأخذ حكم المسجد، وإن ندبنا إليه

In explanation of the above, the following distinction is mentioned in *al-Bināyah* between the rulings applicable to a masjid al-bayt from those that apply to a normal masjid:

هو الموضع الذي يعد للصلاة في بيته للصلاة؛ لأنه لم يأخذ حكم المسجد؛ لبقائه في ملكه، حتى له أن يبيعه ويهبه ويورث عنه، فكان حكمه حكم غيره من المنزل المبلو كوتسبيته مسجدا لا يفيد حكم المساجد وإن ندبنا إليه يعني وإن دعينا إلى اتخاذة في البيت؛ لأنه مستحب لكل

إنسان أن يعد في بيته مكانا للصلاة يصل فيه النوافل والسنن ملخصاً⁷

Hence, the concept of masjid al-bayt has its proof in Quran, Hadith and the works of experts in Fiqh (*fuqahā*). A masjid al-bayt does not have *Fina*. Therefore, [an individual observing *ītikāf*] must remain within the bounds of the masjid al-bayt. In the event of leaving to go to the toilet or perform wudu, it is only permitted to do so out of necessity, and one must return immediately upon fulfilling such needs, otherwise the *ītikāf* will become annulled. Leaving the masjid al-bayt for performing ghusl merely out of routine or for experiencing coolness or relaxation will also render *ītikāf* invalid.

3. The ruling regarding a woman’s *itikāf* in a masjid al-bayt is the same as the ruling for a man observing *itikāf* in a normal religiously endowed masjid. It is permitted for a man to observe a *nafl itikāf* in a normal religiously endowed masjid, so a woman can also observe a *nafl ītikāf* in a masjid al-bayt.

⁴ *Sharh Abī Dāwūd al-‘ayni*, vol. 2, p. 359, Published in Riyad

⁵ *Mirāt al-Manājīh*, vol. 1, p. 443, publisher Ziya al-Quran, Lahore

⁶ *Bahār-i-Sharī‘at*, part 5, vol. 1, p. 1,021, Maktaba tul Madīna, Karachi

⁷ *Al-Bināyah Sharh Hidayah, Kitāb al-Ṣalāh, Ahkam al-Masjid*, vol. 2, pp. 469,470, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Arabiyyah, Beirut

The ruling for a woman's *itikaf* in a masjid al-bayt is the same as the ruling concerning a normal masjid, which includes the *nafl i'tikāf*. Just as 'Allāmah al-Kāsānī رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ writes in *Badā'i' al-Ṣanā'i'*:

وأما الذي يرجع إلى المعتكف فيه: فالمسجد وإنه شرط في نوعي الاعتكاف: الواجب والتطوع -- هذه قرينة خصت بالمسجد لكن مسجد بيتها له حكم المسجد في حقها في حق الاعتكاف؛ لأن له حكم المسجد في حقها في حق الصلاة -- وإذا كان له حكم المسجد في حقها في حق الصلاة فكذلك في حق الاعتكاف؛ لأن كل واحد منهما في اختصاصه بالمسجد سواء وليس لها أن تعتكف في بيتها في غير مسجد وهو الموضع البعد للصلاة مخصصاً⁸

Note: Only women are permitted to observe *itikaf* inside a home; it will not be valid for men to do so.

It is stated in *Fatāwā 'Ālamgīrī*:

مساجد البيوت فإنه لا يجوز الاعتكاف فيها إلا للنساء كذا في القنية⁹

وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ عَزَّوَجَلَّ وَرَسُولُهُ أَعْلَمُ صَلَّى اللَّهُ تَعَالَى عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ

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Ref No: Aqs-1819

Date: 22 Ramadan, 1441 (16 May, 2020)



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⁸ *Badā'i' al-Ṣanā'i'*, Kitāb al- i'tikāf, vol. 2, pp. 280 – 282, Published in Quetta

⁹ *Al-Fatāwā al-Hindiyyah*, Kitāb al-Karahiyyah, al- Bāb al-Khamis fī Adāb al-masjid, vol. 5, p. 321, Published in Beirut