



“ PRAYERS / SALAT BE SAID ALOUD OR SILENT?”

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Question: Should the Prayers / Salat be said Aloud or Silent?

A religious personality from a foreign country has asked a question which is answered below:

Q:I am seeking an answer to a question of a controversy that is raging in a part of my country which I am sure will eventually spread to other parts of the country.

The question is in regards to Salat that is read silently. It is put forward that no Salat should be read silently. The authority for this is taken from Chapter 17:110. I have read the commentary of four translators of the Holy Quran and they all seem to agree that no prayer should be read silently. Yusuf Ali's commentary of the Holy Quran is more explicit on this point.

I am being pressed to make a decision in this matter, but I feel that I am not capable, as I know fully well that all along and up to now certain times the Salat is read silently. I have never read the authority for this silent reading, so my knowledge on this matter is limited. It is for this reason I am seeking your help.

A:1. It is amazing that this controversy should have arisen at all. It is contended that no Salat should be read silently, on the alleged authority of verse 110 chapter 17 of the Holy Quran. Actually the first part of the commandment contained in that verse says: "And utter not thy prayer loudly." How can it be said to support the view that all prayers should be uttered loudly only.

2. The commandment in question, which contains apparently conflicting injunctions, has been explained beautifully by the late Hazrat Maulana Muhammad Ali Sahib in footnote No. 1889 of his Urdu commentary (Bayan al-Quran). Explaining the commandment, he has said: "It means that neither should the whole recitation of the Salat be uttered loudly, nor should it be all uttered silently, but the middle course should be taken i.e., some part of the Salat should be uttered aloud so that the whole congregation should be alike in rendering obeisance to the Might and Majesty of Allah, and some part should be silent so that each member of the congregation remembers Allah in his own way."

3. In view of the above, which part of the Salat should be uttered aloud and which silently? That has not been specified in the Holy Quran. But then most, almost all, injunctions of the Holy Quran in their details were left to be explained by the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, who spoke or conducted the prayer as guided by Hazrat Jibrail [Gabriel] by the Wahy Khafi (unrecited revelation) as made clear in the Holy Quran itself (53:2–3).

4. The above practice is true of almost all commandments of the Holy Quran e.g., those regarding Salat, Zakat, Hajj, fasting, etc. The basic injunction is given and the details were left to the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, to explain by his word or example.

5. On this question as to which parts of the Salat should be uttered aloud and which silently, there is amazing unanimity in the whole Muslim Ummah. The various sects differ sometimes on other issues (e.g., how the positions are taken in the Salat), for instance, between Sunnis and Shias. But there is complete unanimity as to which parts of the Salat should be uttered aloud and which silently. The Sunnah [action] of the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, on this question has been amazingly universal in all these 1400 years. How can such Sunnah be ignored on a wrong interpretation of verse 110 of chapter 17 of the Holy Quran, as already shown in paragraph 2 above? Actually the verse in question fully supports the Sunnah on the question as already explained in paragraph 2 of this note.

6. Supposing the innovation now advocated is accepted, for the sake of argument, that the whole Salat should be uttered aloud, what would be the result in a congregation? A babble and a cacophony of noises making the prayer a fiasco.

7. Incidentally, the way verse 110 of chapter 17 of the Holy Quran is worded it serves another purpose. There is an unfortunate growing practice among some Muslims to broadcast the whole prayer on loud-speakers. And at the other extreme there are people who say that no words are necessary in saying a prayer as Allah knows the thoughts passing through our minds. Both the extremes are negated by this sublime verse.