

MASJID OR MUSALLĀ

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What exactly is a *masjid*? Is there a difference between a *masjid*, *musallā*, and *jamāt khāna*, etc? These are questions which need detailed discussion.

Nowadays, in the west, many Islamic Centers being managed include, among other things, a prayer hall, *musallā*, or *jamāt khāna*. Some communities rent an industrial unit, a store front, a house, or an apartment in which members of the Muslim community gather to perform congregational prayer (and in many cases social activities). Many communities actually have purchased property which they consider their *masjid*.

Which of the above can technically be considered a *masjid*, and what are the related rulings?

There is a difference between a *masjid* and a *musallā* (or *jamāt khāna*). A *musallā* literally means a place where prayer is performed or where congregations are held, or worded differently, any temporary place in which worshippers congregate to perform their prayers. A *musallā* is also a place that has not been made an endowment or not yet intended to become a permanent *masjid* until the Last Day. In many cases, it is a temporary place from which the community will transfer once they find a more suitable, convenient, or permanent location. Though Muslims today commonly refer to their “*musallā*” as their “*masjid*,” which the literal meaning of *masjid* (a place where the prostration is made) allows, a *musallā* cannot technically be considered a legal (*shar‘i*) *masjid*. Likewise the reward for prayer in a *musallā* is not the same as in a proper *masjid*.

The Masjid

The *masjid* is a sanctified area, in which the rewards of prayers in congregation increase 25 to 27 times and where the mercy of Allah descends. It is considered the best of places by the Messenger of Allah (upon him be peace). Ibn ‘Abbās (may Allah be pleased with him) relates:

Masjids are the houses of Allah on the earth. They shine up to the inhabitants of the heavens just as the stars in the sky shine down to the inhabitants of the earth (Tabarānī).

A true *masjid*, in the legal sense, is a place that has been permanently dedicated to Allah for the sake of prayer, recitation, and His remembrance. Any piece of land that has been dedicated permanently for the sake of congregational prayers will also become a proper *masjid*. The great Hanafī scholar of Egypt ‘Allāma Tahtāwī states:

Know that for it [piece of land] to be considered a masjid, a building [or structure] is not necessary. (Tahtāwī, Kitāb al-Waqf, Abkām al-masjid and Qādī Khān 4:712).

A *masjid* is normally made into a *waqf* or endowment (sometimes difficult to establish depending on the legal connotations of endowment in some countries). However, once a *masjid* is erected, it will always be a *masjid* and the property of Allah. It cannot return to being the property of any person or community even those who may have paid for establishing it. ‘Allāma Haskafī writes,

If the inhabitants surrounding the *masjid* wither away and the *masjid* becomes desolate, it will still remain a *masjid* according to Imam Abū Hanīfa and Imam Abū Yūsuf until the Last Day, and the *fatwā* is on this opinion (*Hāwī al-Qudsī*)” (*Al-Durr al-Mukhtār* 3:371).

The Messenger of Allah (upon him be peace) said,

All the earth will disappear on the Day of Judgment with the exception of the *masjids* for they will join with one another (Suyūṭī, *Jāmi’ al-Shaghīr*).

Designation of a Masjid

A *masjid* (to become a *masjid*) must be formally designated by the committee or persons in charge. They do this by defining the area it will occupy and its boundaries. Along with this they can designate other adjoining areas to be used as bathrooms, lobby, storage, etc. The latter however will be considered the auxiliary areas of the *masjid* and, though part of the endowment, will not classify as “*masjid*” area that was previously defined by the committee. Therefore, it is possible, for example, to designate only the front half of a large hall (i.e. the first 10 rows) as the “*masjid*,” while the rest of the hall is classified as a *musallā*. Once the front half has been designated as such, then that part, both above and below it, becomes a *shar‘i masjid*. This means that neither above it nor below it on any floor can be used for anything but as a *masjid*. Hence, all rulings that apply to a *masjid* will now apply to the exact same area directly below it on each of the lower floors (including the basement); and likewise on all floors above it. Constructing toilets, bathrooms, or holding any non-suitable activities above or below the “*masjid*” area will also be impermissible. However, it is permissible to have toilets or bathrooms constructed out of the boundary of the designated *masjid* area on any of the floors, since those areas will be considered the auxiliary area of the *masjid* and not technically the *masjid* itself. ‘Allāma Haskafī writes in his well-accepted text *Al-Durr al-Mukhtār*:

“It is prohibitively disliked to have sexual intercourse above the *masjid*. Likewise it is disliked to urinate or defecate above it because it is a *masjid* to the peaks of the heavens (Ibn ‘Ābidīn adds, “Likewise to the recesses of the earth below”) ... it is disliked to enter any impurity into it.... [However] these are not disliked above a room which has been just set aside as a *masjid* [in a person’s home] nor in the room itself, since that is not a *shar‘i masjid*.... It is permitted for those in a seminally defiled state or menstruating women to enter into it [i.e. a *musallā* or place especially prepared for ‘Id or funeral prayer] just as is permitted into the extended yard of the *masjid* [i.e. the overflow area].... (*Al-Durr al-Mukhtār* with *Radd al-Muhtār* 1:441-442).

Hence, no area of the actual *masjid* prayer area can be excluded from the *masjid* once designated as a *masjid*. However, before the plans are finalized and the area is designated a *masjid*, portions can be excluded from any of the floors above or below where the *masjid* will be, to be used for something else that is related to the *masjid*, for instance, a storage area, office for the *imām*, a basement for storing *masjid* amenities, a shop to bring in income for the *masjid*, etc. Ibn ‘Ābidīn writes in his *Radd al-Muhtār*,

If they build a room above it for the *imam* then there is nothing wrong with that, because that is part of the welfare of the *masjid*. However, once the construction [designation] of the *masjid* is completed then they want to add a room, it will be prohibited [to change the designated *masjid* area and add a room for something else in it]. If the committee states that we had intended to do such, their statement will not be upheld [in court] (*Radd al-Muhtār* 3:371).

Likewise the Egyptian jurist Ibn Nujaym writes,

It states in the *Mujtaba* that it is not permitted for the guardian of the *masjid* to build shops in the *masjid* or in its courtyard [i.e. the courtyard in which *salats* are performed during summer in hot countries - also known as the external *masjid*] (*Al-Bahr al-Rā’iq* 5:249).

Storage Areas and Water Reservoir Above or Below a Masjid

A *masjid* can have a storage area above or below the actual prayer hall. The storage space below the prayer hall however must be used solely for the amenities of the *masjid* and must have been designated as such in the *masjid*’s design phase. Likewise, it would be permitted to have constructed a water reservoir underneath the *masjid* (as in some Muslim countries). It states in the *al-Durr al-Mukhtār*,

If they make a basement beneath the *masjid* for its welfare [however, ‘Allāma Ibn ‘Ābidīn adds here that this should be of limited area], it would be permissible just as in the Masjid in Jerusalem (*Al-Durr al-Mukhtār ma’a l-Radd al-Muhtār* 3:370).

A Residence or Bathrooms Above or Below a Masjid

Although it is permissible to allocate certain parts of the *masjid* as a room for the *imam* and other uses from the original plan, bathrooms or a complete apartment for the *imam* should not be planned directly above the actual *masjid* area, even during the *masjid*’s initial design phase, since it is impermissible to have sexual relations, relieve oneself, etc., above or below a *masjid*. In any case, adding a residence or office to the existing *masjid* area will not be permissible after the *masjid* area is designated. ‘Allāma Ibn ‘Ābidīn writes,

“It remains [to be ruled], whether it would be permissible if the person making the endowment designates lavatories [*bayt li 'l-khalā'*] to be directly beneath the *masjid*, as is the case in Masjid Mahallat al-Shahm in Damascus. I have not seen a specific ruling on this. Yes, it states in the Chapter of Endowments [of *al-Durr al-Mukhtar*] ‘If they make a basement beneath the *masjid* for its welfare it would be permissible’ so ponder” (*Radd al-Muhtar* 1:441).

Ibn ‘Abidin however only mentions this analogy between a storage basement and bathrooms in passing, stating that it is an issue in need of further deliberation. It is not based on any strong analogy.

Islamic Centers and Musallās Today

In the case of large Islamic centers today, which include a prayer hall, the prayer hall area could be considered the *shar‘ī masjid*, if it has been intended and designated as such. However, the adjacent rooms, such as the lobby, dining hall, children’s room, gymnasium, or offices would be considered as supplementary or extensions of the *masjid* and hence, not part of the *shar‘ī masjid* area, even though they would be part if the endowment (*waqf*) (i.e. not returnable to any one’s ownership), but the rulings would be different for the two as we will highlight below.

Women in Menstruation

A menstruating women or one who is experiencing post natal bleeding or a person in a seminally defiled state is prohibited from entering into a masjid. The Prophet (upon him be peace) said,

I do not make the *masjid* lawful for the menstruating women or the one experiencing post natal bleeding (*Abū Dāwād, Ibn Māja, Tabarānī, Zayla‘ī* has considered it sound [*hasan*] 1:193-194).

Young Children in the Masjid

It is unlawful (*haram*) to bring in infants or young children into the *masjid* if there is a possibility of them polluting the area of the *masjid*. If they are in diapers and less likely to pollute any part of the *masjid*, it will still be somewhat disliked (*makruh tanzihan*) to bring them as they could be carrying filth in their diapers (*Radd al-Muhtar ‘ala ‘l-Durr* 1:441, *Al-Ashbah wa ‘l-Naza‘ir, al-Qawl fi Ahkam al-Masjid* 407). The Messenger of Allah (upon him be peace) said,

Keep your infants and the insane away from your *masjids* (*Sunan Ibn Maja, babu ma yukrahu fi ‘l-masjid*).

Sleeping & Eating in the Masjid

It is disliked to sleep or eat in a *masjid* without the intention of *i'tikāf* or unless one is a traveler (*Al Ashbāh wa 'l-Nazā'ir* 407).

Congregation for Five Daily Prayers in the Masjid is a Communal Obligation

A congregation for the five daily prayers have to be established in a *masjid* otherwise the local inhabitants would be sinful for negligence, since it is a *wājib* to perform the congregational prayers for the locals in the *masjid*. 'Allāma Ibn 'Ābidin writes regarding *tarāwīh* prayer which is a confirmed *sunna* and not *wājib*,

The apparent purport of their [jurists] statement is that it is a communal *sunna* to perform it [*tarāwīh*] in congregation in the *masjid*, to the extent that if they performed it in congregation in their homes, and no congregation took place in the *masjid*, they would all be sinful (*Radd al- Muhtār* 1:473).

Hence, if this is the case for a confirmed *sunna* congregation, it would be more binding to have a congregation for every obligatory prayers in each locality. The Messenger of Allah (upon him be peace) said,

There is no *salāt* for the neighbor of the *masjid* except in the *masjid* (*Dāraqutnī, Hākim* from *Kashf al-Khafā*).

Conversation in the Masjid

It is likewise disliked (*makrūh*) for one to speak about worldly affairs in the *masjid*, 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) had designated a special place outside the *masjid* where people could go and talk. Ibn 'Abidin writes,

(It is disliked to speak in the *masjid*) this is regarding that talk which is of [a] permissible nature, [and] not regarding other than that which would warrant much greater sin (i.e. if one were to speak of it in the *masjid*) (*Radd al-Muhtār* 5:269).

The Musallā or Temporary Place of Prayer

All the above restrictions (i.e. that it is disliked to speak of worldly matters in the *masjid*, etc.) do not technically apply to a *musallā* since it is a temporary place for worship. Hence, it can have apartments, bathrooms, etc., above or below it; or itself even turned into such (i.e. an apartment), once it is no longer used as a *musallā*. However, it is recommended to treat it as a *masjid*, since it is being used for similar purposes.

A third floor *musallā* within an industrial complex, which has other activities and businesses operating on the other floors (basement included), cannot be considered a *shar‘ī masjid*, but rather comes within the definition of a *musallā*. ‘Allāma Haskafī writes,

If the basement was designated for any other use [i.e. not for the *masjid*] or he [the owner] made a room above it and faced the door of the *masjid* to the street [meaning he made it separate], then it cannot be a *masjid*. Hence he may sell it... [if he wishes, since it does not become an endowment] the same as if he had made [a portion from] the middle of his home into a *masjid*, and permitted for the *adhān* to be called therein - it would not become a *masjid*.

‘Allāma Ibn ‘Ābidīn comments on this by saying,

The reason for the place not being a *masjid* is because the additional rooms are not designated for the welfare of the *masjid*. This is explicitly mentioned in the *Is‘āf*, where it says, “If the basement or the floor above it is endowed for the benefit of the *masjid* or they were properly endowed for that then it would become a *masjid* (*Shurunbulāliyya*). It states in *al-Bahr [al-Rā’iq]* that the summary of this [issue] is that it is a condition for it being considered a *masjid* that the lower and upper floors need to [also] be a *masjid*, so that the rights [and ownership] of people is waived from it, as Allah says ‘And verily the *masjids* are for Allah...’” (*Radd al-Muhtār* 3:370).

Although similar laws should be observed in a *musallā* as in a *masjid*, since it is emulating a *masjid*, it is not legally necessary. Therefore:

- ✽ It would be permissible for menstruating women to enter into a *musallā* to attend classes or lectures.
- ✽ Performing prayer therein would not hold the same reward as praying in a *masjid* although it would be more than in the home. A hadīth related by Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalānī from ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Amr ibn al-‘Ās states that the reward for a congregation with one’s family members (aside from in a *masjid*) holds 15 times the reward of praying alone, whereas praying it in the congregation in the *masjid* holds twenty five times the reward. Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalānī concludes that the 25 times extra reward is confined to performing it in congregation in the *masjid* and not in a congregation performed at home. See *Fath al-Bārī* 106, *Mirqāt al-mafātīh* 3:145, and *al-Bahr al-rā’iq* 1:346.
- ✽ It would be permissible to eat or sleep in a *musallā* without having the intention of *i’tikāf*, which is necessary in the *masjid* for one to eat or sleep.
- ✽ One can also perform *Tahiyyat al-Masjid* in a *musallā*.

A useful setup for women's prayer could be that there be two rooms: one connected to the back of the men's prayer area, which could be intended as being included in the *shar'ī masjid*; and another room behind the first room, which could be a *musallā* or a multi purpose room for menstruating women or women with children to stay in.