

ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE ON JAMAA'H PRAYER DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic that is still plaguing all over the world has affected the implementation of congregational prayers among Muslims. In Islam, prayers are encouraged to be performed in congregation and are rewarded by God. In fact, in Friday prayers it is obligatory for all Muslim men to perform this worship in congregation setting. The effects of the pandemic that caused people to maintain a social distancing from each other which lead to the implementation of prayers in congregation could not be carried out as usual. In fact, the implementation of Movement Control Orders (MCOs) by the government in almost all countries severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic has caused the government to pay attention to standards of procedures (SOPs) involving religious activities. This study aimed to discuss the barriers of congregational prayer and religious activities in worship's house/mosque from the point of view of fiqh as a measure to prevent the spread of COVID-19 virus. This study used a qualitative method, namely the method of literature review and document analysis. The results showed that, although religious activities in mosques could not be carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic, however, the worship's house/mosques still functioned through the call to prayer. Even in Islamic countries, a proactive measure can be implemented by issuing relevant fatwas. This is because, the obstacle to performing congregational prayers in the mosque is a maslahah to save lives from the COVID-19 virus. Congregational prayers among Muslims are also can be done by performing in their respective homes.

Keywords: Pandemic COVID-19, Movement Control Orders (MCOs), Maslahah, Congregational Prayers, Islam

INTRODUCTION

The practice of congregational prayer in Islam is highly encouraged and promised a great reward from Allah. 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:

Al-Quran

In Islam, the emphasis on congregational prayer can be seen in the verse stated in al-Quran. Praying in congregation is one of demanded and ordered act and applies in a war situation. As 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, Sharbini (1995) concluded that this practice (ibadah) is an obligation on Muslims who live in a peaceful ambience without being troubled and inflicted by war circumstances.

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).

Benefits of Performing Prayer in Congregation

There are various of benefits offered to those who performing prayer in congregation. Firstly, by this practice the relationship between relatives of the same religion, particularly during gatherings in the mosque can be tightened. This is due to 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 congregational prayer gathering in mosques can also educate and encourage 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:

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).

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.

Law (Hukm) Regarding Congregational Prayer in Islam

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

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.

Maqasid Shariah Perspectives

According to Kashim, et al., (2020), for Muslims, in order to be rewarded and get the blessings from Allah SWT, their action must be according to the Shariah. 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):

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.

Maqasid al-Hajiyah: 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).

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.

Pandemic of Covid-19 Effects on Congregational Prayer: Case In Malaysia

Islam is the federal religion in Malaysia with more of 60% of the population are Muslims. According to Ab Rahman, et al., (2020c) the Malaysian government decided to implement the Movement Control Order (MCO) to curb this dangerous pandemic from spreading further. 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-Daririyyah 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 surau, will not leave congregational prayers in their respective homes during the PKP due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

CONCLUSION

In spite of the fact that congregational prayer is highly demanded and encouraged in Islam, preserving life must come first in facing the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. 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.

APPRECIATION

We want to express our appreciation to the research project grants FRGS/1/2019/SSI03/UKM/02/1 provided by Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia, RH-2020-009 afforded by Institut Islam Hadhari, and UKM for the supports.

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