
ADJOURNMENT OF CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC ACCORDING TO FIQH PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The five-time prayer is the essence of religion that must be performed daily. The impetus of prayer to Muslims is to assure that human relationship with God is always close and hinders one from performing sinful and evil acts. This *fard* (obligatory) prayer will be more meaningful if performed in the congregation because of its abundant rewards instead of individual prayers. Besides, congregational prayer can educate people to become human beings sensitive to the sense of life as servants and absolutely in line with *Maqasid Syariah*'s requirements. Nevertheless, currently, the whole world is hit by COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, almost all Islamic countries' governments must administer proactive steps by introducing Movement Control Orders (PKP) to adjourn all religious activities, including mosque and *surau* activities. This research aimed to analyse the need for congregational prayer in the mosque or at home. Accordingly, it explained the rational arguments of the adjournment of all worship houses' activities during the pandemic. This study adopted a descriptive qualitative method of literature review and document analysis. The outcomes revealed that although the pandemic of the COVID-19 epidemic affects Islamic practices, its teachings persists through mosques or *suraus* in the form of a call to prayer every prayer time. Each state's *muftis* must deliver proactive steps in issuing *fatwas* to achieve the *maslahah* of life preservation from the COVID-19 virus. Congregational prayers can continue but performed in their respective homes. It is to ensure that the transmission of the COVID-19 outbreak is controlled and its chain is broken.

Keywords: Mosque; Movement Control Order; *maslahat*; COVID-19; *Maqasid Shariah*

Introduction

The word *al-Jamaah* implies an unlimited gathering of all beings, including humans and animals (al-Sharbini, 1995; al-Zuhayli, 1999; Ibn Manzur, 1994). Al-Zuhayli (1999) defined congregational prayer as an act that can create a friendly bond among human beings in many circumstances. Various definitions were given to the meaning of congregational prayer by scholars. It is to assure that Muslims can observe the emphasis on congregational prayer. In an attempt to guarantee the practice of congregational prayer is appropriately implemented, Islam conditioned that congregational prayer can be carried out if the number exceeds two or more individuals (Ibn Qudamah, 1968). Based on the above definition, it is evident that congregational prayer is not arduous and complicated. The requirement of congregational prayer is prescribed after the Prophet Muhammad PBUH migrated to the city of Madinah. It was not prescribed when the Prophet Muhammad PBUH was in Mecca because the influence of the place and atmosphere was not fitting. The requirements of congregational prayer can be proven through the following arguments:

I. Al-Quran

Allah mentioned the priority of congregational prayer even in war times demonstrates an excellent reward from Him for those who pray in congregation. Allah SWT stated in surah al-Nisa' verse 102, which means:

When you O Prophet are campaigning with them, and you lead them in prayer, let one group of them pray with you—while armed. When they prostrate themselves, let the other group stand guard behind them. Then the group that has not yet prayed will then join you in prayer. Based on the verses of the Qur'an above, it can be concluded that praying in congregation is demanded and ordered. It even applies in a war situation. Of course, this is an obligation on Muslims who live in a peaceful ambience without being troubled and inflicted by war circumstances (Sharbini, 1995).

II. al-Sunnah

Many hadiths explain the virtues and advantages of congregational prayer. Among them is the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH, which means:

Ibn Umar reported Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) as saying: Prayer said in a congregation is twenty-seven degrees more excellent than prayer said by a single person. (al-Bukhari, 1992; Muslim, 1991).

Based on the Prophet Muhammad PBUH's hadith above, it can be understood that congregational prayer holds numerous benefits and priorities compared to prayer alone. Every individual in the congregation will bring blessings and goodness and doubling the reward of more than one prayer up to twenty-seven goodness (Ibn Hajar, 1997).

Advantages of Prayer in Congregation

Congregational prayer holds its virtues and advantages. Through congregational prayers, many things will be discovered such as the essence of patience, brotherhood, oneness, unity of the congregation, being in a close line, and educates people the sense of discipline (Ab Rahman et al., 2020a). This situation symbolises the relationship between relatives of the same religion, particularly during gatherings in the mosque. This congregational prayer gathering in mosques and *suraus* can also educate people to stay away from all the traits of *mazmumah* (reprehensible) such as arrogance, jealousy, envy, greed and at the same time can motivate collaboration to uphold the truth (al-Ghazali, 1997).

According to al-Qardhawi (2001), congregational prayer is one of the signs of Islamic teachings. When the call to prayer happens, it is a sign that a place has Muslims residents, and there is a place for them to gather for congregational prayer. The Prophet Muhammad PBUH once described the advantages of congregational prayer, which gets twenty times the reward degree instead of praying alone. Other hadiths show the advantages of congregational prayer, among them, are:

- I. Release from the two punishments, namely the fire of hell and the nature of hypocrisy. It corresponds with the words of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH, which means:

“Who prays forty days sincerely for Allah in congregation catching the opening *Takbir*, then two exemptions are written for him. He will be safe from the fire and free from hypocrisy.” (al-Tirmidzi, 2008).

In concluding the above hadith, it is evident that a person who keeps the prayers in the congregation will get Allah’s protection by getting two forms of forgiveness, particularly the fire of hell and hypocrisy. (al-Mubarakfuri, 2001).

- II. Savour the forgiveness of Allah SWT for all past sins. The words of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH, which means:

Abu Hurairah (may Allah be pleased with him) reported: The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, “The five daily prayers, and Friday (prayer) to the next Friday (prayer), and (the fasting of) Ramadan to the next Ramadan, is the expiation of the sins committed in between them, so long as major sins are avoided.”(Muslim, 1991).

Based on this hadith, al-Nawawi (1995) asserted that completing the *fard* prayers and Friday prayers will remove the sins committed by His servants. Allah’s love for humankind is so prominent that forgiveness transcends His wrath.

***Hukm* (Rules) of Prayer in Congregation**

The Syafi’i sect scholars examined the rules related to prayer in the congregation so that the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH can be well appreciated and lived in the Muslim community’s life. There are three laws of congregational prayer in Islam, specifically (al-Nawawi, 1995):

- I. *Fard ‘Ayn*

There is an argument that mentioned that the law of congregational prayer is *fard ‘ayn*(Ab Rahman et al., 2020b). *Fard ‘ayn* is defined as everything that every individual must do, and it is a sin if one deliberately leaves it. Ibn Munzir agreed with the opinion regarding the rule of congregational prayer that is *fard ‘ayn*. The basis for this opinion is the words of Allah SWT in surah al-Nisa’ 102 which means:

“When you O Prophet are campaigning with them, and you lead them in prayer, let one group of them pray with you—while armed. When they prostrate themselves, let the other group stand guard behind them. Then the group that has not yet prayed will then join you in prayer.”

The above verse emphasises the importance of congregational prayer, even in a state of war and fighting the enemy. Therefore, the ulama’ who adhere to this view consider that it

is obligatory to pray in congregation in a state of war. Hence, there is no reason not to perform it in a peaceful circumstance.

II. *Fard Kifaya*

Al-Shirbini (1995) and al-Nawawi (1995) argued that congregational prayer either in the mosque or elsewhere is included in the category of *fard kifaya*. In this context, the meaning of *fard kifaya* is if every worship is obligatory on the *mukallaf* and some of them perform it, then the obligation is exempted to others such as congregational prayers in the mosque, and funeral prayers. This group also refers to the words of Allah SWT in surah al-Nisa 'verse 102 as the basis. Nonetheless, their interpretation of this verse differs from that of the first group. According to al-Jurjani (1993), the verse does not specify the rule of congregational prayer is obligatory, but the discussion is on *fard kifaya* because the word 'war' in verse leads to an atmosphere of insecurity. Further, it also emphasises the prayer method in the congregation when Muslims are in a restless atmosphere. Therefore, it is agreeable to the condition that congregational *sunnah* (optional) prayers are performed anywhere, whether in a mosque, or house. (Husain ibn Awdah, 1999).

III. Encouraged *Sunnah*

Sunnah mu'akkadah is a *sunnah* encouraged because it was never abandoned by the Prophet Muhammad PBUH and the companions. This view was pioneered by al-Rafie (1998) and al-Mawardi (1990). This view is based on the following propositions:

Ibn Umar reported Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) saying: Prayer said in a congregation is twenty-seven degrees more excellent than prayer said by a single person. (al-Bukhari, 2001; Muslim, 1999).

Al-Kasani (1990) maintained that congregational prayer is *sunnah* and *afdal* because it is demanded by the Prophet Muhammad PBUH. History confirmed that the Prophet Muhammad PBUH never left the congregational prayers with the companions wherever he was. Consequently, congregational prayer is not obligatory but encouraged *sunnah*.

Human Action Based on *Maqasid Shariah*

Every human action must be based on the Shariah to be rewarded with Allah's rewards and blessings (Kashim et al., 2020). In this regard, *Maqasid Shariah* is a goal that needs to be accomplished by human beings to attend the requirements of Islamic law (Kashim et al., 2018). It is found that the laws in Islam will be developed based on *Maqasid Shariah* (Husain ibn Awdah, 1999; al-Sayuti, 1999). It should be noted that Islamic rule intends to bring good to human beings and keep them away from harm. It drives the man to achieve life's

objectives in line with Allah's will. Thus, *Maqasid Shariah* was divided into three parts according to the level of importance, according to al-Sayuti (1999):

- I. *Maqasid al-Daruriyyah*: It is the most critical goal of human life. Man will not live without caring for the five essential things, namely religion, life, intellect, lineage and property. These five fundamental things play the most critical role in determining a rule that involves human life. Every *fatwa* on new issues such as adjourning congregational prayers in the mosque and Friday prayers must be assessed based on the five principles so that the law decided does not deviate from the path of truth.
- II. *Maqasid al-Hajiyyah*: It is a human need that can make survival more meaningful. Man can live without it, but it will result in man living a taxing and stressful life. For instance, Islam permits its people who travel to shorten the pray. It endeavours to make people's lives easy while travelling even though they can continue praying without such *rukhsah* (leniency).
- III. *Maqasid al-Tahsiniyyah*: It is a side need as a complement to human life to be more convenient. This type of human need is at the final stage in the evaluation of a rule. Without that need, human beings still live contentedly without any problems or stress. For example, covering the 'awrah is an obligatory and *daruriyyah* business, but, on the other side, the fragrance is the only *tahsiniyyah* because, without it, human beings will not have a problem to survive.

Adjournment of Congregational Prayer During Covid-19

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the Malaysian government decided to implement the Movement Control Order (PKP) to curb this dangerous pandemic from spreading further (Ab Rahman et al., 2020c). Following this matter, the National Security Council (MKN) and the Ministry of Health Malaysia (KKM) dated 11 March 2020 established all public gatherings to be adjourned to stop COVID-19 spread.

The ban also concerns all mosque activities, including gatherings to perform congregational and Friday prayers. MKN believes that gatherings in mosques or *surau* will prompt the spread of the COVID-19 virus (Anon, 2020). It is due to the close contact among the congregation to favour the spread of the virus and infection. Therefore, the Muzakarah of the National Council for Islamic Religious Affairs Malaysia (MKI) convened and approved all Islamic religious leaders of the states that congregational activities in the mosque be adjourned.

MKI decision must be submitted and implemented by all parties because it meets the requirements of *Maqasid Shariah*. Of the five *Maqasid al-Daruriyyah* that was explained previously, three *Maqasid* are immediately involved in determining the order's rule to close the mosque for the public. The three *maqasids* referred to are the care of life, lineage and

property (Ab Rahman et al. 2020a). The support for such directions is the words of Allah SWT in surah al-Baqarah verse 195 which means:

“Spend in the cause of Allah and do not let your own hands throw you into destruction by withholding. And do good, for Allah certainly loves the good-doers.”

Apart from this verse, the fiqh method (jurisprudence) is also the basis of support to close the mosque for congregational and Friday prayers. Among the methods of *fiqh* referred to in this issue are:

“Can not harm yourself and others.” (al-Sayuti, 2004).

Additionally, there are other methods of *fiqh* that determine

“Rejecting the harm is more important than getting the benefit.”(al-Sayuti, 2004).

Although mosques and *suraus* are closed for congregational prayers, two quintessential things remain to be performed so that Islamic teachings continue to grow in Malaysia. Firstly, the call to prayer at every prayer time is continued as usual. There is only an additional direction after the call to prayer that is “pray at your house”. Secondly, the congregational prayers are continued in their respective homes in the congregation. A person who regularly follows congregational prayers in the mosque or *suraus*, will not leave congregational prayers in their respective homes during the PKP due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conclusion

Ergo, taking care of life in curbing the COVID-19 pandemic does not signify putting *hifz nafs* (life care) over *hifz din* (religious care) such as congregational prayers and Friday prayers. The provision of Friday prayers and congregational prayers in the mosque complement the completeness of *hifz din*. Without life, religious care will not be achieved because religion needs to be practised and sustained by human beings. It should also be noted that preserving life is the sole purpose of human beings created to survive any harm.

Based on that basis, when there is a clash between the *Maqasid Shariah* components, the priority to choose something more practical and holistic comes first. It is to maintain Islam’s excellency in dealing with the situation during the spread of infectious diseases such as COVID-19. In addition to complying to the *Shariah* guidelines, adherence to government’s guidelines is also imperative to stop the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in the community. Therefore, it is relevant when the government adjourned Friday prayers and congregational prayers in mosques or *suraus* to curb the spread of COVID-19 among the congregations even when these instructions induced controversy in some communities. Still, each state’s *muftis* must exercise avant-garde actions in issuing *fatwas* so that the quandary of life preservation from the COVID-19 virus is achieved.

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