

Women praying on upper or lower floors while not seeing the Imaam

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Question: There are some masjids in which the women pray below the actual masjid, such as in the basement or in an upper level (above the masjid). We are women who pray in these masjids, at times following the Imaam from a point where we are not able to see him or the male followers. And sometimes there is a large empty space left over in the area of prayer for the men. Is our prayer valid if we cannot see the Imaam or any of the (male) followers, and while knowing that sometimes we enter the masjid and don't know what rak'ah he is in. Is it allowed in this situation to follow (the Imaam) by (hearing) the raised voice only? And is it correct for us to follow the Imaam while we are on an upper or lower level knowing that at times there is ample room in the masjid (floor)?

Answer: Shaykh al-Albaanee (رَحِمَهُ اللهُ)¹: The answer is in two parts. The first is that the prayer and the mentioned scenario is valid so long as the women pray in the masjid, regardless of whether it is in the upper or lower level. And it is so long as they are able to hear the takbeers from the Imaam indicating the change in position, such as from standing to bowing to prostrating.

The second part is that it is not proper for the women to pray like this unless the area for the men is filled with people and they (the women) cannot find a place behind the rows for them to pray in. In these circumstances, it is permissible for the women to pray in the upper or lower level of the masjid. But if this masjid, where the Imaam and the men behind him pray, has ample room left over, then it is not allowed for the women to go up to the upper level or down to the lower level where they won't be able to see the movements of the Imaam or the movements of the men praying behind him. The reason for this goes back to two matters:

1. When the Prophet, (صلى الله عليه وسلم)², said: "**The best rows for the men are their first ones and their worst (rows) are their last ones. And the best rows for women are their last ones and the worst (rows) are their first ones**", he meant by it the same ground that the Prophet, (صلى الله عليه وسلم), and his Companions behind him used to pray on. The women were not in upper or lower levels.

2. The underlying reason for this is that the speakers at times can be low and at other times they are not working. So the prayer of the women who are following him from an upper or lower level, from which they cannot see the prayer of the Imaam or those behind him, is subject to becoming invalid.

To summarise this answer: The prayer that is performed while on an upper or lower level is valid. However, it is not permissible to designate those places for prayer when there is enough room in the prayer place (musalla), such that the women are able to pray in the back of it.

¹ (رَحِمَهُ اللهُ) (rahimahullaah) May Allaah have mercy on him

² (صلى الله عليه وسلم) May the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him