

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE VIEWS OF SCHOLARS ON THE VENUE OF *I'TIKĀF*

By

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Abstract

I'tikāf, a spiritual retreat during the last ten days of ramadan, is expected to be observed in the mosque as indicated in the Qur'an and sunnah of prophet Muhammad (S.A. 'A.S). However, the specific mosque where it should be practised is not stated. This causes argument among the scholars. It is against this background that the paper examines the views of the scholars vis a vis Islamic jurisprudence on the issue. After investigations, it could be concluded that non specification of the mosque is a mercy for the faithfuls and that i'tikāf could be observed in any convenient mosque where observance of any other 'ibadat such as salat Juma'ah is not hindered.

Introduction

Mosque is an important institution in Islām and the first of its kind was established by Allāh (SW) – (Ka'bah) and renovated by prophet Ibrahim (A.S) and his son – (Ismail) purposely for the worship of Allāh (Qur'an 72:18). By the same token prophet Muhammad (S.A. 'A.S) built his mosque immediately he got to Madinah.

Specifically, three types of mosques are mentioned in up to twenty one places in the Qur'an. They are masjid Haram and Aqisa (Qur'an 17:1) and masjid Dhiraar (Qur'an 9:107). The first two are sacred and recommended for worship while the latter is not; as it was put up by way of mischief and infidelity to disunite the faithfuls – and as an outpost for those who warred against Allāh and His messenger aforesaid (Osama, 2005).

Asides worships, social issues that are not antithetical to the spirit of Islām are allowed in the mosque such as settlement of misunderstanding, marriage, preparation of Jihad and so on. Abu Huraira (R.A) narrated from Prophet Muhammad (S.A. 'A.S) the latter sent an expedition of horse men who came back with a man, who was then tied to one of the pillar of the mosque (Al-Asqalāni, 2002). Thus, mosque could be used temporarily for detention of a culprit – Muslim or non Muslim. Equally, Aisha reported that on the day of Al-Khandaq Sa'd was injured and Allāh's messenger (S.A. 'A.S) prepared a tent for him in the mosque to visit him from a close distance (Al-Asqalāni, 2002).

Masjid are expected to be respectfully honoured, prophet Muhammad (S.A. 'A.S) directs:

Whoever wishes to love Allāh (SW) should love me. Whoever loves me should love my companions. Whoever loves my companions, should love the Qur'an. Whoever loves the Qur'an, should love masjid. Masjid are houses of Allāh. Allāh has ordered us to respect them. Allāh has blessed these places and those who are in them for legitimate use. Allāh protects these masjid and their occupants. These occupants establish salat in these masjid. Allāh fulfills their needs and wishes. Allāh protects their belongings while they are in the masājid (Ahmad, 2002:100).

I'tikāf is identified with *masājid* in the Qur'ān 2:187; 22:25 and 48:25. The word *masājid* appears in the verses in plural (mosques) form of *masjid* (mosque) as there central mosque (*masjid jami'*) and compound or nearby mosque. The prominent difference between the two categories is that *Juma'h* or Friday prayer is observed in the former while only five daily prayers are observed in the latter. These typologies of mosque are found in countries of the world today. They could also be regarded as ordinary mosques. However, *ka'abah* in Makkah, Prophet Mosque in Madinah and Aqsah in Jerusalem are sacred worship places respectively that could not be constructed anywhere in the globe except where they are situated. Out of all these venues of *i'tikāf*, which one is the reference point of the Glorious Qur'an for *i'tikāf*? This is the thesis of this paper.

Quranic position on Venue of I'tikāf

In enjoining *I'tikāf*, Qur'ān posits that it should be observed in the *masājid* (mosques).

... وَلَا تُبَشِّرُوهُنَّ وَأَنْتُمْ عَاكِفُونَ فِي الْمَسَاجِدِ

“But do not associate with your wives while ye are in retreat in the mosques” (Q 2:187).

Ibn As-su'diyy (2004) explains that the term *masājid* is generic, denoting all the mosques without specification. As noted by At-Thawkaniyy (1999), Ayub (2009), Salim (2010) and Kandhalvi (n.d), Imams Mālik, Shafi'i scholars, Abu Yousaf, Muhammad and Salim, submit that *i'tikāf* could be observed in any of the *masājid*, not necessarily Jum'ah mosque, unless Jum'ah prayer is due on such a *mu'takif*.

Ahadith on the Venue of I'tikaf

Prophet Muhammad (S.A.'A.S) was reported to also have been silent on the specification of mosque for *i'tikāf* as narrated in the under noted hadith:

وَعَنْهَا قَالَتْ: السُّنَّةُ عَلَى الْمُعْتَكِفِ أَنْ لَا يَعُودَ مَرِيضًا، وَلَا يَشْهَدَ
جَنَازَةً، وَلَا يَمَسَّ امْرَأَةً، وَلَا يُبَاشِرَهَا، وَلَا يَخْرُجَ لِحَاجَةٍ إِلَّا لِمَا لَا بُدَّ
لَهُ مِنْهُ، وَلَا اعْتِكَافَ إِلَّا بِصَوْمٍ وَلَا اعْتِكَافٌ إِلَّا فِي مَسْجِدٍ
جَامِعٍ... وَلَا بَأْسَ بِرِجَالِهِ، إِلَّا أَنْ الرَّأْجِحَ وَقَفَ آخِرَهُ

Narrated ('Aisha) R.A: The sunnah for one who is observing *i'tikāf* (seclusion in a mosque for worship is not to visit a sick person, nor attend a funeral nor touch nor fondle a woman (one's wife), nor go out for any need, except for that which is an absolute necessity. There is no *i'tikāf* without fasting, and no *i'tikāf* except in a congregational mosque... and its narrators are acceptable,

Scholars' views on the Venue of Itikaf

Ayūb (2009:640) states:

... Malik however, said that *i'tikāf* may be performed in any mosque, not necessarily a Jami' (central) except it Friday is due on him while he is in *i'tikāf*. The opinion of Shafi'i scholars is close to that

However, one Hadith accredited to the Prophet on the subject matter posits that *i'tikāf* can only be practised in the three sacred mosques of Makkah, Madinah and Jerusalem. The Hadith reads: لا اعتكاف إلا فى المساجد الثلاثة

I'tikāf should not be performed except in the three Masjids (Abdul Hamid, 1987:3; Abdus-Salam, 1994:10; Al-bāni, 2004:130; and Al-Albāni 2006: 215).

Although no mention is made of the particular three mosques, it is believed among Islamic scholars that the mosques referred to here are those of Makkah, Madinah and Jerusalem. According to one Hadith, the Prophet states that:

لا تشد الرحال إلا إلى ثلاثة مساجد: المسجد الحرام، ومسجدي هذا، المسجد الأقصى

Do not set out on a journey except for three mosques i.e. Al-Masjid Al-Haram (at Makkah), Masjid Ar-Rasul (the mosque of Allāh's Messenger at Madinah) and Masjid Al-Aqsa (Al-Aqsa, mosque of Jerusalem) (Nasir, 2013:372).

On this tradition, Nasir (2013) opines that, travelling for religious purpose should only take place to any of these three sacred mosques. The rewards of any religious observance there are compared to any other mosque(s). He, however, adds that educational, social and economic exploration to any other place(s) is not jettisoned by the hadith. Corroborating this assertion, Az-Zubaidi (1994:312) cites a Hadith which reads:

صلاة فى مسجدي هذا خير من ألف صلاة فيما سواه إلا المسجد الحرام

One salat (prayer) in my mosque is better than one thousand prayers in any other mosque except Al-Masjid Al-Haram.

However, at-Thawkaniyy (1999) claims there is no that correlation between the first and the second Hadiths; as the first Hadith focuses on *i'tikāf*, while the second one examines journey for spiritual exercise.

Al-bāni (2004 and 2006); Abdul Hamid, (1987) and Abdus-Salām (1994) contend that, *i'tikāf* should not be observed in any other mosques except those three mosques which the Hadith in perspective apparently limits the practice of *i'tikāf* to. They argue further that some of the companions, such as Hadhayfa bn al-Yamām, Sa'eed bn al-Musayyab and A'taa, equally subscribed to the assertion. In contrary, Ayūb (2009) argues that Hanafii scholars, Ahmad, Mālik and Shafi'i posited that only vow *i'tikāf* should be observed in those three specific sacred mosques. Ayūb (2009:640) notes that:

An exception is when he makes a vow to do *i'tikāf* in the sacred mosque, the Prophet (S.A.'A.S) mosque or Al-Aqsa mosque, in which

Another view posits that, *i'tikāf* could be observed in any other place than the mosque. Ibn Rushd (2006) and Al-bāni (2004) argue that Ibn Lubaba contends that, *i'tikāf* is not limited to the mosque alone.

The fourth view is that, *i'tikāf* could be observed in any Jumu'ah mosque. This idea stemmed from a Hadith accredited to Prophet Muhammad (S.A. 'A.S), which reads

لا إعتكاف إلا في المساجد الثلاثة أو قال: في مسجد جماعة

I'tikāf should not be observed except in three mosques or he said: In Jumu'ah prayer mosque (At-Thawkaniyy, 1999:286).

It is on this note that At-Thawkaniyy (1999) Al-Albāni (2004) and Ayūb (2009) explain that some of the companions, *Salaf* (successors), imāms Hanafi, Ahmad and others posited that, *i'tikāf* could be observed in any Jumu'ah prayer mosque. Ayūb (2009:640) remarks that:

In the same vein, according to al-Bayhaqi and Abu Dawud, as explained by Al-bāni (2004:129), A'ishah (R.A) was reported to have said:

Hanafi scholars and Ahmad, held that *i'tikāf* should be in a mosque where prayers are performed in congregation.

It is recommended for the one performing *i'tikāf* not to leave (the masjid) except for an essential need, not to visit a sick person, and not to touch or sleep with his wife. *I'tikāf* may only be performed in a masjid where the Jama'ah prayer is performed. And it is recommended for the one performing *i'tikāf* to fast.

It should be noted that apart from the dos and don'ts of *i'tikāf* evident in this tradition, Jumu'ah mosque is recommended for *i'tikāf* to ensure that the *mu'takif* does not need to move out of the practice before observing the prayer of Jumu'ah. It should be recalled that Aishah (R.A), the learned wife of the Prophet reports most of the Hadiths (traditions) on the subject matter of *i'tikāf*.

As regard the Hadith in question which limits the observance of *i'tikāf* to only three sacred mosques, scholars such as Abdul Hamid (1987) Abdus-Salām (1994) and Al-bāni (2004) reveal that the scenario behind the tradition was that a group of people practised *i'tikāf* in a mosque between the houses of Abdullahi bn Mas'uud and Abu Musa al-Asharee in al-Kufah. So Hudhayfa anxiously asked Ibn Mas'uud whether he held the belief that *i'tikāf* could be practised outside the three sacred mosques. Then Hudhayfa recollected the Hadith in focus. Subsequently, Abdullah answered that Hudhayfa might have forgotten while those people remembered or he might be mistaken while those people were right.

To Al-bāni (2004), Abdullah admitted the authenticity of the Hadith but he was not sure of the correct meaning and legal implication. He, therefore, opines that the Muslims should adhere to the apparent meaning of the tradition by observing *i'tikāf* only in the three sacred mosques. From the opinion of Al-bāni, it is evident that the Hadith is ambiguous and subject to alternative interpretation.

In the opinion of *Dawah* Institute of Nigeria (DIN) (n.d), such a Hadith is regarded as *Zanni al-dilalah* (probable, speculative and debatable text). Since it gives relative truth, one should be cautious in deducing law from it. Contextually, it could be deduced that Prophet Muhammad's specification, according to the Hadith, perhaps, may be to underscore the excellence of practising *i'tikāf* in those three identified mosques and not to discourage the practice of *i'tikāf* in any easily available Jumu'ah mosque.

At-Thawkaniyy (1999) opines that, the following facts are inferred from the tradition in question:

- i. The Hadith is not traceable to the Prophet but just a mere dialogue between Hudhayfa and Abdullahi;
- ii. *Sanad* (narration) did not go to the Prophet (S.A.‘A.S), hence irregularities and weakness, which do not go well with some of the *Muhaddithūn* (scholars of Hadith) are established;
- iii. As popular as Abdullah Ibn Mas‘uud was among the companions, especially when it comes to the subject of Hadith, he was unaware of the tradition and that was why he disagreed with Hudhayfa on the correct interpretation;
- iv. There is an element of doubt in the tradition, as Hudhayfa was not sure whether Jumu‘ah mosque was included or not. Therefore, he submitted that all mosques could be used for *i‘tikāf*.

Al-Wassaabee (2003) examines the references and grading of the Hadith in perspective, through a discourse on its narrators and sources. He alludes to the point of benefit drawn from the discussion on the verification of the Hadith, noting that the divergent opinions started among the companions of the Prophet. To him, the crux of the matter is the wording “... or a congregational masjid,” which occurs in the report of the Hadith. Those scholars who reported it to be *Marfoo* form (traceable to the Prophet) and those who reported it to be *Mawqoof* (traceable to the companions) did not add the statement. Part of the narration from Ibraheem bin Yazeed is broken. Therefore, the Hadith could not be linked to the Prophet. Based on these arguments, he contends that *i‘tikāf* is permissible in every Jumu‘ah prayer mosques. However, practising it in the three sacred mosques is better and more complete.

All the scholars trace the Hadith to only Hudhayfa among the companions. Thus, the tradition is *ahad* (single chain). In the opinion of Kamali (2003), such a tradition gives truth that is less certain and authoritative. It does not give *ilmal-yakeen* (certainty of truth) but probability (*zann*). It is on this note that the majority of the scholars do not regard such a Hadith (tradition) as authoritative enough for the purpose of establishing creed which needs knowledge of certainty and which cannot be based on conjecture, speculative or probabilistic truth. The Glorious Qur‘ān 53:28 enunciates:

وَمَا لَهُمْ بِهِ مِنْ عِلْمٍ إِنْ يَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا الظَّنَّ وَإِنَّ الظَّنَّ لَا يُغْنِي مِنَ الْحَقِّ شَيْئًا

But they have no knowledge therein. They follow nothing but conjecture; and conjecture avails nothing against Truth.

Haddad (2006) and Brown (2009) assert that, acting upon *ahad* (single chain) Hadith is only preferable. They argue further that some scholars, such as Ahmad bin Hanbal, Ibn Hazm and Ibn Taimiyyah, regard single chained Hadith as reliable enough to be used to establish creed; especially if it is supported by other evidence, such as *ijma‘* (consensus of opinion of scholars) and that the content is not repugnant to reason.

Contextualizing the Hadith in question within the framework of the principle (not repugnant to reason) one realizes that the Hadith could be unpleasant to reason. How can one imagine that Prophet Muhammad (S.A.‘A.S) restricts observance of *i‘tikāf* (his ardent sunnah) to just three sacred mosques; that are not easily accessible to the majority of his followers worldwide? If the Muslims should adhere strictly to the apparent interpretation of the Hadith, *i‘tikāf* will eventually die among them. This is antithetical to the intent of the Prophet on legislation on the tenets of Islām like *i‘tikāf*. Prophet Muhammad (S.A.‘A.S) aims at spiritual and moral development of his followers all the time. Also, if *i‘tikāf* is limited to those three mosques, another Hajj is discernible, which could be the sixth pillar of Islām. This is antithetical to the well-known five pillars of Islām.

Furthermore, human limitations in respect of worship are considered in Islamic legal system. This is elaborately expatiated in the Qur’ān. Allāh says:

فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ

“So fear Allāh as much as you can” (64:16) Elsewhere, He says:

يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ بِكُمْ الْيُسْرَ وَلَا يُرِيدُ كُمُ الْعُسْرَ

Allāh intends every facility for you; He does not want to put you to difficulties (2:185).

Again, Allāh declares: لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا

“On no soul doth Allāh place a burden greater than it can bear” (2:285), to mention but a few. Moreover, *Dawah Institute of Nigeria* (n.d:30) reveals a Hadith from A’ishah:

All these are facilities packaged for convenient observance of worship in Islām. Therefore, ... whenever the Prophet (S.A.‘A.S) was asked to choose between one of two options he chose the easiest of them. So long as it did not amount to sin.

observance of *i’tikāf* in a nearby Jumu‘ah mosque could be easier for most of the intending *mutakifūn* (retreatants).

The DIN contends further that sometimes when the Prophet commands or prohibits, the essence of such is to teach high ideals (*ta’lim al-haqaiq al-a’liyah*). Therefore, he does not actually compel nor forbid such an action.

It further argues that speculating a certain underlying purpose, aim or intent of Qur’ān or tradition is encouraged by the Prophet. One clear evidence is the Hadith of “afternoon prayers at Banu Qurayzah”, in which the Prophet sent a group of companions to Banu Qurayzah and ordered them to observe their ‘*Asr* (afternoon) prayer there. The group later divided into two. The first group observed the prayer before getting to those people; while the second group observed her own when it got to the people. On reporting to the Prophet, he did not denounce either of the groups.

Again, in a situation of divergent views, after thorough analysis, one is directed to go for the strongest view. Qur’ān 39:18 says:

الَّذِينَ يَسْتَمِعُونَ الْقَوْلَ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ أَحْسَنَهُ أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ هَدَاهُمُ اللَّهُ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ
أُولُوا الْأَلْبَابِ

Considering the Hadith that speculates and includes “Jumu‘ah prayer mosque” and that of Those who listen to the word, and follow the best of it.

Those are the ones who Allah has guided, and those are the ones endued with understanding.

Aishah that actually recommends any Jumu‘ah mosque, as well as the opinion of the overwhelming scholars, one can argue that the strongest view is that *i’tikāf* could be practised in any accessible Jumu‘ah mosque. Kandhalvi (n.d) asserts that the best place for *i’tikāf* is the *masjid Al-Haram* in Makkah. The next is the *Masjid-Nabawi* in Madinah and the next to it is *Baitul-Maqaddas*. Thereafter, comes the Friday congregational prayer mosque in one’s town, and the last any nearest mosque.

Ibn Rushd (2006:367-368) examines the divergent views of the scholars and remarks that:

It is evident from the passage that, ibn Rushd analyses the rationale behind the divergent views of the scholars on the venue of *i'tikāf*, which is premised on Qur'ān 2:187. It could also be inferred that he agrees with all the views and they are within the interpretation of the verse in question.

From the foregoing, four divergent opinions on the venue of *i'tikāf* stemming from the Qur'ān verse as well as the Hadith in perspective are identified. The opinion that *i'tikāf* could be practised in all the mosques. The view that it could be observed in any other place than mosque. The idea that *i'tikāf* is restricted to only the three sacred mosques. The last is the view that *i'tikāf* could be practised in any nearby Jumu'ah mosque.

Similarly, Al-Tahir (2006:28-49) argues that, intent of the Prophet of issuing edicts may differ. He cites an instance where a man came and said to the Prophet:

I sacrificed before throwing the pebbles". The Prophet advised: "Throw and don't worry". Then another Muslim came and said: I shaved before sacrificing. The Prophet responded: Sacrifice, and don't worry.

Juxtaposing this analogy with the Hadith in perspective, one may argue that the intent of the Prophet may be to emphasise the rewards that could be attained in those three mosques that are not attainable in any other mosques and not to jettison the observance of *i'tikāf* in any easily accessible Jumu'ah mosque. It is equally possible that, if the Prophet was alive, he would have allowed those companions to perform *i'tikāf* in a mosque between Abdullah ibn Mas'ud and Abu Musa, as their observance of *i'tikāf* fell within the purview of Qur'ān 2:187, which allows observance of *i'tikāf* in mosques.

According to *Dawah* Institute of Nigeria (n.d:80), a maxim in shari'ah says: *Al-Yaqinu la yazulu bish-shakk* (certainty is not overruled by doubt). Explaining the Hadith – (*i'tikāf* should only be practised in three mosques) within the framework of the principle and Qur'ān 2:187, one can conclude that:

- i. The verse stipulates the observance of *i'tikāf* in mosques,
- ii. The Hadith is in doubt, as the three mosques are not identified in the Hadith;
- iii. The Hadith could be left while the verse could be followed. Thus, *i'tikāf* could be conveniently observed in any mosque, as the verse does not limit the practice to any mosque;
- iv. *Mu'takifūn* (retreatants) are allowed to use Allāh's facility (mosques); as no specification of mosque is made in the verse, it is presumed that all mosques are permissible. Establishing this assertion further, Qur'ān 31:20 explains:

Are you not aware that God has made subservient to you all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth, and He has lavished upon you His blessings, both out word and inward.

Elsewhere, Allāh says: "He it is who has created all that is in the earth for your benefit" (Qur'ān 2:29).

Also, as reported by Daraqutni, Tirmidhi, Ibn Maja and Hakim, Prophet Muhammad, (S.A. 'A.S) was reported to have said:

God the Almighty has laid down religious duties, so do not neglect them; He has set boundaries, so do not overstep them; He has prohibited some things, so do not violate them; and about some things He was silent – out of compassion for you, not forgetfulness – so seek not after them (*Dawah Institute of Nigeria*, n.d:81).

It could be deduced that Allāh generalizes all the mosques for *i'tikāf*, as reflected in Qur'ān 2:187 and is silent in specification of any mosque. If a Hadith in perspective could specify three mosques without identifying those three mosques, it could be inferred; that the Prophet is equally silent on mentioning any mosque. Then, what audacity does anybody have to specify any three mosques that some scholars earlier on said do not have correlate with the Hadith in question? Therefore, the silence of Allah and that of the Prophet could be out of compassion for the Muslims, in general, and the *mu'takifūn*, in particular, to observe *i'tikāf* in any easily available Jumu'ah mosque.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, one can conclude that, the venue of *i'tikāf* can be the Jumu'ah mosque. This is based on the verse of the Qur'ān that generalizes mosques for the observance of *i'tikāf*, traditions of the Prophet and the argument that the Prophet Muhammad could not have limited or restricted the practice of an important sunnah to just three mosques which are not easily accessible to the majority of the Muslims.

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