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## WHAT DID THE PROPHET DO? AN EVALUATION OF THE “ISLAMIC BASIS” OF FEMALE-LED PRAYER

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### **A response to Nevin Reda's article: *What Would the Prophet Do?* about Muslim women leading prayers**

On March 18, 2005, for perhaps the first time in the history of Islam, a woman delivered a *khutbah* and led a mixed congregation in *Jumu'ah* prayers. Although this action was clearly at variance with Islamic teachings and the consensus of the Muslim *Ummah*, attempts have been made to legitimize it. The most notable of these is a piece by Nevin Reda, available on the Internet.

Sadly, Reda's arguments have convinced a number of Muslims of the admissibility, or even desirability, of such prayers. This essay is a response to those arguments.

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## **Table of Contents**

<b>Part 1: A Guiding Principle: Adhering to the Understanding of the Companions and Eschewing Innovations.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Part 2: The Evidences Against Nevin Reda's Argument... ..</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Part 3: Scholarly Consensus... ..</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Part 4: The Hadeeth of Umm Waraqah.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Part 5: Conclusion – Compare and Contrast .....</b>	<b>18</b>

## **Part 1: A Guiding Principle: Adhering to the Understanding of the Companions and Eschewing Innovations**

Abu Daawood and at-Tirmithee reported on the authority of Irbaadh bin Saariyah that Allaah's Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said:

*"Whoever of you lives (after me) shall see much difference of opinion; so adhere to my Sunnah and the Sunnah of the rightly-guided Caliphs after me; bite on to it with your back teeth; and beware of innovations, for every innovation is misguidance."*<sup>2</sup>

Al-Bukhaaree and Muslim reported on the authority of Ibn Mas'ood that the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said:

*"The best of mankind is my generation; then those who come after them; then those who come after them."*<sup>3</sup>

These two narrations (and others of the same import) establish two very important principles: First, that the only correct way of understanding and implementing Islam is that of the Companions of Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم). Second, the obligation to shun all religious innovations.

It is possible for almost anyone who wishes to legitimize a particular belief or action and ascribe it to Islam to find, if they look hard enough, in the Qur'an (and to a lesser extent, the Sunnah) that which they can use to support their views. Hence we see vast numbers of sects and individuals with a wide and conflicting array of beliefs and practices, all of whom ascribe themselves to Islam and quote the Qur'an.

But the purpose of a true believer, when studying the Qur'an and Sunnah, is not to find support for what he already believes, but to learn the will of Allaah, and submit his or herself accordingly. As Imam Ash-Shaafi'ee said: "I believe in Allaah, and (the Book of) Allaah, *as Allaah intended it*; and I believe in Allaah's Messenger, and (the Sunnah of) Allaah's Messenger, *as Allaah's Messenger intended it*."<sup>4</sup>

The criterion for this is the understanding and practice of the Companions. In addition to the fact that the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) extolled them and commanded us to follow

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<sup>2</sup> Aboo Daawood (4607); at-Tirmithee (2678)

<sup>3</sup> Al-Bukhaaree (2652); Muslim reported it with several different wordings from several Companions, see #2533-5

<sup>4</sup> See 'Abdul-'Azeez bin Muhammad as-Salmaan: *al-As'ilah wal-Ajwibah al-Usooliyyah* (Jeddah, 1409) p.70

their way, they were the ones who saw the Qur'an being revealed and witnessed the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) implement it. And therefore no one is more knowledgeable of the meaning of the Qur'an and Sunnah than them. Allaah said:

﴿ فَإِنْ ءَامَنُوا بِمِثْلِ مَا ءَامَنْتُمْ بِهِ ۖ فَقَدِ اهْتَدَوْا ۗ ﴾

**“So if they believe as you believe, they are indeed on the right path.”**

[Sooratul-Baqarah, 2:137]

This verse was addressed to the Companions.

The above narrations also point to the danger of innovation in matters of religion. Allaah has informed us that He has perfected this religion<sup>5</sup>, and the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said:

*"Nothing remains which brings one closer to Paradise, or further away from the Fire, that has not been explained to you."*<sup>6</sup>

Imam Maalik elucidated this principle in his famous dictum: "Anyone who introduces an innovation into Islam, and believes that it is good, has claimed that Muhammad betrayed the Message. For Allaah says, **“This day I have perfected your religion for you, completed my favor upon you, and chosen for you Islam as your religion.”** [Sooratul-Maa'idah, 5:3] So whatever was not from the religion on that day can never be from the religion today."<sup>7</sup>

Anyone, therefore, who attempts to introduce foreign ideas or practices into the religion – under the guise of "progressiveness," "American Islam," or otherwise – is implying either that Allaah's revelation was insufficient or that the Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) did not convey His message.

Yet this should not be understood as a call to maintain the status quo. Sadly, the vast majority of the *Ummah* has become profoundly ignorant of its religion, profoundly negligent in its practice, and has been inundated with foreign ideologies which are antithetical to Islam. The state of the *Ummah* definitely needs to change. But true "progress" lies in *returning to* the example of Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم) and his companions, not straying farther away from it.

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﴿ ... أَلْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَتَمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي ۖ وَرَضِيْتُ لَكُمْ الْإِسْلَامَ دِينًا ۗ ﴾

**“This day, I have perfected your religion for you, completed My Favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion.”** [Sooratul-Maa'idah, 5:3]

<sup>6</sup> Reported by at-Tabaraanee in *al-Mu'jam al-Kabeer* (1647)

<sup>7</sup> See 'Alee Hasan 'Abdul-Hameed: *'Ilm Usool al-Bida'* (Riyadh: Daar ar-Raayah 1417) p. 17-21

These points established, we can now examine Ms. Reda's research in detail.

Reda begins her piece with the contention that "there is no prohibition precluding women from leading mixed-gender prayer." This, apart from being inaccurate, is not a valid argument. The established principle in Islam is that, while worldly matters are assumed to be permissible until proven otherwise, all religious acts are considered forbidden unless a basis for them can be established in the Qur'an or Sunnah.<sup>8</sup>

Allaah says:

﴿ أَمْ لَهُمْ شُرَكَاءُ تَشْرَعُوا لَهُمْ مِمَّنْ دَلَّ عَلَىٰ أَنَّهُمْ لَآ يُؤْتُونَ حُكْمًا مَّا لَمْ يَأْذُنْ بِهِ اللَّهُ ﴾

**“Or do they have partners who have ordained for them a religion which Allaah has not allowed?” [Sooratush-Shoorah, 42: 21]**

And the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said:

*"Whoever introduces into this affair of ours (the religion of Islam) that which is not from it will have it rejected."*<sup>9</sup>

Interestingly, Reda entitles her piece, "What Would the Prophet Do?" as if the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) was some imaginary creature who never set foot on Earth. What we should ask is: What *did* the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) do? The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) spent 10 years in Madeenah with his Companions, during which several *masaajid* were established. If female-led Friday prayers were permissible - or desirable, as Reda holds - Why didn't the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) appoint Aa'ishah, Hafsa, Faatimah, Umm Salamah, Umm Sulaym (رضي الله عنهن), or any of the eminently qualified female Companions as Imaams? Why didn't Aboo Bakr, 'Umar, Uthman, or 'Alee (رضي الله عنهم) do so? Are we to accept that this important issue was neglected by the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم), his Companions (رضي الله عنهم), and then 14 successive centuries of Muslims until we came along – in 21st century New York – to set things straight...?

## **Part 2: The Evidences Against Nevin Reda's Argument...**

That said, there is actually ample evidence, as we will see, that it is impermissible for women to lead mixed-gender prayers:

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p.69-73

<sup>9</sup> Al-Bukhaaree (2697); Muslim [1718]

1. The *hadeeth* of Aboo Bakrah, who reported that Allaah's Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said: "A people who place a woman in charge of them will never succeed."

This is an authentic narration, reported by al-Bukhaaree.<sup>10</sup> Although it was said in a particular context, its wording is general, and as such, scholars have used it as evidence that a woman should not lead men in prayer.<sup>11</sup>

Reda rejects this narration, impugning the credibility of its narrator, the noble Companion Aboo Bakrah. Aboo Bakrah, it is known, was flogged during the Caliphate of 'Umar for accusing al-Mugheerah bin Shu'bah of adultery without the requisite number of witnesses.<sup>12</sup> Aboo Bakrah refused to retract his deposition, so in accordance with the Qur'anic injunction, Umar would not accept his testimony thereafter. Reda argues that since his testimony in legal matters was not accepted, the narrations he narrates should likewise be rejected.

Her argument, we find, is unsound. There is a well-defined difference between testimony in legal matters and narration of religious matters, as the scholars have made abundantly clear.<sup>13</sup> One cannot be gauged by the other: For example, two or four witnesses may be required in legal matters, while in religious narrations, one reliable narrator is sufficient.

What's more, the scholars have specifically stated that Aboo Bakrah's being flogged does not render his narrations unacceptable, as we see in the following quote from Ibn Qudaamah:

"One who has been punished for *qathf* (accusing another of adultery), if he has done so as a witness, should not have his narrations rejected, as he is not

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<sup>10</sup> #4425

<sup>11</sup> See Muhammad bin 'Alee ash-Shawkaanee, *as-Sayl al-Jarraar* (Beirut: Daar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah) vol. 1, p.250

<sup>12</sup> Aboo Bakrah originally had three other witnesses with him: Naafi' ibn al-Haarith, Shibl bin Ma'bad, and Ziyaad bin Abeehi. Aboo Bakrah, Naafi', and Shibl gave their testimony, but when Ziyaad was asked, he was unsure about what he had seen. The fourth witness was thus missing, so the three who gave their testimony were flogged. Hence, when Aboo Bakrah offered his testimony, he believed that he had the requisite number of witnesses, and he refused to repent afterwards because he didn't believe he had done anything wrong. See *Siyar A'laam an-Nubalaa'* vol. 3. pp. 7,28

Sa'eed ibn al-Musayyab (may Allaah have mercy upon him) said, "'Umar flogged Aboo Bakrah, Naafi' ibn al-Haarith, and Shibl. The latter two repented, so 'Umar accepted their testimony. Aboo Bakrah refused, so 'Umar wouldn't accept his testimony – and he was the best of them all." Ibid. p. 7-8

Al-Hasan al-Basree said, "No better Companion than 'Imraan bin Husayn or Aboo Bakrah ever resided in Basrah." Ibn al-Atheer, *Usd al-Ghaabah* (Beirut: Daar al-Ma'rifah 1418)

<sup>13</sup> See Aboo Haamid al-Ghazaalee, *al-Mustasfaa min 'Ilm al-Usool*, vol. 2, pp. 223-225

responsible for the lack of witnesses. Hence, the people have narrated from Aboo Bakrah, and **done so unanimously**, even though he has been punished for *qathf*.”<sup>14</sup>

Aboo Bakrah was an eminent Companion, noted for his piety and righteousness. It is the consensus of *Ahlu-Sunnah wal-Jamaa'ah*, based on numerous texts from the Qur'an and the Sunnah, that all of the Companions are reliable, and that their narrations are to be accepted.<sup>15</sup> Contemplate the following quote from the famous *hadeeth* scholar, Aboo Zur'ah ar-Raazee (d.264):

“If you hear a person disparaging any of the companions of Allaah's Messenger, know that he is a *zindeeq* (heretic). For the Messenger is true, the Qur'an is true, and its message is true; and these were only relayed to us through the Companions. **But these heretics want to challenge our witnesses, to nullify the Qur'an and the Sunnah, so they are the ones who should be discredited.**”<sup>16</sup>

And is it possible, were Aboo Bakrah's biography truly damaging, that it would have escaped not just al-Bukhaaree, but all the successive generations of scholars who unanimously accepted his narrations?

After traducing this noble Companion, Reda proceeds to question the authority of the most authentic book in Islam after the Qur'an, *Saheeh al-Bukhaaree*, where the preceding *hadeeth* was related. In short, Reda claims that since al-Bukhaaree was human and hence prone to error, we should not accept his judgments blindly.

Again, Reda has misunderstood the issue. Yes, al-Bukhaaree was not infallible, and his pronouncements on narrations and narrators outside of his *Saheeh* are open to scrutiny. But with regard to the *Saheeh*, it is not al-Bukhaaree's judgment alone that we are relying upon. The entire *Ummah*, with all of its scholars, for centuries after al-Bukhaaree, have agreed upon the authenticity of the *Saheeh*, and it is the consensus of the *Ummah* which is infallible.

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<sup>14</sup> 'Abdullaah Ibn Qudaamah, *Raudhat an-Naathir wa Jannat al-Manaathir* (Beirut: Daar ar-Rayyaan, 1423) vol. 1, p. 348

<sup>15</sup> See Ibn Abi al-'Izz al-Hanafee, *Sharh al-'Aqeedah at-Tahaawiyyah* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islaamee, 1408) p. 467-471

<sup>16</sup> *As-Sunnah Qabl at-Tadween*, Dr. Muhammad 'Ajjaj al-Khateeb, (Cairo: Maktabah al-Wahbah, 1408) p.405

2. The *hadeeth*, narrated by both Aboo Hurayrah and Sahl ibn Sa'd, and reported by both al-Bukhaaree<sup>17</sup> and Muslim<sup>18</sup>, that the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said:

*"Saying subhaan Allaah is for men, and clapping is for women."*

Muslim added in one narration: *"...in prayer."*

The meaning of this *hadeeth*, as is plain from the context of Sahl bin Sa'd's narration, is that if the Imaam makes a mistake in his prayer, the men should correct him by saying, *"subhaan Allaah,"* while the women should alert him by clapping.

The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم), we see, told the women to clap instead of speaking so that their voices would not be heard in the prayer by men. Is it conceivable, then, that they would be asked to lead the prayer and give the Friday sermon?

3. The *hadeeth* reported by Muslim<sup>19</sup> on the authority of Ibn 'Umar, that Allaah's Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said:

*"Don't prevent the female servants of Allaah from the masaajid of Allaah."*

Aboo Daawood's narration adds: *"...but their homes are better for them."*<sup>20</sup>

And the *hadeeth* narrated by both Umm Salamah and Ibn Mas'ood, and reported respectively by al-Haakim and Aboo Daawood, that the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said:

*"A woman's prayer in her bedroom is better than her prayer in her waiting-room, and her prayer in her inner chamber is better than her prayer in her bedroom."*<sup>21</sup>

The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) not only encouraged women to pray at home, he encouraged them to pray in the innermost recesses of their homes, as that is more private and secure. The "progressives," in sharp contrast, not only encourage Muslim women to pray in the masjid, but to lead the prayer and give the *khutbah*.

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<sup>17</sup> #1203, 1204

<sup>18</sup> #106, 107

<sup>19</sup> #442

<sup>20</sup> Sunan Abee Daawood (567); see also Irwaa' al-Ghaleel (515)

<sup>21</sup> See Saheeh al-Jaami' (3833)

4. The *hadeeth* of Aboo Hurayrah, related by Muslim<sup>22</sup>, that the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said:

"The best rows of men are the front rows and the worst (rows of men) are the back rows, and the best rows of women are the back rows and the worst (rows of women) are the front rows."

The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said that the best rows for women are the last rows; so how is it conceivable that they should be requested not only to pray in the front rows, but to lead the prayer and give the *khutbah*?

Reda hilariously suggests that the meaning of "rows" (*sufuof*)<sup>23</sup> in this narration is not prayer rows, but battle rows, on the basis that "the word 'saff' does not appear in the Qur'an in connection with prayers, but with battle rows." "It is possible," she argues, "that a tradition (read: *hadeeth*) which originally arose in the context of battle was later applied to prayer."

This hardly merits rebuttal. If that were the context of the narration, it would mean that the women of the Companions regularly donned armor and fought in rows behind the men – an absurd suggestion. The word *saff* and its derivatives, moreover, are used twice in the Qur'an with reference to prayer rows – those of the angels.<sup>24</sup> (It is used only once in the context of battle.) Other than that, the word is not used to mean prayer rows for the simple reason that the subject of (human) prayer rows is not discussed in the Qur'an. In the Sunnah, though (of which this narration is an example), we find literally hundreds of examples of the word "*saff*" and its derivatives being used to signify prayer rows.<sup>25</sup> In fact, in general, no other word is used.

<sup>22</sup> #132

<sup>23</sup> "*Saff*" is row, singular; "*sufuof*" is plural.

<sup>24</sup>

﴿ وَالصَّافَّاتِ صَفًّا ﴾

"By those (angels) ranged in ranks (or rows)." [Sooratus-Saffat 37:1]

﴿ وَإِنَّا لَنَحْنُ الصَّافُّونَ ﴾

**Verily, we (angels), we stand in rows for the prayers (as you Muslims stand in rows for your prayers);** [Sooratus-Saffat, 37:165]

<sup>25</sup> For example, the narration, "Straighten your rows (*sufuof*), for straightening the rows (*sufuof*) is from the perfection of the prayer." Al-Bukhaaree #723; Muslim #433

It is not possible, I might add, that the correct understanding of this *hadeeth* was withheld from the entire *Ummah*, without exception, from the time of the Companions until today, and granted to us.

Reda then asserts that what she terms "gender segregation" i.e. separation of the sexes in the *masaajid* was not implemented during the Prophet's lifetime (صلى الله عليه وسلم), but was introduced later. We would be obliged if she would explain just how this happened: Men and women during the life of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) were praying side by side, and then sometime after his death, someone manages to institute "gender segregation" in every *masjid* on the face of the earth without there being a murmur of protest! Who did this, when, and where is it recorded?

As a matter of fact, there is ample evidence from the *Sunnah* that men and women should pray separately, most of which is also proof of the incorrectness of female-led Friday prayers. For example:

**a)** The *hadeeth* reported by Aboo Daawood<sup>26</sup> under the heading: "The Separation of Women from Men in the Mosques":

Ibn 'Umar reported that Allaah's Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said: "*Why don't we leave this door for the women?*" So Ibn 'Umar never passed through it until he died.

**b)** The long *hadeeth* of Jaabir ibn 'Abdillaah, reported by al-Bukhaaree<sup>27</sup> and Muslim<sup>28</sup>, in which he describes the 'Eed prayer of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم). He mentions that the Prophet, after delivering the *khutbah*, "then proceeded until he came to the women, and admonished them and reminded them (of Allaah)."

It is clear from this narration that the women were praying separately from the men.

**c)** Muslim reports<sup>29</sup> that Sahl bin Sa'd said: "*I saw men (praying) behind the Prophet whose loin-cloths<sup>30</sup> were so small, they had to tie them to their necks, as children do.*" So someone said, "*O women, don't raise your heads until the men raise theirs.*"

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<sup>26</sup> #467

<sup>27</sup> #978

<sup>28</sup> #885

<sup>29</sup> #133

<sup>30</sup> In Arabic, "*izaar*" – a towel-like cloth worn on the lower body

Many of the Companions, due to their poverty, could not find more to wear than a single loin-cloth. These were such that when they prostrated, their private areas would sometimes be exposed. Hence, the women – *who were behind them* – were requested not to raise their heads before the men, lest they see them uncovered.

**d)** Al-Bukhaaree reports<sup>31</sup> that Aboo Sa'eed al-Khudree said: The women said to the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم), "The men have robbed us of you! Make a day of yours just for us." So he promised them a day in which he would meet them...

This *hadeeth* also shows that it was not customary for the sexes to mingle in mixed gatherings, or else why would the women have asked the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) to make a special day for them?

**e)** Al-Bukhaaree<sup>32</sup> reports that Umm Salamah said: "When the Prophet would make *salaam*, the women would get up and leave when he finished his *salaam*, and he would wait a while before standing." Ibn Shihaab (one of the narrators) said, "I believe – and Allaah knows best – that he used to wait in order for the women to leave before the men could overtake them."

**f)** Al-Bukhaaree<sup>33</sup> and Muslim<sup>34</sup> report on the authority of Anas bin Maalik that his grandmother invited the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) to eat with them, and that he prayed with them in their home. Said Anas:

*"The orphan and I formed a row<sup>35</sup> behind him (the Prophet) and the old lady (stood) behind us; he then prayed two rak'ahs and left."*

This *hadeeth* clearly shows that the rows of women should be behind – and separate – from the men's.

The foregoing narrations not only show that "gender segregation," as Reda terms it, was applied during the life of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم), but should make it clear to anyone who contemplates them that female-led Friday prayers cannot be from the religion of Islam.

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<sup>31</sup> #101

<sup>32</sup> #870, under the heading, "Women Praying Behind the Men"

<sup>33</sup> #380

<sup>34</sup> #658

<sup>35</sup> A derivative of the word "*saff*" is used here.

### Part 3: Scholarly Consensus

The spearheads of this movement claim that there is no consensus on the issue and that there is a scholarly precedent to their position. This is not entirely accurate. While it is reported that a few scholars – three, to be exact: at-Tabaree<sup>36</sup>, Aboo Thawr, and al-Muzanee, – held that it was permissible for a woman to lead men, the following points should be noted:

1. Even if a majority of the scholars held this opinion, it would not be valid in the face of the clear evidence from the *Sunnah*.
2. We have no way of determining the accuracy of ascribing this opinion to the above scholars. Their original works have not reached us, and there exist no chains of narration whereby we can be sure of their actual positions.
3. As the actual statements of these scholars have not reached us, we cannot be certain whether they placed any limitations on women leading men in prayer. However, none of them are recorded as allowing women to lead *Jumu'ah* and to give the *khutbah*. It can be safely concluded, therefore, that there is absolute consensus on the impermissibility of such an action.
4. None of these scholars began a "woman's liberation" movement and insisted on placing women as imaams and *khateeb*s of mosques.

In her article, Reda declares that "there were at least four schools within Sunnism that allowed women to lead men in prayers" – namely, the schools of at-Tabaree, Aboo Thawr, al-Muzanee, and Daawood ath-Thaahiree. Her statement, however, falls short of accuracy in several aspects:

First, with respect to at-Tabaree and Aboo Thawr, this cannot, as we have seen, be verified; notwithstanding the fact that they did not have major schools or a significant number of followers.

Second, al-Muzanee did *not* have his "own school of law with adherents in various parts of the Islamic world," as Reda claims. On the contrary, he is widely known as a prominent student of Imam ash-Shafi'ee, and a proponent of his *math-hab*. Imam ash-Shafi'ee is recorded as saying, "Al-Muzanee is the protector of *my math-hab*."<sup>37</sup> Al-

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<sup>36</sup> It may interest the reader to learn that on the Web site that patronizes Ms. Reda and began this so-called "prayer initiative," at-Tabaree is misquoted, defiled, and referred to with an obscene seven-letter epithet.

<sup>37</sup> *Siyar A'laam an-Nubalaa'*, vol. 12, p. 493

Muzanee's biography is well documented; there is no mention whatsoever of him having a school of law or followers.<sup>38</sup> It is also doubtful whether he actually held this view.<sup>39</sup>

Third, this was not the position of Daawood ath-Thaahiree. Reda fell into this error by relying in her research solely on Ahmed al-Banna's *Buloogh al-Amaanee*, which is a relatively modern work, and not an authoritative source.<sup>40</sup> We do not find this opinion ascribed to Daawood in any authoritative source, and an-Nawaawee, in his *al-Majmoo'*, explicitly states that Daawood was with the majority<sup>41</sup>. The only major source of the Thaahiree *math-hab* which has reached us is Ibn Hazm's *al-Muhallaa*, and in it, he says, "It is not permissible for a woman to lead a man or men in prayer. There is no difference of opinion about this." Then after mentioning a number of evidences, he continues, "from these texts, the invalidity of a woman leading men can be established with certainty."<sup>42</sup>

Reda also claims that "whether the majority of the Muslim population supported women's leadership or not is difficult to determine." It is not. As for the scholars, we have seen how few allowed women to lead men in prayer. And as for the public, we have no record of anyone – before "PMU" – instituting a woman as the Imaam of a *masjid*. The majority, if not all, of the Muslims – male and female – accepted the ruling of Allaah and His Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم):

﴿فَلَا وَرَبِّكَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ حَتَّىٰ يُحَكِّمُوكَ فِيمَا شَجَرَ بَيْنَهُمْ ثُمَّ لَا يَجِدُوا فِي أَنفُسِهِمْ حَرَجًا مِّمَّا قَضَيْتَ وَيُسَلِّمُوا تَسْلِيمًا﴾

**“But no, by your Lord, they can have no (true) faith until they make you (O Muhammad) judge in all that arises between them, and find in their souls no resistance against your decision, and submit (themselves) completely” [Sooratun-Nisaa', 4:65]**

<sup>38</sup> See *ibid*, vol. 12, p.492, footnote, for sources of his biography

<sup>39</sup> In his '*al-Mughnee*', Ibn Qudaamah quotes al-Muzanee as holding that one who prays behind a non-Muslim does not have to repeat his prayers if he was not aware of his imam's condition. Ibn Qudaamah then says that *by way of analogy* on this position of al-Muzanee's, a man who prayed behind a woman (i.e. unknowingly) would not have to repeat. If this is accurate, it would mean that al-Muzanee did not explicitly allow men to pray behind women, but that it could be understood from his other positions that if a man were to do so unknowingly, he would not have to repeat his prayer. See *al-Mughnee* (Riyadh: Daar 'Alam al-Kutub, 1419) vol. 3, pp. 32-33

<sup>40</sup> It is assumed that the attribution of this position to Daawood in *Buloogh al-Amaanee* is either a misprint or simply an error from al-Banna.

<sup>41</sup> *Al-Majmoo' Sharh al-Muhath-thab* (Beirut: Daar al-Fikr) vol. 4, pp. 254-255

<sup>42</sup> *Al-Muhallaa*, (Beirut: Daar al-Afaaq) vol. 3, pp. 125-126

Not that it would matter much to Reda if the entire *Ummah* were agreed on the matter. She shamelessly calls for a "re-evaluation" of the exemption of women from prayers during their menses, despite the unassailable consensus on this issue and the mountains of incontrovertible evidence from the *Sunnah*. Contrary to her claim that the evidence from the *Sunnah* is "mixed," there is not one *hadeeth* – be it authentic, weak, or even fabricated – that women should pray while on their menses or that the Prophet's wives did so. We can only assume that Reda has encountered something which she has misread or misunderstood.<sup>43</sup> That being the case, the *Ummah* does not need to re-evaluate the issue, it needs to re-educate Nevin Reda.

#### Part 4: The Hadeeth of Umm Waraqah

The main evidence of the female-led *Jumu'ah* advocates is the *hadeeth* of Umm Waraqah. It was related by Aboo Daawood<sup>44</sup>, Ahmad<sup>45</sup>, and others, with various

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<sup>43</sup> "Medieval [sic] scholars," Reda says, "attempted to harmonize between the two groups of hadith. (i.e. the narrations prohibiting prayer during menses and the (non-existent) narrations permitting it.) They constructed a distinction between two types of blood: menstruation (*hayd*) and pseudo-menstruation (*istihada*). Any blood that was outside the normal period was considered pseudo-menstruation. Thus, if a woman's normal period was a week, and for some reason it suddenly became two weeks, she would be exempted one week and pray the other. However, this distinction is artificial: there is no difference in the substance, color, or odor of the blood of pseudo-menstruation and menstruation."

We ask the reader to compare the above statement with the narrations of Allaah's Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم):

Aa'ishah reported: Faatimah bint Abee Hubaysh asked the Prophet, "*I experience vaginal bleeding [istihaadhah], and it doesn't stop. Should I stop praying?*" He replied, "**No, that's just (blood from) a vein. Don't pray during the days in which you used to have your period, then make *ghusl* and pray.**" Reported by al-Bukhaaree (325) and Muslim (333).

Aa'ishah also reported that Umm Habeebah complained to Allaah's Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) about vaginal bleeding (one narration states that she experienced *istihaadhah* [using that exact word] which lasted seven years). Allaah's Messenger said, "**Don't pray for the period of time during which your menses would come, then make *ghusl*.**" Muslim (334); al-Bukhaaree (327) ⇨

In another *hadeeth*, Aa'ishah reports that Allaah's Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said, "**Menstrual blood is a black, distinguishable blood; if you see that, stop praying. But if it's the other [(i.e. normal) type of blood], make *wudhoo'* and pray.**" Aboo Daawood (286); an-Nasaa'ee, vol. 1, p. 185.

For many more *ahaadeeth* on the subject, the English reader may refer to the translations of *al-Bukhaaree*, *Muslim*, *Buloogh al-Maraam*, or *Mishkaat al-Masaabeeh*, in the chapters concerning menstruation.

<sup>44</sup> #591, 592

<sup>45</sup> vol.6, p.405

wordings. In it, she relates that the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) allowed her to have someone call the *athaan* at her home and that she would lead the people of her household in prayer.

But this *hadeeth* is not valid evidence for several reasons:

1. The authenticity of this *hadeeth* is questionable. Its chains of narration revolve around one narrator, al-Waleed bin Jumay'<sup>46</sup>, who has been considered error-prone. On top of that, he narrates it through two individuals, Laylaa bint Maalik and 'Abdur-Rahman bin Khallaad, both of whom are unknown.<sup>47</sup> Hence, though some *hadeeth* scholars have accepted the narration, its authenticity, as we say, is questionable.
2. The narration of ad-Daaraqutnee<sup>48</sup> specifies that Umm Waraqah was leading the **women** of her household in prayer. This becomes clearer when we consider that the narrations of al-Haakim<sup>49</sup>, al-Bayhaqee<sup>50</sup>, and Abu Nu'aym<sup>51</sup> state that she was leading the obligatory prayers. We know the importance that the Prophet (*sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) placed upon males' attending the obligatory prayers in the *masjid*; he contemplated burning the homes of those who pray at home, and commanded a blind man without a guide to come to the *masjid*. It is unlikely, therefore, that the male members of Umm Waraqah's household would abandon the *masjid* and lag behind to pray with her. This, accordingly, is what most scholars have understood the *hadeeth* to mean: that Umm Waraqah was leading the *female* members of her household. Ibn Khuzaymah reported the *hadeeth* in his *Saheeh* under the heading, "A Woman Leading Other Women in the Obligatory Prayer."<sup>52</sup> Ad-Daaraqutnee placed it in a chapter he entitled, "Women Praying with a Woman Leading Them."<sup>53</sup> And Al-Bayhaqee's heading was even more explicit: "A Woman Leading Other Women, Not Men."<sup>54</sup>
3. Even if we were to assume – for the sake of argument – that the *hadeeth* was authentic, and that Umm Waraqah was leading males, it would still not support

<sup>46</sup> See Ibn Hajar, *Taqreeb at-Tahtheeb* #7482, and ath-Thahabee, *Meezaan al-I'tidaal* #9362

<sup>47</sup> *Taqreeb at-Tahtheeb*, #8909 and #3880

<sup>48</sup> *At-Ta'leeq al-Mughnee 'alaa Sunan ad-Daaraqutnee* (Pakistan: Nashr as-Sunnah) vol. 1, p. 279. Ahmed al-Banna mentions this narration in his *Buloogh al-Amaanee*, which is Reda's primary source in her research, on the very page to which Reda refers us in her footnote. It would, accordingly, be difficult to avoid the conclusion that she was aware of this clarifying narration, and deliberately concealed it from her readers.

<sup>49</sup> #733

<sup>50</sup> *As-Sunan al-Kubraa* (Riyadh: Maktabah ar-Rushd, 1425) vol. 3, p.194

<sup>51</sup> *Hilyah al-Awliyaa'* vol. 2, p. 63

<sup>52</sup> #1676

<sup>53</sup> *At-Ta'leeq al-Mughnee 'alaa Sunan ad-Daaraqutnee*; vol. 1, p. 279

<sup>54</sup> *As-Sunan As-Sughraa* (555)

what the so-called "progressives" are calling for. A woman leading the male members of her household, in the privacy of her own home, and a woman standing in front of the multitudes on Friday and delivering the *khutbah* are two separate and distinct issues, as should be obvious to anyone seeking the truth.

Yet Reda does not stop at the apparent meaning of this *hadeeth*. In a mind-boggling display of sophistry, she interprets the word "*daar*" (household) to mean "tribe" and concludes from the fact that Umm Waraqah had a *mu'ath-thin* (caller to prayer) that she had a congregational *masjid* in her home and that all the members of her clan were praying behind her. Neither of these conclusions is sound. The word "*daar*" in this context cannot be used to signify anything other than household, and that is how all the commentators upon the *hadeeth* have understood it to mean. Likewise, calling the *athaan* does not necessitate that a large congregation is gathering. In fact, it in itself does not necessitate that there be a congregation at all; the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) has said:

*"Your Lord marvels at a shepherd at the top of a mountain crag who calls the athaan and prays. Allaah says: 'Look at this servant of mine: he calls to the prayer and prays. He fears Me; I have forgiven him and granted him Paradise.'"*<sup>55</sup>

Also, the fact that the word "*masjid*" is used in one narration does not mean that there was a congregational mosque. The word *masjid* literally means "a place where *sajdah* (ie. prayer) is made." Hence, the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said:

*"The whole Earth has been made a masjid for me, and a means of purification."*<sup>56</sup>

When used with reference to a person's house, the word "*masjid*" simply means the part of that individual's home reserved especially for prayer.

Besides, if Umm Waraqah was doing something as monumental as leading her entire tribe five times a day, wouldn't the narrator have said so explicitly, instead of resorting to this cryptic and secret service mode of expression? And wouldn't this fact have been widely known, and have reached us in more than just one weak narration? The "*masjid*" of Umm Waraqah, like the "*math-hab*" of al-Muzanee, is nothing more than a figment of Reda's imagination.

### **Distorting the Qur'an**

Reda, in her attempt to legitimize female-led Friday prayers, also enlists several verses from the Qur'an. For example, she interprets the *ayaat* in which Allaah condemns the Arabs for killing or being ashamed of their baby girls as being a prohibition of any form

<sup>55</sup> See *Saheeh al-Jaami'* (8102)

<sup>56</sup> Reported by al-Bukhaaree (335) and Muslim (521)

of "gender discrimination." But it just doesn't follow: there's a big difference between killing women and holding that they cannot lead mixed-gender prayers. Indeed, if any form of differentiation between the sexes is "gender discrimination and a way of abasing female Muslims," what does Reda say about the verses which clearly do so, such as in the matters of inheritance, marriage, and financial responsibilities? Reda may feel that such distinction is "injustice," but 14 centuries of right-thinking Muslims – male and female – have not.

In fact, it seems that Reda deliberately distorts or conceals certain Qur'anic passages to support her opinion. For instance, she claims that the Queen of Sheba is "the Qur'anic role model for a positive leader." But when we read the *soorah* to which she refers us, what do we find?

﴿ فَمَكَتْ غَيْرَ بَعِيدٍ فَقَالَ أَحَطْتُ بِمَا لَمْ نَحِطْ بِهِءَ وَجِئْتُكَ مِنْ سَبَإٍ بِنَبَأٍ يَقِينٍ ﴿٢٢﴾ إِنِّي  
وَجَدْتُ أَمْرًا تَمَلِكُهُمْ وَأُوتِيَتْ مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهِيَ عَرْشٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿٢٣﴾ وَجَدْتُهَا وَقَوْمَهَا  
يَسْجُدُونَ لِلشَّمْسِ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَزَيْنَ لَهُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ أَعْمَلَهُمْ فَصَدَّهُمْ عَنِ السَّبِيلِ فَهُمْ لَا  
يَهْتَدُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾ ﴾

**"But (the hoopoe) stayed not long, he (came up and) said: "I have grasped (the knowledge of a thing) which you have not grasped and I have come to you from Saba' (Sheba) with true news. I found a woman ruling over them, and she has been given all things (that could be possessed by any ruler of the earth), and she has a great throne. I found her and her people worshipping the sun instead of Allaah, and Shaytaan has made their deeds fair-seeming to them, and has barred them from (Allaah's) Way, so they have no guidance..." [Sooratun-Naml, 27:22-4]**

Reda also refers us to *Ayah 35 of Soorah Aali-'Imraan*. But if we read the next verse, we find that which demolishes her entire thesis:

﴿ فَلَمَّا وَضَعَتْهَا قَالَتْ رَبِّ إِنِّي وَضَعْتُهَا أُنْثَىٰ وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا وَضَعْتَ وَلَيْسَ الذَّكَرُ كَالْأُنْثَىٰ وَإِنِّي  
سَمَّيْتُهَا مَرْيَمَ وَإِنِّي أُعِيدُهَا بِنكِ وَدُرِّيَّتَهَا مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ ﴿٣٥﴾ ﴾

**"Then when she delivered her (child Maryam), she said: 'O my Lord! I have delivered a female child,' - and Allaah knew better what she delivered, 'And the male is not like the female, and I have named her**

**Maryam (Mary), and I seek refuge with You (Allaah) for her and for her offspring from Shaytaan (Satan), the outcast. ) [Soorah Aali-Imraan, 3:36]**

## Part 5: Conclusion – Compare and Contrast

Allaah says:

﴿ إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ ﴾

**“We have, without doubt, sent down the Message; and assuredly, we shall guard it.” [Sooratul-Hijr, 15:9]**

The organizers of this event declare that they are "reclaiming" a part of Islam that has been lost. According to them, a part of the religion which Allaah revealed was suppressed by a group of male scholars. And thus, this great masculine conspiracy thwarted the Will of Allaah.

The Messenger of Allaah (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said:

*"A group of my Ummah will always remain victorious upon the Truth; they will not be harmed by those who oppose them, nor by those who forsake them, until the Command of Allaah (the Day of Resurrection) arrives."<sup>57</sup>*

According to the "progressives," throughout 14 centuries – beginning from the age of the Companions onward – and across the length and breadth of the Muslim world, there was not one Muslim – male or female – with the intelligence, courage, or initiative to unmask this hideous conspiracy and stand up for the truth.

### A Fundamental Misunderstanding

This recent push for female-led *Jumu'ah* prayers stems from the narrow-minded notion, widely held in the West, that Islam's assigning different social roles to the two sexes is unjust and demeaning to women. This is not the case; however, Allaah *has* created males and females with clear physical and psychological differences and granted each sex distinct aptitudes. And as such, Islam has given them complementary, not competitive, roles. Surely our Creator knows best:

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<sup>57</sup> Al-Bukhaaree (7311); Muslim (170-176)

﴿ أَلَا يَعْلَمُ مَنْ خَلَقَ وَهُوَ اللَّطِيفُ الْخَبِيرُ ﴾

**“Should He not know – He that created? And He is the Subtle, the All-Aware?” [Sooratul-Mulk, 67:14]**

One has to look no further than the West to see the social and moral mayhem that results when the Creator's guidance in these matters is rejected.

Some have even gone so far as to liken the *Sunnah* of women praying separately from men to the racial segregation formerly practiced in America.<sup>58</sup> This also indicates a feeble understanding. The object of a Muslim's worship is the Pleasure of Allaah, and this is equally accessible to both sexes – by praying where the *Sharee'ah* has encouraged them to. In fact, women could be seen as having the advantage here: they can attain the same reward as a man praying in the first row without leaving their homes.

The call for women to be Imaams is also rooted in a fundamentally un-Islamic view toward leadership. Unlike Western culture, in which acquiring positions of power and authority is considered the ultimate success in life, Islam teaches its adherents to shun seeking such positions, keeping their focus on the life to come:

﴿ تِلْكَ الدَّارُ الْآخِرَةُ نَجْعَلُهَا لِلَّذِينَ لَا يُرِيدُونَ عُلُوًّا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فَسَادًا  
وَالْعَاقِبَةُ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴾

**“Such is the home of the Hereafter; we grant it to those who desire neither status upon the earth, nor corruption. And the (best) outcome will be for those who have *taqwaa*.” [Sooratul-Qasas, 28:83]**

Abu Hurayrah narrates that the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said:

*"You people are keen to acquire the authority of leadership, but it will be a thing of regret for you on the Day of Resurrection."*<sup>59</sup>

Ka'b ibn Maalik reported that Allaah's Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said:

*"Two hungry wolves set loose in a flock of sheep would not do more damage to them than the craving of wealth and status does to a person's religion."*<sup>60</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Some have also called for Muslims to participate in female-led *Jumu'ah* prayers whether they are convinced of their validity or not, in an act of "civil disobedience" to Allaah and His Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم).

<sup>59</sup> Al-Bukhaaree (7148)

Authority in Islam, be it religious or political, is a responsibility, not a privilege. If a Muslim acquires it, he must strive to fulfill his duties, but a Muslim – male or female – does not covet ascendancy.

And Allaah knows best



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<sup>60</sup> Ahmad and at-Tirmitheh; see *Saheeh al-Jaami'* (5620)