

Question: What are the rulings of one man leading a woman or group of women in congregation without the presence of another man in the same congregation? More specifically:

1. One man leading a group of nonmahram women.
2. One man leading a group of mahram women.
3. One man leading one mahram woman.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Answer:

1. It is strongly disliked (*makrūh taḥrīmī*) for a lone man to lead a group of non-maḥram women in an enclosed space. It is permissible for the imam of a masjid to lead a group of non-maḥram women in the masjid.
2. It is permissible for a lone man to lead a group of maḥram women.
3. It is permissible for a lone man to lead a maḥram woman as long as she is not immediately next to him.

Explanation:

Throughout time, there likely has been no other tactic used more by Shayṭan to delude our nafs into disobedience, than the potential harm that can arise from gender interaction. The Qur'an takes the approach of blocking many paths to it. For his part, the Prophet ﷺ warned us, "A man is not alone with a (non-maḥram¹) woman except that the third of them is Shayṭān."² Even in ṣalāḥ one should take care not to transgress boundaries.

Before getting into the explanation of each situation, we should remind ourselves of a few basic points:

1. The Prophet ﷺ advised us that most rewarding place of prayer for a man is with the *jamā`ah* in the masjid, and for a woman, alone in her home. This not preclude that, at times, men may find themselves praying at home and women, in the masjid.
2. He ﷺ prohibited us from *khalwah*, being alone with a non-maḥram, non-spouse in a confined space.³
3. Proper *ḥijāb* and decorum must always be observed when before a non-maḥram.

Lone man leading a group of women

Keeping the above three points in mind, if a man finds himself in a home, a *muṣalla* or another enclosed space having missed the masjid's *jamā`ah* and in the presence of only women, none of whom are maḥram to him, it is strongly disliked (*makrūh taḥrīmī*) to lead them in *ṣalāḥ*. Although, he is not alone with a single, non-maḥram female, Imam al-Sarakhsī explains the fear of corruption remains with a lone male in a female group. Despite the sin of performing a strongly disliked action, the *ṣalāḥ* is valid and does not need to be repeated.

¹ A maḥram is a person with whom marriage is not permissible in the Sharī`ah.

² Sunan al-Tirmidhī 2165

³ The Prophet ﷺ said, "A man should not be secluded with a woman except in the presence of a maḥram." al-Bukhārī 5233, Muslim 1341

Otherwise, according to Imam Muḥammad al-Shaybānī, if the imam leads a group of non-*maḥram* women in a space which does not constitute *khalwah*, like a masjid, while proper modesty and *ḥijāb* is observed, there is no harm in it. Sayyidunā `Umar رضي الله عنه ordered Sulayman ibn Abī Ḥathmah to lead women during Ramadan in this manner.⁴

Lone man leading a group of maḥram women

Ibn `Ābidīn quoting Ibn Nuḡaym al-Miṣrī's *al-Baḥr al-Rā'iq* explains if a man leads a group of *maḥram* women, whether in a masjid, home, or other enclosed space, it is permissible. Here, the fear of corruption is removed by the presence of any one of them being a *maḥram* or all of them. Similarly, if there is an additional male present or his spouse, the *ṣalāh* will be without dislike.⁵

Lone man leading a single maḥram woman

`Allāmah Sirāj al-Dīn al-`Ushī stated that it is permissible for a man to lead a single woman, who is a *maḥram* or his spouse, even in an enclosed space.⁶ If he misses the *ṣalāh* in the masjid, it is better to pray as a *jamā`ah* with her or them at home as stated by Muftī `Abd al-Raḥīm Lājpūrī. She or they should stand behind him.⁷

والله أعلم بالصواب

And Allah knows best,

Mufti Sulaiman Yusufi

Shaykh Mateen Khan

⁴ قلت: أرايت الرجل يؤم النساء وليس معه رجل غيره؟ قال: أما إذا كان مسجد جماعة تقام فيه الصلاة وهو إمام فتقدم يصلي وليس معه رجل فدخلن نِسوةً في الصلاة فلا بأس بذلك. وأما أن يخلو بمن في بيت أو في مكان غير المسجد فإني أكره له ذلك إلا أن يكون معه ذات محرم منهن. الأصل ١:٤٠، دار ابن حزم، بيروت - لبنان

قال (وإذا أم الرجل نساءً في مسجد جماعة ليس معه رجل فلا بأس بذلك) لما روي عن عمر - رضي الله تعالى عنه - أنه أمر أبي بن كعب أن يصلي بالرجال في ليالي رمضان وسليمان بن أبي حنيفة بأن يصلي بالنساء ولأن المسجد ليس بموضع الخلوة فلا بأس للرجل أن يجتمع معه فيه، فأما في غير المسجد من البيوت ونحوها فإنه يكره ذلك إلا أن يكون معه ذو رحم محرم ومنه لقوله - صلى الله عليه وسلم - «ألا لا يخلون رجلان بمراةٍ ليس بينهما يسبيلى فإن نالتهما الشيطان» وتتفرّد النساء يزداد معنى خوف الفتنه فلا تزول الكراهة إلا أن يكون معه محرم لجديث «أنس - رضي الله تعالى عنه - أن النبي - صلى الله عليه وسلم - صلى بهم في بيوتهم قال فأقامني واليتيم من ورائه وأقام أمي أم سليم وراةا» ولأن بوجود المحرم يزول معنى خوف الفتنه ويستوي إن كان المحرم هن أو لبعضهن ونحو الصلاة بكل حال؛ لأن الكراهة لمعنى في غير الصلاة المبسوط، دار المعرفة، ١:١٦٦

⁵ (كما نكره إمامة الرجل لمن في بيت ليس معه رجل غيره ولا محرم منه) كأخيه (أو زوجيه أو أميه، أما إذا كان معه واحد ممن ذكر أو أمه في المسجد لا يكره بخير - رد المحتار على الدر المختار، دار الفكر،

١:٥٦٦

^٦ ولو أم أمه أو امرأته ونحوهما في الخلوة لم يكره - الفتاوى السراجية ٩٧ دار العلوم زكرية