

A Treatise on the Prostration of Forgetfulness

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Written by: His Eminence Sheikh

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May Allah forgive him, his parents, and all Muslims

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In the Name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds. May Allah's peace and blessings be upon our Prophet Muhammad, who conveyed the message clearly and perfectly, and upon his family, his Companions, and those who followed them in the best way until the Day of Judgment.

To proceed, Many people are ignorant of the rulings of the prostration of forgetfulness which is to be offered when an incident of forgetfulness occurs during prayer. Some people fail to offer such prostration when it is due, some offer it when it is not due, some offer it before Taslīm (concluding the prayer with Salām) when it should be offered after it, and others offer it after Taslīm when it should be offered before it. Therefore, knowing its rulings is a matter of great importance, especially by those who lead people in prayer and shoulder the responsibility of following the guidance prescribed by the shariah in their prayer in which they lead other Muslims.

This urged me to present to my fellow Muslims some of the rulings related to this topic, hoping that Allah Almighty would benefit with it His believing servants.

So I say, seeking Allah's help and depending upon Him in attaining success and correctness:

The prostration of forgetfulness consists of two prostrations which one has to offer to make up for a shortcoming that has occurred in his prayer out of forgetfulness.

It is due in three cases: adding something to the prayer, leaving something of it, or harboring doubt about its perfection.

First: Addition:

If the praying person adds an action to his prayer like standing, sitting, bowing, or prostrating deliberately, then his prayer is invalid. If, however, he does so out of forgetfulness and he did not remember the addition until he finished it, then he is only required to offer the prostration of forgetfulness, and his prayer is valid. But if he becomes aware that he is making an addition while making it, then he has to stop it immediately and the prostration of forgetfulness becomes due on him, and his prayer is valid.

Example: Someone performed the Zhuhr prayer five rak'ahs without remembering that extra rak'ah until he comes to recite the Tashahhud. In this case, he has to complete the Tashahhud, make Taslīm, then offer the prostration of forgetfulness, then make Taslīm again. If he fails to remember the addition he made until he makes Taslīm, he should offer the prostration of forgetfulness then make Taslīm again. If he remembers the addition when he is offering the fifth rak'ah, he should sit down immediately, recite Tashahhud, make Taslīm, then offer the prostration of forgetfulness then make Taslīm.

Proof:

The Hadīth of 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ūd (may Allah be pleased with him) wherein he reported: "The Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) once prayed Zhuhr five rak'ahs. So, someone said: 'Has increase been made in the prayer?' He replied: 'Why do you say that?' They said: 'You have prayed five (rak'ahs).' So he performed two prostrations after having made Taslīm." According to another version: "... so he turned his feet and faced the Qiblah, and he performed two prostrations then made Taslīm."

[Narrated by Al-Bukhāri, Muslim, Abu Dāwud, An-Nasā'ī, At-Tirmidhi, Ibn Mājah and Ahmad]

Making Taslīm before completing the prayer:

Making Taslīm before completing the prayer is a form of addition in the prayer [1]. So if the praying person makes Taslīm before completing the prayer deliberately, then his prayer is invalid.

[1] It is a form of addition because an extra act of Taslīm is added to the prayer while still performing it.

If he did that out of forgetfulness and a long time passes before he remembers, then it is due upon him to perform the prayer anew.

But if he remembers after a short while, such as two or three minutes, then he should complete his prayer and make Taslīm, then he should offer the prostration of forgetfulness and make Taslīm.

Proof:

The Hadīth of Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) wherein he reported that the Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) led them in Zhuhr or 'Asr prayer and made Taslīm after two rak'ahs. So the people rushed out of the mosque doors asking each other: "Has the prayer been shortened?" The Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) got up toward the wooden beam of the mosque and leaned against it as if he was angry. A man stood up and said: "O Messenger of Allah, have you forgotten or has the prayer been shortened?" He replied: "Neither have I forgotten nor has it been shortened." A man said: "Surely, you have forgotten." The Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) asked the Companions: "Is what he is saying true?" They said: "Yes, it is." So he moved forward and offered the remaining two rak'ahs of his prayer then made Taslīm, then he performed two prostrations (of forgetfulness) then made Taslīm."

[Narrated by Al-Bukhāri and Muslim]

If the imam makes Taslīm before completing the prayer and there are among those led in prayer some who have missed part of the prayer, so they get up to make up for what they have missed and then the imam remembers that he has left something of the prayer and gets up to complete it; in this case, those who got up to make up for what they had missed have the choice either to go on making up for the missed part then offer the prostration of forgetfulness, or go back to following the imam and when he finishes they make up for the missed parts then offer the prostration of forgetfulness after making Taslīm. This last choice is more proper and cautious.

Second: Omission:

a- Omitting a pillar of the prayer:

If the praying person leaves out a pillar of the prayer; if it is the Opening Takbīr, then his prayer is annulled whether he leaves it deliberately or forgetfully, because his prayer has not validly started in the first place.

If he leaves a pillar other than the Opening Takbīr, his prayer is invalid if he does that deliberately.

But if he leaves it forgetfully; and he reaches its point in the second rak'ah, the preceding rak'ah is annulled and the following rak'ah replaces it. If he has not yet reached its point in the second rak'ah, he must go back and perform the forgotten pillar and the actions that come after it. In both cases he has to perform the prostration of forgetfulness after making Taslīm.

Example: someone forgot to perform the second prostration of the first rak'ah, and he only remembered that when he was sitting between the two prostrations of the second rak'ah. In this case, the first rak'ah is annulled and the second replaces it. He should consider the second rak'ah as the

first, complete his prayer based upon this and make Taslīm. Then he performs the prostration of forgetfulness and makes Taslīm.

Another example: someone forgot the second prostration and the sitting that precedes it of the first rak'ah. He remembered that after he rose from bowing in the second rak'ah. In this case, he has to go back and sit down and perform that second prostration then complete his prayer and make Taslīm. Then, he performs the prostration of forgetfulness and makes Taslīm.

b- Omitting an obligatory act:

If the praying person omits an obligatory act of the prayer deliberately, his prayer is invalid.

If he does so out of forgetfulness but he remembers before he moves on from its place in the prayer, he has to perform it and he does not have to do anything more. If he remembers it after having moved on from its place in the prayer but before reaching the next pillar, then he should go back and perform it. Then he completes his prayer and makes Taslīm, prostrates for forgetfulness and makes Taslīm.

If he remembers it after reaching the next pillar, the omitted obligatory act is no longer due. That is, he does not have to go back to perform it; rather, he continues with his prayer and performs the prostration of forgetfulness before making Taslīm.

Example: someone rises from the second prostration of the second rak'ah so as to stand up to perform the third rak'ah, having forgotten to recite the first Tashahhud; yet, before he stands up, he remembers. In this case, he settles in the sitting position, recites Tashahhud, and completes his prayer. He does not have to do anything else.

However, if he remembers after he gets up, yet before standing up fully straight, he should go back and sit down, recites Tashahhud, completes his prayer, and makes Taslīm. Then he performs the prostration of forgetfulness and makes Taslīm.

But if he remembers after having stood up fully straight, it is no longer due upon him to recite the first Tashahhud. Instead, he should complete his prayer and perform the prostration of forgetfulness before making Taslīm. Proof: The Hadīth narrated by Al-Bukhāri and others:

'Abdullah ibn Buhaynah (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that the Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) led them in the Zhuhr prayer and stood up after the first two rak'ahs without sitting for Tashahhud, and the people stood up with him. When he finished the prayer and the people were waiting for him to make Taslīm, he said Takbīr while sitting and prostrated twice before making Taslīm, then he concluded his prayer with Taslīm.

Third: Doubt:

Doubt is the uncertainty about two matters as to which of them has occurred.

Doubt regarding acts of worship is not taken into consideration in three cases:

First: if it is a mere illusion that has no actual grounds, like obsessive whisperings.

Second: if one experiences it frequently in such a way that he rarely performs an act of worship without experiencing doubt.

Third: if it occurs after finishing the act of worship. Here it is not given any consideration so long as it does not reach the degree of certainty. Instead one should act upon what he is certain of. Example: someone prayed Zhuhr, and after finishing the prayer, he becomes doubtful whether he prayed three or four rak'ahs. He should not pay attention to such doubt unless he is certain that he prayed three only. If only a short while had passed after he finished the prayer, he should complete it by offering the missed rak'ah, make Taslīm, then offer the prostration of forgetfulness and make Taslīm. If, however, he remembered after a long time had passed, he should perform the prayer in full anew.

Doubt that occurs in other than those three cases is to be taken into consideration.

There are only two cases for doubt that occurs within the prayer:

The first case: one of the two assumptions is more preponderant than the other, so he should act upon that assumption, complete his prayer based on it, make Taslīm, then offer the prostration of forgetfulness and make Taslīm.

Example: someone prays Zhuhr and has doubt whether he is praying the second or third rak'ah. However, he tends to believe that it is the third. So, he should consider it the third, perform one more rak'ah and make Taslīm, then offer the prostration of forgetfulness and make Taslīm. Proof: Hadīth narrated by Al-Bukhāri, Muslim, and others wherein 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ūd (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that the Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) said: "If anyone of you has doubt in his prayer, then he should make sure of what he has truly performed and complete his prayer accordingly and make Taslīm, then he should perform two prostrations (for forgetfulness)."

This is the wording of Al-Bukhāri.

The second case: neither assumption is preponderant over the other, so the praying person bases his action on what is certain, which is the lesser of the two assumptions. Thus, he should complete his prayer accordingly and make Taslīm, then offer the prostration of forgetfulness and make Taslīm.

Example: someone is praying 'Asr and is doubtful whether he is in the second or third rak'ah, and neither of the two assumptions is stronger than the other. So he considers it the second rak'ah, sits for the first Tashahhud, then performs two rak'ahs after it, offers the prostration of forgetfulness and makes Taslīm. Proof: the Hadīth narrated by Muslim:

Abu Sa'īd al-Khudri (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that the Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) said: "If one of you is in doubt about his prayer and does not know how much he has prayed, three or four (rak'ahs), he should cast aside his doubt and base his prayer on what he is certain of (three). Then he should perform two prostrations before making Taslīm. If he has prayed five rak'ahs, they will make his prayer an even number, and if he has prayed exactly four, then they will be a humiliation for the devil."

Example of doubt: a latecomer joins the prayer when the imam is bowing. He recites the opening Takbīr while standing upright then bows. There are three possible cases in this situation:

The first: He is certain that he has caught up with the imam when the latter was bowing before rising. Thus, he has caught up with the rak'ah, so reciting Al-Fātihah is not due upon him.

The second: He is certain that the imam rose from bowing before he joined him, so he missed the rak'ah.

The third: He is in doubt whether he joined the imam while the latter was in the bowing position, whereby he has caught up with the rak'ah, or the imam had risen from bowing before he joined him, thus, he missed the rak'ah. If either of the two possibilities is stronger, then he should act upon it, complete the prayer accordingly, make Taslīm, offer the prostration of forgetfulness and make Taslīm. But if he did not miss any action of the prayer, then prostration of forgetfulness is not due upon him.

If neither possibility is stronger than the other, then he bases his action on what is certain; i.e. that he has missed the rak'ah. So he should complete his prayer accordingly and make Taslīm, then offer the prostration of forgetfulness and make Taslīm. Important note: If the person experiences doubt with

regard to his prayer and he acts upon certainty or upon what he assumes to be the stronger possibility according to what is explained in detail above, then he found out that what he did was actually the correct course of action and that his prayer involved neither addition nor omission, then no prostration of forgetfulness is due upon him as per the famous opinion of the Hanbali school of fiqh. That is because the cause of offering the prostration of forgetfulness no longer exists, which is doubt. Another opinion suggests that it is due upon him in order to cause humiliation and vexation to the devil. This is based on the statement of the Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him): "...and if he has prayed exactly four, then they will be a humiliation for the devil."

Another reason is that he performed part of the prayer while being in doubt about it. This is the preponderant opinion.

Example: while someone is performing the prayer, he becomes in doubt whether he is in the second or third rak'ah, and both possibilities are equal in his mind, so he considers it the second, completes his prayer accordingly, then he finds out that it was actually the second rak'ah. In this case, no prostration of forgetfulness is due upon him according to the famous opinion of the Hanbali school of fiqh. But according to the other opinion which we regard as the preponderant one, he is required to offer it.

Offering the prostration of forgetfulness by someone led in the prayer: If the imam experiences an incident of forgetfulness in the prayer, those led in prayer should follow him in offering the prostration of forgetfulness, because the Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) said: "Indeed, the imam is appointed to be followed, so do not act differently from him... and if he offers prostration, then offer prostration."

[Narrated by Al-Bukhāri and Muslim on the authority of Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him)]

Those led in prayer have to follow the imam in offering the prostration of forgetfulness whether he does so before or after Taslīm. But, if someone has missed a part of the prayer, he does not follow the imam if the latter offers the prostration of forgetfulness after Taslīm, as he is not allowed to end the prayer with the imam. So he should make up for what he missed, make Taslīm, then offer the prostration of forgetfulness and make Taslīm.

Example: a man joins the imam in the last rak'ah, and the imam is required to offer the prostration of forgetfulness after Taslīm. When the imam makes Taslīm, that man should stand up to make up for what he missed and not offer the prostration of forgetfulness along with the imam. When he makes up for what he has missed and makes Taslīm, he can then offer the prostration of forgetfulness after that.

If one who is led in the prayer, not the imam, experiences an incident of forgetfulness in the prayer but misses nothing of the prayer, he does not have to offer the prostration of forgetfulness because if he does so, this will result in acting differently from the imam and not following him. The Companions (may Allah be pleased with them) left the first Tashahhud when the Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) forgot it. Instead, they got up along with him and did not sit down for the first Tashahhud, for the sake of following him and not acting differently from him.

But if the one led in prayer misses something and experiences an incident of forgetfulness when he is following the imam or when he is making up for what he has missed, he is required to offer the prostration of forgetfulness. So he offers it after making up for what he has missed, before or after making Taslīm according to the above detailed explanation.

Example: someone led in prayer forgot to say 'subhāna rabbi al-'azhīm (Glorified is my Lord, the Great) in his bowing, but he missed nothing of the prayer. No prostration of forgetfulness is due upon him in this case. But if he misses a rak'ah or more, he should make up for what he has missed then offer the prostration of forgetfulness before making Taslīm.

Another example: someone is led in Zhuhr prayer. When the imam gets up to perform the fourth rak'ah, the one led in prayer sits down thinking that it is the last rak'ah. When he realizes that the imam is standing, he stands up. If he missed nothing of the prayer, he does not have to offer the prostration of forgetfulness, but if he missed one rak'ah or more, he should make up for what he missed and make Taslīm then offer the prostration of forgetfulness and make Taslīm. The reason for offering the prostration of forgetfulness is the sitting he added to the prayer when the imam was getting up to offer the fourth rak'ah.

To summarize: from what is mentioned above, it becomes clear that the prostration of forgetfulness is to be offered before Taslīm in some cases and after Taslīm in others. It is offered before Taslīm in two cases: First: When there is omission in the prayer; and this is supported by the Hadīth reported by 'Abdullah ibn Buhaynah (may Allah be pleased with him) who said that the Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) offered the prostration of forgetfulness before Taslīm when he forgot to sit for the first Tashahhud. The Hadīth is cited above in its full version. Second: If it is due to doubt where neither possibility is stronger than the other; and this is supported by the Hadīth reported by Abu Sa'īd al-Khudri (may Allah be pleased with him) about the one who has doubt during the prayer: "... and he does not know whether he prayed three or four rak'ahs." The Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) ordered that person to offer two prostrations (for forgetfulness) before making Taslīm.

The Hadīth is cited above in its full version.

The prostration of forgetfulness is to be offered after Taslīm in two cases: First: When there is addition in the prayer; and this is supported by Hadīth of 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ūd (may Allah be pleased with him) reporting that when the Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) prayed Zhuhr five rak'ahs, the Companions mentioned that to him after he had made Taslīm. So, he offered two prostrations of forgetfulness then made Taslīm. The Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) did not explain that the reason he offered the prostration of forgetfulness after Taslīm was that he did not know about the extra rak'ah until he finished the prayer. This proves that the ruling is general, and that the prostration of forgetfulness is to be offered after Taslīm if there is an addition, whether one knows of such addition before or after Taslīm. This also applies if one makes Taslīm forgetfully before he completes his prayer, then he remembers and completes it. He has indeed added an extra Taslīm to his prayer, so he offers the prostration of forgetfulness after Taslīm. This is supported by the Hadīth of Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) reporting that when the Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) made Taslīm in Zhuhr or 'Asr prayer after two rak'ahs only and the Companions mentioned that to him, he completed his prayer and made Taslīm then offered the prostration of forgetfulness and made Taslīm. The Hadīth is cited above in its full version. Second: If it is due to doubt where neither possibility is stronger than the other. This is supported by the Hadīth of Ibn Mas'ūd (may Allah be pleased with him) wherein he reported that the Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) ordered the one who has doubt about his prayer to strive to verify which possibility is stronger, completes his prayer accordingly, makes Taslīm, then offers the prostration of forgetfulness.

First: When there is addition in the prayer;

and this is supported by Hadīth of 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ūd (may Allah be pleased with him) reporting that when the Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) prayed Zhuhr five rak'ahs, the Companions mentioned that to him after he had made Taslīm. So, he offered two prostrations of forgetfulness then made Taslīm.

The Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) did not explain that the reason he offered the prostration of forgetfulness after Taslīm was that he did not know about the extra rak'ah until he finished the prayer. This proves that the ruling is general, and that the prostration of

forgetfulness is to be offered after Taslīm if there is an addition, whether one knows of such addition before or after Taslīm.

This also applies if one makes Taslīm forgetfully before he completes his prayer, then he remembers and completes it. He has indeed added an extra Taslīm to his prayer, so he offers the prostration of forgetfulness after Taslīm.

This is supported by the Hadīth of Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) reporting that when the Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) made Taslīm in Zhuhr or 'Asr prayer after two rak'ahs only and the Companions mentioned that to him, he completed his prayer and made Taslīm then offered the prostration of forgetfulness and made Taslīm.

The Hadīth is cited above in its full version.

Second: If it is due to doubt where neither possibility is stronger than the other.

This is supported by the Hadīth of Ibn Mas'ūd (may Allah be pleased with him) wherein he reported that the Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) ordered the one who has doubt about his prayer to strive to verify which possibility is stronger, completes his prayer accordingly, makes Taslīm, then offers the prostration of forgetfulness.

The Hadīth is cited above in its full version.

If he experiences two cases of forgetfulness, one of them requiring prostration before Taslīm and the other requiring prostration after it. The scholars said that offering prostration before Taslīm is predominant in this case, so he should prostrate before it.

Example: someone is praying Zhuhr and he gets up to offer the third rak'ah without sitting for the first Tashahhud, then he sits in the third rak'ah thinking it to be the second mistakenly, then he remembers that it is the third. He should stand up, perform a rak'ah, offer the prostration of forgetfulness, then make Taslīm.

This person left the first Tashahhud, which entails offering the prostration of forgetfulness before Taslīm, then he added a sitting to the third rak'ah, which entails offering the prostration of forgetfulness after Taslīm. So, offering the prostration before Taslīm is given predominance here, and Allah knows best.

I ask Allah to help us and our fellow Muslims to understand His book and the sunnah of His Messenger (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) and to act upon them inwardly and outwardly in matters of belief, worship, and dealings, and to make good for us our consequence. Indeed, He is Most Beneficent and Most Generous.

Praise be to Allah, Lord of the worlds. May Allah's peace and blessings be upon our Prophet Muhammad, his family, and all his Companions.

Written by:

Muhammad As-Sālih Al-'Uthaymīn on 4/3/1400 AH.

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