

Placing hands below the navel

There are some who claim that placing the hands below the navel whilst performing the prescribed prayers is either of a weaker opinion than that of placing the hands upon the chest or has no evidence at all. This chapter will address this issue in the light of the Sunna and prove that this false claim has absolutely no foundation.

According to Imam Abu Hanifa, it is part of the Sunna for a man performing the ritual prayer, salat, to place his hands beneath the navel. Many Companions of the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) and their students (Tabi'un) performed their salat in this manner.

Imam at-Tirmidhi writes that it is Sunna to place one hand over the other but there are different opinions amongst the Companions and their students regarding the actual positioning of the hands [at-Tirmidhi, Watal-yamin 'ala ash-Shimal]

Qadi Shawkani states that there existed different opinions amongst the scholars regarding the positioning of the hands during salat. The following consider it correct to place the hands beneath the navel: Imam Abu Hanifa, Sufyan ath-Thawri, Ishaq ibn Rahwia and Abu Ishaq [Nayl al-Awtar, Watal-yamin 'ala ash-Shimal]

The aforementioned scholars were outstanding in the field of Hadith sciences and clearly knew the differences between authentic, acceptable, weak and fabricated narrations. Furthermore, if the ahadith stating that the hands should be placed beneath the navel were fabricated then why would Imam Ahmed and Yahya ibn Mu'in, the teacher of both Imam al-Bukhari and Imam Muslim, act upon these narrations?

Evidence About The Validity of Placing the Hands Below The Navel During The Prayer

Imam Ahmed ibn Hanbal writes:

" 'Ali said that it is a Sunna to place one hand over the other and beneath the navel"

[Musnad Ahmed ibn Hanbal; also Daraqutni & Abu Dawud, Watal-yamin 'ala ash-Shimal]

Imam Ibn Abi Shayba writes:

"Alqama reported from his father that the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) would place his right hand over his left and beneath the navel. Imam Ibrahim says that 'Ali said it is a Sunnato place your hands beneath the navel during the salat"

[Musannaf Ibn Abi Shayba, ash-Shimal'ala al-Yamin]

Ibn Hazm writes that the hands should be placed beneath the navel and Anas reported that there are three things which are Sunna:

1. Not to delay the breaking of the fast [during Ramadan]
2. To end the fast after the very last minute
3. To place the hands beneath the navel during the prayer

[Ibn Hazm, Muhalla, Watal-Yamin]

The aforementioned narrations prove that it is an established Sunna to place the hands beneath the navel. These ahadith are neither weak nor fabricated as Ibn Hazm would have declared them as being such because he was in strong opposition to the Hanafi School of thought.

Evidence About The Validity of Placing The Hands Upon The Chest During The prayer

Wyle relates:

"I saw that the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) was performing his prayers with his hands placed upon his chest"

[Sahih Ibn Khuzayma, Chapter on Salat]

We respond to the above narration with the observation that it is neither present in Sahih Muslim or Bukhari. It is amazing how people who rigorously promote Bukhari and Muslim as the only books to follow for Sunna will quickly use a hadith that does not appear in either, just as long as they feel it will win them an argument! A close examination of the hadith in question will show who is following a sahih hadith and who is blindly following the mistakes of their scholars - the same people who have the audacity to criticise scholars of the orthodox four schools of fiqh but do not see their own glaring mistakes.

Secondly, the main narrator of this hadith, Muammal ibn Isma'il has been criticised by the scholars of Hadith. Imam adh-Dhahabi and Ibn Hajar al-'al-'Asqalani write:

"Imam al-Bukhari said that Muammal ibn Isma'il was amongst the Mukirul Hadith (deniers of hadith). Imam Abu Khatim, Imam Abu Zahra, Imam Saje, Imam Ibn Sa'd, Hafiz Marwaze and Daraqutni all consider Muammal ibn Isma'il as having a weak memory. When informing others of hadith Muhammad ibn Isma'il would make many mistakes. He has been known to have burnt his books and hence made errors in transmitting his ahadith from memory. He also made erroneous claims by stating that he heard many of his narrations from the great scholars, whereas he had not done so. Only some scholars, such as Ibn Habban and Ibn Khuzayma claim that he was a knowledgeable scholar"

[Mizan al-'itidal & Tahzib at-Tahzib, Biography of Muammal ibn Isma'il]

Allama Ghulam Rasul Sa'idi writes that Imam al-Bayhaqi wrote another two ahadith in his book, Sunan, regarding the placement of the hands upon the chest during the salat. However, neither of these ahadith are authentic as their narrators have been criticised by the scholars of Hadith. We will look at each one in turn.

First Hadith

One of the narrators of the hadith is Muhammad ibn Hujjar, whom Imam adh-Dhahabi writes as having been criticised. Notably, he did not fit the criterion that Imam al-Bukhari has for accepting hadith from someone. Imam al-Bukhari says that it is impermissible to accept any hadith narrated by him because he narrates doubtful ahadith from his uncle.

The other narrator of that hadith is Umm Jabbar; she is unknown. Imam al-Bayhaqi himself wrote that this hadith is weak.

Second Hadith

The second narrator is known as Ibn 'Abbas while the main narrator is Ruh ibn Musayyib. Imam Ibn 'Adi says that Ruh ibn Musayyib has been criticised by the scholars of Hadith. Imam Ibn Habbab says that Ruh narrates fabricated hadith and therefore it is impermissible to accept his narrations. Also, Imam Fikri considers Ruh as transmitting unknown hadith which should not be accepted [Allama Sa'idi, Sharh Sahih Muslim, Wujubi Qira'at]

We close this chapter by stating that there exists no single authentic hadith proving the permissibility of placing the hands upon the chest during the salat.