# 82536 - Praying on a plane when one is unable to stand or face the qiblah

**the question**

I am from the Emirates and during Ramadaan I went for ‘umrah by plane. On my way back to my country, the time of the flight was just before Fajr, and at a certain time the captain of the plane announced that we had to stop eating as the time of Fajr had begun. I was confused about where to pray because the sun would rise before the plane landed, and there was no place to pray except in the aisles, which would be awkward for me as a woman. I also needed the washroom (as I had been suppressing the need to pass wind) but because it was so crowded I could not get there. Then suddenly I saw the orange glow on the horizon so I hastened to say takbeer whilst I was sitting in my seat. I thought it most likely that the qiblah was behind me, because we were headed east and the qiblah was behind us towards the west. I also had wudoo’. Was my prayer valid or not? What should I do?.

**Detailed answer**

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

Standing and facing the qiblah during an obligatory prayer are two of the essential parts of the prayer, without which it is not valid unless one has an excuse. Among the excuses that the scholars have mentioned in this regard is one who prays in an airplane and is unable to stand or face the qiblah, if he is afraid that the time for prayer will end and the prayer is one that cannot be joined to the prayer that comes before it or after it.

Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen (may Allaah have mercy on him) was asked about a man who was travelling by plane, and he did not know the direction of the qiblah because no one else there knew it either. He prayed and he did not know whether he was facing the qiblah during his prayer or not. Is prayer in such circumstances valid?

He replied: If the traveller in a plane wants to offer a naafil prayer, then he may pray in whatever direction he is facing and he does not have to face the qiblah, because it is proven that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) used to pray on his camel no matter what direction it was facing, when he was travelling. But with regard to obligatory prayers, it is essential to face the qiblah and to bow and prostrate if one is able. Therefore if a person is able to pray properly when he is in the plane, then he should do so., but if the prayer whose time has come when he is in the plane is one which may be joined with the prayer that comes after it, such as if the time for Zuhr, he can delay it and join it with 'Asr, and if the time for Maghrib comes when he is in the plane, he can delay it and join it with 'Isha'.  He should ask the flight attendants about the direction of the qiblah if he is in a plane where the direction of the qiblah is not shown. If he does not do that then his prayer is not valid. End quote from Majallat al-Da'wah, issue no. 1757, p. 45.

The Standing Committee was asked: If I am travelling by plane and the time for prayer comes, is it permissible for us to pray in the plane or not?

They replied: If the time for prayer comes and the plane is continuing its journey, and there is the fear that the time for prayer may end before it lands in an airport, then the scholars are unanimously agreed that it is obligatory to offer the prayer as best as one is able to, bowing, prostrating and facing the qiblah if one can, because Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): "So keep your duty to Allaah and fear Him as much as you can" [al-Taghaabun 64:16]. And the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "When I command you to do a thing, do as much of it as you can." Narrated by Muslim (1337).

But if he knows that the plane will land before the time for the prayer ends and that he will have enough time to offer the prayer then, or if the prayer is one that may be joined with another, such as Zuhr with 'Asr or Maghrib with 'Isha', or he knows that the plane will land before the end of the time for the second prayer and that he will have enough time to offer both prayers, then the majority of scholars are of the view that it is permissible to offer the prayer in the plane, because of the command to offer the prayers on time to the best of one's ability, as stated above, and this is the correct view. End quote.

Fataawa al-Lajnah al-Daa’imah (8/120).

They were also asked (8/126): Is it permissible to pray sitting in the plane even though one is able to stand, because one feels shy?

They replied: It is not permissible to pray sitting in the plane or elsewhere if one is able to stand, because of the general meaning of the words of Allaah (interpretation of the meaning): “And stand before Allaah with obedience” [al-Baqarah 2:238]. And it is narrated in Saheeh al-Bukhaari from ‘Imraan ibn Husayn that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said to him: “Pray standing, and if you cannot, then sitting, and if you cannot, then on your side.” Al-Nasaa'i added with a saheeh isnaad: “and if you cannot then lying on your back.” End quote.

Secondly:

Purification is an essential condition of prayer being valid. You prayed with wudoo’ so your prayer is valid in sha Allaah, but it is makrooh to pray when suppressing the urge to urinate, defecate or pass wind, if it is strong, because that will affect one’s focus and presence of mind when praying, but the prayer is still valid in sha Allaah.

Based on the above, we may sum up as follows: if you did not stand and face the qiblah because you were unable to do so, then your prayer is valid, but if you were able to stand or face the qiblah but you did not do so then your prayer is not valid and you have to repeat it now.

We ask Allaah to accept your ‘umrah and to reward you with good for your keenness to ask and find out.

And Allaah knows best.