

## Reciting Surah Al-Faatihah in Every Prayer

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In his classical treatise, Shaikh Muhammad bin 'Abdil-Wahhaab, may Allaah have mercy on him, says: "The pillars of the prayer are fourteen: (1) Standing, if one has the ability to do so; (2) The opening Takbeer; (3) Reciting Surah Al-Faatihah..."

In his explanation of this last pillar, Shaikh Muhammad Amaan Al-Jaamee, may Allaah have mercy on him, said:

This applies to everyone – the one leading the prayer (*Imaam*), the one being led in prayer (*ma'moom*) and the one praying alone (*munfarid*) in the same manner – and according to the most correct opinion even in the audible prayers.

The *ma'moom* listening to the recitation of the Imaam and remaining attentive to it does not remove the obligation of reciting Surah Al-Faatihah from him according to the most correct opinion of the scholars. This issue is one of differing since the Prophet's (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) statement: **"There is no prayer for he who does not recite the opening chapter of the Book"** includes the one leading the prayer, the one being led in prayer and the one praying alone. He (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said: **"There is no prayer for he who does not recite..."** Listening is not reciting.

It's true that the one being led in prayer should remain attentive to the recitation of the one leading the prayer. However, the extent in which it takes him to recite Surah Al-Faatihah is exempted from this, whether he recites Al-Faatihah along with the Imaam in succession or he is able to recite it during one of the moments in which the Imaam pauses or he recites it while the Imaam is reciting the (next) surah in any of the opportunities he gets. This is since there is no mention (in the texts) of a specific time for the one being led in prayer to recite Surah Al-Faatihah.

Irregardless, he must recite it since the prayer of the one who does not recite Surah Al-Faatihah is invalid whether he is leading the prayer, praying alone or – according to the most correct view as stated before – even if he is being led in prayer and standing behind an Imaam that is reciting out loud. The strongest proof for this is the *qudsee* hadeeth in which Allaah said: **"I have divided the prayer between Myself and My servant into two halves."** What is meant by **"prayer"** here is Surah Al-Faatihah. Allaah referred to Al-Faatihah as the prayer.

**"I have divided the prayer between Myself and My servant into two halves, and My servant**

will have what he asks for. When the servant says: *‘Al-Hamdulillaahi Rabb-il-‘Alameen’*, Allaah says: *‘My servant has praised Me.’* And when he says: *‘Ar-Rahmaan-ir-Raheem’*, Allaah says: *‘My servant has extolled Me.’* And when he says: *‘Maaliki-yawm-id-Deen’*, Allaah says: *‘My servant has honored Me.’* And when he says: *‘Iyyaaka Na’bdu wa Iyyaaka Nasta’een’*, Allaah says: *‘This is between My servant and I and My servant will have what he asks for.’*

And when he says: *‘Ihdinaas-Siraat-al-Mustaqeem. Siraat-aladheena an’amta ‘alaihim. Ghairil-Maghdoobi ‘alaihim wa lad-Daalleen’*, Allaah says: *‘This is for My servant and for My servant will be what he asks for.’*”

Allaah has referred to Surah Al-Faatihah as the **“Prayer”** in this qudsee hadeeth. This includes everyone who prays, meaning: Whoever does not recite Al-Faatihah has no prayer. So the hadeeth explains itself and supports itself.

Therefore, a person who prays behind someone – even an Imaam that is reciting out loud – should not leave off reciting Surah Al-Faatihah just because of what he has read in the books of one of the madh-habs. If he considers this type of hadeeth to be authentic as well as the second hadeeth **“There is no prayer for he who does not recite the opening chapter of the Book”** and other narrations concerning Surah Al-Faatihah that bear a similar meaning, it is not permissible for him to turn away from these *ahaadeeth* by claiming that he is following the madh-hab of so and so and that this madh-hab says it is not obligatory upon the one being led in prayer to recite Al-Faatihah particularly when the Imaam is reciting out loud. This is not a correct stance.

Imaam Maalik, may Allaah have mercy on him, the Imaam of Madeenah and one of the great ones to have taught at the Prophet’s Masjid during the time of the Taabi’-ut-Taabi’een who would teach in the proximity of the garden would advise his students saying to them: “Every person’s statements can either be accepted or rejected except for the inhabitant of this grave” and he pointed to the Prophet’s (*sallAllaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) grave, which was close to where he was teaching.

This is what it means: It is not befitting for a Muslim – especially a student of knowledge – that comes upon a hadeeth of Allaah’s Messenger (*sallAllaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) to claim that this hadeeth opposes our madh-hab, and then abandons it claiming that he is doing so out of following his madh-hab. Following one of the madh-habs is not obligatory. There does not exist at all any creature whom we are obligated to follow and for whom we will be questioned about following – if we fall short in doing that – except for the Messenger of Allaah, Muhammad, (*sallAllaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*). Such a person does not exist.

As for the one who says: “And it is an obligation to blindly follow a scholar from amongst them” as the saying goes, using such wording that implies the same understanding of this statement made by the author of *Jawharat-ut-Tawheed*, then such a statement is baseless.

We are not obligated to follow any one of the four madh-habs. It is not an obligation. In fact, the most correct view is that it is not even permissible. The term “obligation” is a legal ruling and a legal ruling does not become established except by a proof from the Qur’aan or the Sunnah.

Whoever claims that something is obligatory is required to bring forward the proof for his claim. What is meant by the saying that we are obligated to follow the madh-hab of Imaam Maalik?? How could this be when at his time there were three other Muslim Imaams of his caliber? And altogether, these four Imaams were considered the Imaams of the world during the time of the Taabi’-ut-Taabi’een as Ibn Taimiyyah said: “These four are the Imaams of the world during the time of the Taabi’-ut-Taabi’een. Amongst them is Imaam Maalik in the Hijaaz, Al-Laith bin Sa’ad in Egypt, Ath-Thawree in ‘Iraaq, and Al-Awzaa’ee in Shaam.” So it is not permissible to blindly follow three of them but as for the fourth, we can?!?!

Where did they get this from? What is the proof for it? For three of them it is not permissible, ok, it is not obligatory. It is not permissible for us to blindly follow Laith or Thawree or Al-Awzaa’ee, but as for Imaam Maalik, we must blindly follow him? Where did such a division come from? Who is the one who made such a thing an obligation? Did some revelation come down saying: “If an Imaam reaches the level of Imamship, the ummah is obligated to follow him?” There must be some text similar to this reported. And because there is none, the claim that blind-following one of the four Imaams is a false claim.

I am only using Imaam Maalik as an example here because I used his statement previously. Afterward, I remembered the three other Imaams that were of his caliber. Imaam Abu Haneefah, Ash-Shaafi’ee, Maalik and Ahmad were all Muslim Imaams, but there were others along with them who were just like them. Weren’t they more knowledgeable than them? It was said that Laith bin Sa’ad was more knowledgeable than Maalik. The point I’m trying to make is: The only one whom we are obligated to follow and for whom we will be questioned about following is Muhammad (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*).

Every Muslim knows and memorizes the three questions that he will be asked in the grave. When a person dies and is buried, he will definitely be asked these three questions: “Who is your Lord?” “What is your Religion?” And “who is your Prophet?” In some wordings of the narration, it states: “What do you say about the man who was sent to you?”

This is in reference to Muhammad (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*). One of the questions will not be: “Who is your Imaam? What is your madh-hab? What is your way?” No such report has been

mentioned. Our Imaam, our example, our prophet and our leader to Allaah is Muhammad (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*). We have no other Imaam. The four Imaams as well as those who were of their caliber and standing would call the people to follow this same Imaam. They did not come with the purpose of calling people to follow them. This is why Imaam Abu Haneefah would say: “It is Haraam (unlawful) for anyone to blindly-follow us until they know from where we took (i.e. the sources).” Several scholars have reported this statement on him, such as Ibn ‘Abdil-Barr and Ibn ‘Aabideen in his Hanafee notes.

I would like to reiterate to the students of knowledge that the act of following the Messenger of Allaah (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) does not fall second to the act of worshipping Allaah. This is since worshipping Allaah is what is meant by “*Laa Ilaaha Illaa Allaah*” whereas following the Messenger of Allaah is what is meant when you say: “*Ash-hadu anna Muhammadan Rasoolullaah.*” These two statements are like one statement – the first part of it is not complete without the second part or the second part without the first. We must understand this point well. So the opening chapter of this Qur’aan is one of the important pillars of the prayer.