

Placement Of The Hands In Salah (Prayer)

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The View Of The Four Schools Of Fiqh

Hanafi

The author of al Durr al Mukhtaar, explaining the Hanafi position says: **'For men the hands should be below the navel.'**

Maliki

Imam Malik (ra) has three narrations: 1) Not fastening the hands at all but letting them hang at the sides. This is the most famous ruling of his madhab. 2) A choice of fastening or letting them hang at the sides. 3) Placing the hands above the navel but below the chest.

Shafi'ee

Imam Shafiee (ra) says that they should be placed above the navel but below the chest. Imam Nawawi (ra) discusses this in his commentary of Muslim saying, **'This is the better known ruling of our Madhab.'** He also says in Sharh al Muhaddhab, **'He should place them below his chest and above his navel. This is the correct and clear ruling (of our school).'**

Imam Shafiee (ra) also has two other narrations but they are not well known: below the navel and on the chest.

Hanbali

Imam Ahmed Ibn Hanbal's (ra) view is that that hands should be fastened below the navel. This is his most famous narration and is adopted by virtually all the hanbali ulama.

Ibn al Qayyim (ra) writes in his Badai' al Fawaid that Abu Talib said, **'I asked Ahmed Ibn Hanbal, 'Where should a man place his hands when praying?' He replied, 'Upon the navel or below it.'** [Badai' al Fawaid 3/73]

Tha Hanbali scholar of 18th century Arabia, Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab also says, **'He should then clasp his left wristbone with his right hand and place them below the navel. This signifies humbleness before his Lord, the Almighty.'** [Kitab Adaab al Mashy ila al Salah, second section on fiqh, p6]

Sheikh ul Hadeeth Moulana Muhammad Zakariyya quotes the authors of Nail al Maarib, al Anwaar and al Rawdh al Murabb'a in his Awjaz al Masalik and then concludes, **'We learn from this that the preferred and secure narration amongst the Hanbali ulama is that of below the navel.'** [Awjaz al Masalik 3/171]

The Hanbali scholar Alaa al Deen al Mardawi writes in his al Insaaf, **'He should place his hands below**

the navel. This is the Madhhab (of the Hanbali's), and upon this are the clear majority of the Hanbali ulama.' [al Insaaf 1/46]

Imam Ahmed (ra) also has two other narrations: 1) Above the navel but below the chest. 2) A choice of either of the two positions without preference for either.

The Opinion of all the Imams and Ulama can therefore be summarised into three positions

- 1) Above the navel but below the chest.
- 2) Below the navel.
- 3) Not fastening the hands at all, but letting them hang at the sides.

Thus, in reality, there are only two positions of fastening the hands: above the navel, and below it. No school of fiqh advocates the fastening of the hands on the chest.

Abu al tayyib al Madani writes in his commentary on Tirmidhi that none of the four Imams adopted the practise of placing the hands on the chest.

Ibn al Qayyim al Jawziyyah also writes in his Bada'i' al Fawa'id, **'It is makrooh (undesirable) to place the hands on the chest in view of the narration that the Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) forbade takfeer, which is to place the hands on the chest.'** (Bada'i al Fawa'id, 3/73)

Following is an analysis of the ahadeeth often quoted for placing the hands upon the chest

1. Sayyiduna Wail bin Hujr (ra) says, **'I prayed with the Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) and he placed his right hand over his left on his chest.'**(Ibn Khuzaimah, 479)

Imam Nimawi says, **'It's isnad is questionable and the additional wording 'on his chest' is inauthentic and not established.'**

This hadeeth has been reported by Muammal bin Ismaeel from Sufyan al Thawri from Aasim bin Kulaib from Wail bin Hujr (ra) -However it is only Muammal who reports these additional words from Sufyan al Thawri. Sufyan's other student, Abdullah bin al Waleed who also narrates this hadeeth from him does not include these words in his narration as recorded in Imam Ahmad's Musnad. (Ahmad 18392)

The other narrators who report the hadeeth together with Sufyan al Thawri from Aasim bin Kulaib have also not included these words in their narrations. Observe the following list of narrators who have all reported the same hadeeth from Aasim bin Kulaib but none of them have included the additional words reported by Muammal bin Ismaeel

- Sh'ubah, Abdul Wahid, and Zubair bin Muawiyah as in Imam Ahmad's Musnad. (Ahmad 18398, 18371 & 18397)
- Zaidah as in Imam Ahmad's Musnad, Darimi, Abu Dawood. Nasai and Baihaqi (Ahmad 18391,

Darimi 1357, Abu Dawood 726, Nasai 889 and Baihaqi 2325)

- Bishr bin al Mufaddhal as in Ibn Majah, Abu Dawood and Nasai (Ibn Majah 810, Abu Dawood 726 & 957, and Nasai 1265)
- Abdullah bin Idrees as in Ibn Majah (Ibn Majah 810)
- Salam bin Saleem as in Abu Dawood Tayalisi's Musnad (Abu Dawood Tayalisi 1020)

There are many other chains for this hadeeth, however, none contain this extra wording. Thus, it is clear that this is Muammal bin Ismaeel's own erroneous addition to the hadeeth. Ibn al Qayyim al Jawziyyah also says in I'laam al Muwaqqieen, 'No one has said upon the chest apart from Muammal bin Ismaeel.' (I'laam al Muwaqqieen 2/361) Therefore, as Imam Nimawi has concluded in his al Ta'leeq al Hasan, this hadeeth with the additional wording of 'upon his chest' is extremely weak.

It is an accepted principle of hadeeth that if a certain authentic and reliable narrator contradicts other equally authentic or more reliable narrators in his wording of a hadeeth then his narration will be declared shaadh and will not be accepted. If this is the case with authentic narrators, then an irregular addition of the words 'upon the chest' cannot be accepted from a narrator who, although declared acceptable by some, errs excessively and is weak of memory like Muammal bin Ismaeel. Study the following observations of the scholars of Jarh and T'adeel about Muammal bin Ismaeel:

Abu Hatim says, **'He is sadooq, firm in sunnah, but one of many mistakes'**

Imam Bukhari says, **'Muammal is munkar al hadeeth (People who view Imam Bukhari as the ultimate authority in matters of Hadeeth should note his following statement: 'It is not permissible to narrate from anyone whom I have labelled munkar al hadeeth [Mizan al I'tidal. 1/119]**

Dhahabi says in al Kashif, **'He is sadooq, firm in sunnah, but one of many mistakes. It was also said that he buried his books and narrated by heart and thus erred. '**

Ibn Sa'd says, **'He is thiqah, though one of many mistakes.'**

Yakub bin Sufyan says, **'Muammal Abu Abdul Rahman is a great sunni shaikh. I heard Sulaiman bin Harb praise him. Our shaikhs would advise us to take his hadeeth, only that his hadeeth are not like the hadeeth of his companions. At times it is obligatory upon the people of knowledge to distance themselves from his narrations as he narrates munkar ahadeeth from even his authentic teachers. This is worse for had he narrated these munkar ahadeeth from weak authorities we would have excused him.'**

Saji says, **'He errs excessively. He is sadooq, but one of many mistakes. He has errors that would take too long to be mentioned.'**

Muhammad bin Nasr al Marwazi says, **'If Muammal alone relates a certain narration then it becomes obligatory to pause and research the hadeeth as he had a bad memory and erred**

excessively' (See Tahdheeb al Tahdheeb)

Hafidh Ibn Hajar **has made it clear in his Fath al Bari that there is dh'af (weakness) in Muammal bin Ismaeel's narrations from Sufyan (Fath al Bari, 9/297). The above hadeeth has this very chain of narration.**

We must also bear in mind that Sayyiduna Wail Ibn Hujr(ra), the very companion who narrates this hadeeth, was a resident of Kufa, and the practice of the people of Kufa was to fasten their hands below the navel. There is nothing to suggest that he contravened this practice. Sufyan al Thawri, from whom Muammal narrates this hadeeth, is himself of the view that the hands should be placed below the navel (Ibn Qudamah in al Mughni 2/23, and others as quoted by the author of Bughyah al Almaee 1/316)

Furthermore, there is another hadeeth narrated by Sayyiduna Wail (ra) himself (quoted above) which says that he saw the Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) fasten his hands below the navel.

2. Sayyiduna Hulb (ra) relates, **'I saw the Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) turn from both his right and left and I also saw him place this upon his chest.'** Yahya (one of the narrators) described this as being the right hand upon the left above the wrist joint.²⁹²

The above hadeeth contains the words 'upon his chest'. This extra wording is not firmly established or confirmed, because of all the narrators who report this hadeeth from Simak, only one reports this extra wording.

Observe the following narrations of the same hadeeth without the extra wording of 'upon his chest'.

- Abu al Ahwas reports from Simak bin Harb from Qabeesah bin Hulb from his father that **the Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) would lead us in prayer and would clasp his left hand with his right.**²⁹³

- Shareek reports from Simak from Qabeesah bin Hulb from his father who says (towards the end of a longer hadeeth), **'I saw him place one of his hands on the other and I also saw him turn once towards his right and once towards his left.'**²⁹⁴

Wakee reports from Sufyan from Simak bin Harb from Qabeesah bin Hulb from his father who says, **'I saw the Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) place his right hand upon his left in prayer and I also saw him turn away from both his right and left.'**²⁹⁵

- Daruqutni narrates from Abdul Rahman bin Mahdi and Wakee', from Sufyan from Simak bin Harb from Qabeesah bin Hulb from his father who says, **'I saw the Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) place his right hand upon his left in prayer.'** (Daruqutni 1087)

The above narrations all clearly show that the wording 'upon his chest' is an unreliable addition on the part of one of the reporters and therefore this particular narration is shaadh.

Imam Nimawi adds in his al T'aleeq al Hasan (1/145):

'I have a suspicion that the wording of this hadeeth has mistakenly been changed by a writer. The correct words would appear to be "Yadhau hadhihi ala hadhihi", i.e., "he would place this hand upon this hand", and not "hadhihi ala sadrihi", i.e., "this hand upon his chest". Only this wording would be in agreement with the narrators own interpretation of the hadeeth as is stated in the narration "Yahya described this as being the right hand upon the left above the wrist joint". This would also tally with all the other narrations of this hadeeth that do not contain the wording "upon the chest", and would also explain why the following authors have not included this narration in their comprehensive books: Haithami in his Majm'a al Zawaid, Suyuti in his Jam' al Jawami, and Ali al Muttaqi in his Kanz alUmmal. And Allah knows best.'

The author of Awn al M'abud also admits that Yahya's commentary does not fit the wording of the hadeeth.

3. Taawoos narrates that **The Messenger of Allah [salallahu alayhi wa sallam] used to place his right hand over his left, and then clasp them firmly on his chest during prayer.** [Abu Dawood 759]

Imam Nimawi **has declared this hadeeth to be weak.** 299

This hadith is mursal and its isnad contains Sulaiman bin Musa who has been classified as weak by some scholars. Bukhari claims that he has munkar narrations. Nasai says that he is not strong in Hadeeth. Hafidh says in al Taqreeb, **"He is a sadooq and faqeeh. There is some (leen) "weakness" in his hadeeth."** Furthermore, Abu Dawood has recorded the same narration in his Maraseel but with a different wording. Instead of "he clasped them firmly on his chest" that narration reads "he entwined the fingers of his hands on his chest. [Maraseel Abi Dawood, p85]

This hadeeth is also mursal and although mursal narrations are not readily accepted by others, the Hanafi Ulama consider them acceptable as evidence. Therefore, as some have pointed out, this narration is binding on us. However, we say that the saheeh hadith of Sayyiduna Wail bin Hujr [radiyallahu anhu] narrated by Ibn Abi Shaibah takes precedence and the ahadeeth of Sayyidina Ali (ra) and Siyyiduna Abu Hurairah (ra) are more acceptable to us because they explicitly mention the sunnah being below the navel. Tawoos's words "he would" cannot match the words of the companions "it is sunnah". Also as mentioned earlier the very wording of Tawoos's hadeeth is in dispute. Moreover, Tawoos's mursal narration is opposed to the mursal narrations of Ibrahim al Nakhai and Abu Mijlaz.

Imam Nimawi writes in Aathaar al Sunan that there are other ahadeeth about placing the hands on the chest but they are all weak. Of these he mentions the following:

4. Sayyiduna Wail ibn Hujr (ra) narrates, **"I was present with the Prophet [salallahu alahyi wasalam]. He rose, went towards the masjid and entered the mihraab. He raised his hands with takbeer and then placed his right hand over his left upon his chest."** [Bayhaqi 2335]

Imam Nimawi says,

Its isnad is extremely weak. Dhahabi has said about Muhammad bin Hujr in Mizaan that he has

munkar narrations. Bukhari has said that there is a question about him. [Bukhari often uses this expression to describe the weakness of a narrator]. Ibn al Turkmani says, **“The mother of Abdul Jabbar is the mother of Yahya. I do not know her name or her details (grade of reliability).”** Saeed bin Abdul Jabbar is also weak. Dhahabi quotes Nasai in his Mizaan as saying that Saeed bin Abdul Jabbar is not strong. Hafidh ibn Hajar says in Taqreeb, **“Saeed bin Abdul Jabbar al Hadhrami al Kufi is weak.”** [al T’aleeq al Hasan 1/145]

5. Aqabah bin Sahban reports **that Sayyiduna Ali (ra) commenting on the verse [So pray unto thy Lord, and sacrifice] explained, that this means to place the right hand upon the middle of the left upon the chest.** [Bayhaqi 2337]

Ibn al Turkmani says that both the sanad and the text of this narration are mudhtarib. [al Jawhar al Naqiyy 2/46]

6. Abu al Jawz reports from Sayyiduna ibn Abbas (ra) **that he said of the verse [So pray unto thy Lord, and sacrifice]: This means placing the right hand upon the left in prayer, on the chest.** [See fn. 305]

Imam Nimawi has declared the isnad of this narration to be weak.

He says, “Rawh bin al Musayyab is matrook [abandoned]. Ibn Hibban says that Rawh Ibn al Musayyab narrates and ascribes fabricated traditions even to reliable authorities. It is not permissible to narrate from him. Ibn Adiyay says that his narrations are not preserved.” [al T’aleeq al Hasan 1/146]

The sanad also contains a third narrator, Amr bin Malik al Nakri. Ibn al Turkmani writes of him in al Jawhar al Naqiyy saying,

“Ibn Adiyay has said that Amr al Nakri is munkar al Hadeeth even when narrating from reliable authorities. He plagiarised narration and Abu Ya’la al Mawsili declared him dhaeef.” [al Jawhar al Naqiyy 2/47]

The correct Tafseer of this verse:

Ibn Jareer al Tabari, quoting the tafseer of the ulama which he states is the most correct, writes:

“The meaning of this verse is that “Oh Poropphet of Allah! Make all your prayers sincere for the sake of your Lord, whithout any share for other false gods and deities, and also make all your sacrifices solely for the sake of your Lord without any share for other idols.” [Ibn Jareer al Tabari in his Tafseer 12/724]

7. Ibn Jarir al Dhabbiyy reports from his father who said, **“I saw Ali (ra) clasping his left hand with his right on the wrist, above the navel.”** [Abu Dawood 757]

Imam Nimawi writes in Aathar al Sunan that the additional wording **“above the navel” is not authentic and established.** The same hadeeth has been narrated in al Safinah al Jaraidiyyah on the

authority of Muslim bin Ibrahim, one of Bukhari's shaykhs, in al Musannaf of Abu Bakr bin Abi Shaibah, [Ibn Abi Shaibah 3940 & 8722] and in Bukhari [in the chapters relating to actions in salah] in muallaq, abridged form. However, none of these narrations contain the extra wording "above the navel". The only narrator to include this additional wording in the hadeeth is Abu Badr Shuja bin al Walid narrating from Abu Talut Abdus Salam bin Abi Hazim. Shuja' has been considered reliable by some, but Abu Hatim says of him as quoted by Hafidh Ibn Hajar in his introduction [to Fath al Bari], and by Dhahabi in his Mizan that **"He is weak in hadeeth; a shaykh who is not strong and therefore, his word cannot be acceptable in evidence, although he has saheeh ahadeeth from Muhammad bin Amr bin Alqamah."** Hafidh Ibn Hajar also says in his Taqreeb, **"He is pious, sudoq and he has mistakes."** [al T'aleeq al Hasan 1/146]

Furthermore, above the navel does not mean "upon the chest".

Notes (1):

footnote (fn) no. 292 says: Ahmad 21460. Allamah Hashim Sindhi says in Dirham al Surrah p. 113 that both Simak bin Harb and Qabeesah (two of the narrators of this hadeeth) have been disparaged by some of the ulama of jarh and t'adeel.

fn. 293 Ibn Abi Shaibah 3934, Ahmad 21467, Ibn Majah 809 and Tirmidhi 252. Imam Tirmidhi adds that it is a hasan hadeeth.

fn. 294: Ahmad 21464.

fn. 295: Ahmad 21461 & 21475. Daruqutni 1087. al T'aleeq al Hasan 1/145

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fn. 299: al T'aleeq al Hasan 1/145. Allamah Hashim Sindhi says in Dirham al Surrah p27 that the authenticity of two of its narrators has been disputed: Sulaiman bin Musa and Haitham bin Humaid.

fn. 305: Bayhaqi 2339. Allamah Hashim says in Dirham al Surrah p28, "The hadeeth is weak on two accounts: because it is muqati' and also because three of its narrators, Amr, Yahya and Rawh are weak. So this should be considered. Furthermore, the authors of Muheet al Burhani and Majm'a al Bahrain have narrated a marf'u hadetteh from Ibn Abbas [radiyallahu anhu] with the words "It is part of sunnah to place the right hand upon the left below the navel in salah."

A more detailed reply can be found in arabic works like:

- i) Dirham al-Surra by Imam Muhammad Hashim al Sindi (d. 1174 AH) - which contains a thorough reply to Shaykh Muhammad Hayat al-Sindi and those who imitated him in later times (like Abdur Rahman al Mubarakpuri in his Tuhfatul Ahwadhi)
- ii) Athar al-Sunan ma'a Ta'liq al Hasan by Imam al-Nimawi
- iii) I'la al-Sunan by Shaykh Zafar Ahmad al-Uthmani (d. 1974)
- iv) Badhlul Majhud fi Halli Sunan Abu Dawud by Shaykh Khalil al-Sahranpuri
- v) Ma'arif al-Sunan by Shaykh Muhammad Yusuf al Binuri (d. 1977)

Placing The Hands Below The Navel

The scholars have provided various reasons why **the hands are best placed beneath the navel** and

why this method has been **classified as most preferable**.

(a) Although most of the ahadith on this issue are weak in one way or another, the narrations presented by the Hanafis have been judged to be more sound than the rest.

(b) Ibn al-Humam states in his book Fath al-Qadir, **'Due to the inconsistency and contradictions found between the various narrations, it is best to resort to analogy and reasoning. Standing before the Lord demands a posture which expresses respect and reverence. Since positioning the hands beneath the navel is probably the most respectful way of standing, it will be considered most superior. On the other hand, the reason for women being instructed to position their hands on their chest, is so that greater concealment [and modesty] can be achieved by this.'**

c) Allama Ayni states, **'To position the hands beneath the navel holds great virtue. It is a posture which signifies great respect. It displays greater contrast to the postures of the disbelievers.'** He further states, **'Placing the hands on the chest creates a similarity with women, hence that cannot be classified as the sunna for men.'** [Umdat al-qari 3:16]

Sayyiduna Wail bin Hujr radiallahu anhu says: **'I saw Rasulullah sallallahu alaihi wa sallam radiallahu anhu placing his right hand over his left in prayer, below the navel.'**[35]

Sayyiduna Ali radiallahu anhu says, **'It is part of he sunnah of prayer to place the palm over the palm below the navel.'**[36]

Sayyiduna Abu Hurairah radiallahu anhu says, **'The positioning of the hands upon the hands in prayer is below the navel.'**[37]

Hajjaj bin Hasan said, **'I heard Abu Mijlaz say or I asked him how should I place my hands.'** He replied, **'He (the individual performing the prayer) should place the inside of his right palm on his left hand and position both of them below the navel.'**[38]

Ibrahim al Nakhai reports that Rasulullah sallallahu alaihi wa sallam would rest one of his hands on the other in salâh, humbling himself before Allâh. Imam Muhammad (the narrator of this hadeeth) says, **'He would place the palm of his right hand on his left wrist below the navel. The wrist would thus be in the middle of the palm.'** [39]

Ibrahim al Nakhai also says, **'He (the individual performing the prayer) should place his right hand on his left, below the navel.'**[40]

Imam Tirmidhi says in his Sunan after narrating the above hadeeth of Qabeesah: **'Fastening the hands in prayer is the practice of the learned Sahâbah, Tabi'ûn and Tab' Tabieen. They are of the view that the individual performing the prayer should place his right hand on his left. Some of them then say that he should position them above the navel whilst others contend that they should be placed below the navel. All is permissible in their view.'**[41]

Notes:

[34] This is only for men. Women should place their hands on their bosoms.

[35] Ibn Abi Shaibah. Hafidh Qasim bin Qutlubughah says in his takhreej of the ahadeeth of 'al Ikhtiyaar' that this hadeeth has a very good sanad. Imam Hashim Sindhi also says in his Dirham al Surrah p84 that its sanad is strong. Imam Nimawi says that its sanad is saheeh (330). Imam Abu Tayyib Madani also says in his commentary of Tirmidhi 1/277 (published by al Matba' al Nidhami, Kanpur, India, 1299 AH) that this is a hadeeth which is saheeh in both sanad and text and is thus a basis for evidence.

[36] Ibn Abi Shaibah 3954, Ahmad 877, Abu Dawood 756, Daruqutni 1089 & 1090, and Baihaqi 2341 & 2342. Also narrated by Abu Hafs bin Shaheen in his al Sunnah and by Adani in his Musnad as mentioned by Allamah Hashim Sindhi in Dirham al Surrah, p32 quoting from Kanz al Ummal. Reported also by Razeen as quoted by the author of Jam' al Fawaid.

[37] Abu Dawood 758 and Ibn Battah as quoted by Allamah Hashim Sindhi in Dirham al Surrah, p36.

[38] Ibn Abi Shaibah 3942. Ibn at Turkumani says 2/47 that it has been narrated with a very good sanad. Imam Nimawi (331) and Muhaddith Yusuf Binnouri 2/44 both say that its isnad is saheeh. It has also been mentioned by Imam Abu Dawood but without a sanad (757).

[39] Imam Muhammad in his Kitab al Aathaar 120.

[40] Ibn Abi Shaibah 3939 and Imam Muhammad in his Kitab al Aathaar 121. Imam Nimawi says that its isnad is hasan (332).

[41] Tirmidhi 252.