

WOMEN'S I'TIKAAF AT HOME

Question

What is the proof for the permissibility of women observing i'tikaaf at home? I recently read a post on social media claiming that even women have to observe i'tikaaf in the masjid and not at home. Is this correct?

Answer

Imam Nawawi (ra) noted in his commentary on Sahih Muslim that Imams Malik, Shafi'i, Ahmad, in fact the jamhoor (majority of the scholars) are of the opinion that men and women may only observe i'tikaaf in a masjid. However, some Maliki and Shafi' scholars maintained that let alone women, it is better for even the men to observe i'tikaaf at home.¹ Ibn Hajar (ra) noted in his commentary on Sahih Al-Bukhari that the rationale behind the opinion of these Maliki and Shafi'i scholars is that (i'tikaaf is optional and) *إن التطوع في البيوت أفضل* (it is best to observe optional acts at home).² Nonetheless, both commentators noted that Imam Abu Hanifa (ra) allowed women (not men) to observe i'tikaaf at home. This was also Imam Shafi'i (ra)'s Old Opinion (*القول القديم*). The author of Al-Binaayah, a commentary of Al-Hidaayah, attributed this opinion to Ibrahim Nakha'i, Sufyan Thawri and Ibn Ulayyah also.³

¹ Al-Minhaaj V.2 Pg.757 (Al-Bushra 1437)

² Fath-ul-Baari V.4 Pg.319 (As-Salafiyya 1407)

³ Al-Binaayah V.4 Pg.126 (Maktabah Shaamilah)

Discussing the Hanafi reasoning for disallowing women from i'tikaaf in the masjid, Shaikh Zafr Ahmad 'Uthmani (ra) writes that the reason for stipulating that i'tikaaf be observed in a masjid is so that those who are observing i'tikaaf will not miss the congregational salaah. Thus, the masjid is not a requisite for those upon whom congregational salaah is not compulsory. It is therefore permissible for a woman to observe i'tikaaf in her house.⁴

Discussing the same topic, Imam Abu Bakr Al-Jassaas (ra) cites the hadith 'Do not stop Allah's bondswomen from Allah's houses but their houses are best for them' and then explains that:

- a. There is consensus that as long as a person is permitted to observe i'tikaaf in a masjid, doing so anywhere else is invalid. The masjid is a requisite for validity of his i'tikaaf.
- b. Hence, if it was permissible for women to observe i'tikaaf in the masjid, it would not be permissible for her to do so at home.
- c. Would this not contradict the words 'but their houses are best for them'?⁵

Quoting the hadith which states that the salaah of a lady at home is better than her salaah in a masjid, Imam Al-Jassaas (ra) comments that:

فلما كانت صلاتها في بيتها أفضل من صلاتها في المسجد كان اعتكافها كذلك

*When it is better for her to perform salaah at home than in a masjid, the same will apply to her performance of i'tikaaf.*⁶

⁴ Ahkaam-ul-Qur'aan V1 Pg.264 (Idaarat-ul-Qur'aan 1418)

⁵ Ahkaam-ul-Qur'aan V.1 Pg.334 (Dar-ul-Fikr 1431-1432)

⁶ Ahkaam-ul-Qur'aan V.1 Pg.334 (Dar-ul-Fikr 1431-1432)

Salaah is greater than i'tikaaf. Salaah is compulsory whereas i'tikaaf is optional. Therefore, if it is better for her to perform salaah at home, it would also be better for her to perform i'tikaaf at home.

At this juncture it is imperative for us to add that just as the permissibility of women attending salaah in the masjid is conditional, the permissibility of their performance in the masjid would also be conditional. Hence, just as non-fulfilment of the relevant conditions results in impermissibility for them to attend congregational salaah in the masjid, it also results in impermissibility of them observing i'tikaaf in the masjid.

Nonetheless, Imam Jassaas (ra) deduced the karaahat (dislike) of women observing i'tikaaf in the masjid from a hadith commonly referred to by the 'ulama as the Hadith of the Tents.⁷ It is mentioned in this hadith that one year, when Nabi sallallahu alaihi wasallam's tent for i'tikaaf was erected in the masjid, his wife Safiyya (ra) told her servant/s to erect a tent for her as well. Seeing this, the other wives of Nabi sallallahu alaihi wasallam did the same. When Nabi sallallahu alaihi wasallam saw this, he became angry and said *أَلَيْسَ يُرَدَّنَا* (Are they seeking piety?) Having said that, Nabi sallallahu alaihi wasallam had his tent dismantled and did not observe i'tikaaf in the last ten days of that Ramadaan.⁸ Commenting on this hadith, Imam Jassaas (ra) states that:

⁷ Ahkaam-ul-Qur'aan V.1 Pg.335 (Dar-ul-Fikr 1431-1432)

⁸ Sahih Muslim Hadith 2785 (Al-Bushra 1437)

1. The meaning of the question **آلَيْرُ يُدَنَّ** (are they seeking piety?) is that **أَنْ هَذَا لَيْسَ مِنَ الْبِرِّ** (this is not piety).⁹ In technical parlance, such a question is termed **استفهام إنكار**
2. Nabi sallallahu alaihi wasallam not observing i'tikaaf in the last ten days of that Ramadaan and his dismantling his tent due to which his wives dismantled their tents all point towards the **كرهة** (dislike) of women observing i'tikaaf in the masjid. Were it permissible for them to observe i'tikaaf in the masjid, neither would he sallallahu alaihi wasallam have abandoned his intention to observe i'tikaaf nor would he have allowed his wives to do so. He then concludes that:

و في هذا دلالة على أنه كره اعتكاف النساء في المسجد

*In this is an indication that he sallallahu alaihi wasallam disliked women observing i'tikaaf in the masajid.*¹⁰

An Objection

In explaining their opinion, Hanafi fuqaha state that a woman should observe i'tikaaf in the masjid of her house. This refers to a specific area reserved for the performance of salaah. Imam Shaafi'i (ra) objected that i'tikaaf may only be performed in a masjid and, considering that the laws of a masjid do not apply to the masjid of her house, it is not a masjid.¹¹ As elucidated by others, such actions are permissible in the masjid of her house which are not permissible in a masjid. For

⁹ The text in Ahkaam-ul-Qur'aan has the word **تُردن** (in the second person).

Thus, the translation would be, 'Are you seeking piety?'

¹⁰ Ahkaam-ul-Qur'aan V.1 Pg.335 (Dar-ul-Fikr 1431-1432)

¹¹ Badaa'i-us-Sanaa'i V.2 Pg.281 (Dar-ul-Kitaab, Deoband)

example, a person in janaabah and woman in haid are allowed to sleep in such an area although they are not allowed to sleep in a masjid.¹²

Our Answer

Do you remember the ahaadith which indicate that the salaah a woman performs in her house is better than the salaah she performs in the masjid? These ahaadith imply that by performing salaah at home she receives the same reward that the men receive for performing salaah in congregation. This means that although the masjid of her house is not a masjid, it falls under the ruling of a masjid with regards her gaining the reward of congregational salaah. Now if we consider that i'tikaaf and the congregational salaah are the same with regards being confined to the masjid, we may conclude that, for the sake of attaining the reward of i'tikaaf, the masjid of her house also falls under the ruling of a masjid. In short, our answer to the above question is qiyaas (analogy) – we analogised female i'tikaaf in the light of female salaah.¹³

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¹² Al-Mabsoot V.3 Pg.119 (Maktabah Shaamilah)

¹³ Badaa'i-us-Sanaa'i V.2 Pg.281-282 (Dar-ul-Kitaab, Deoband)