

Title: What is Placed First When Prostrating: Hands or Knees?

Original Title: النزول على الركبتين عند السجود قبل اليدين

Original Author: `Abdul-`Azīz Ibn Bāz

What is Placed First When Prostrating:

H A N D S O R K N E E S ?

BY:

`Abdul-`Azīz Ibn `Abdullah Ibn Bāz¹

¹ This article was taken, at the time of translation, from the website of the esteemed scholar, `Abdul-`Azīz Ibn `Abdullah Ibn Bāz, and the original Arabic is at: <http://www.binbaz.org.sa/node/14936>.

Question:

You have mentioned—may Allah preserve you—when describing the prayer of the prophet (عليه الصلاة والسلام) that a person should go down from bowing to prostrating on his knees (first) and then get up for the next unit of prayer by lifting his hands before his knees. But some researchers state the very opposite. So which of the two opinions should we rely upon and act upon?

Answer:

The scholars (رحمهم الله) are of two opinions. Some of them favor the position that a person should go down on his knees first, then his hands, then his forehead and nose, and this is based on what has been narrated by the scholars of the Sunnah collections (i.e., al-Nasā'ī, Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī, and Ibn Mājah). It is also based on the ḥadīth of Wā'il Ibn Ḥujr (رضي الله عنه):

« رَأَيْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ - صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ - إِذَا سَجَدَ وَضَعَ رُكْبَتَيْهِ قَبْلَ يَدَيْهِ، وَإِذَا نَهَضَ رَفَعَ يَدَيْهِ قَبْلَ رُكْبَتَيْهِ »

I saw that when Allah's messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) would prostrate, he would place his knees before his hands, and when he would get up, he would raise his hands before his knees.²

This opinion also has support in the ḥadīth of Anas (رضي الله عنه) collected by al-Ḥākim and others.³ The scholars of this position also say that this order (i.e., knees

² Collected by al-Nasā'ī (in *al-Ṣughra*, no. 1076), Abū Dāwūd (no. 714), al-Tirmidhī (no. 248), and Ibn Mājah (no. 872) and others.

³ The wording of this ḥadīth collected by al-Ḥākim (no. 853) is:

before hands) is easier for the person praying and further away from resembling animals while praying, since a camel goes down on its front legs followed by its backside. These scholars also state that going down on the knees before the hands is in accordance with the ḥadīth of Abū Hurayrah (رضي الله عنه) that the prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said:

« إِذَا سَجَدَ أَحَدُكُمْ فَلَا يَبْرُكُ كَمَا يَبْرُكُ الْبَعِيرُ ، وَلِيَضَعَ يَدَيْهِ قَبْلَ رُكْبَتَيْهِ »

When any of you makes prostration, let him not kneel down like a camel kneels; let him place his hands before his knees.⁴

A camel kneels by lowering his front legs first, so when a person lowers himself on his legs first, he will not resemble the manner in which a camel kneels.

As for the second phrase, « let him place his hands before his knees », some scholars say that perhaps this phrase was mistakenly reversed (by one of the narrators). They say what is correct is that it should be « let him place his *knees* before his *hands* » so that the second part of the ḥadīth coincides with the first part, and so that it agrees with the ḥadīth of Wā'il Ibn Ḥujr, Anas, and other narrations with similar meanings.

« رَأَيْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ - صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ - كَبَّرَ فَحَادَى بِإِبْهَامَيْهِ أُذُنَيْهِ ، ثُمَّ رَكَعَ حَتَّى اسْتَقَرَّ كُلُّ مَفْصِلٍ مِنْهُ ، وَأَنْحَطَّ بِالتَّكْبِيرِ حَتَّى سَبَقَتْ رُكْبَتَاهُ يَدَيْهِ »

I saw Allah's messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) make *Takbīr* raising his thumbs to the level of his ears, then he bowed until every one of his joints settled, then he went down saying *Takbīr* until his knees preceded his hands.

⁴ Collected by al-Nasā'ī (no. 1091), Abū Dāwūd (no. 840), al-Tirmidhī (no. 269), and others.

This is the more correct understanding based on which all of the ḥadīth are in agreement with no contradictions occurring between them. So the forbiddance of kneeling like a camel is in agreement with the ḥadīth of Wā'il Ibn Ḥujr which states that the knees are placed first followed by the hands when prostrating. Again, the second part « let him place his hands before his knees » contradicts the first part of the same ḥadīth as well as the ḥadīth of Wā'il. This is because if a person places his hands down before his knees, he would then resemble the manner in which a camel kneels. This is the most correct opinion.

Other scholars explain that the statement « let him place his hands before his knees » in Abū Hurayrah's ḥadīth is explicit in proving that the hands should be placed down first and then the knees. Yet with this understanding, it would contradict the ḥadīth of Wā'il—and there is nothing wrong with that narration; it is a good (*ḥasan jayyid*) ḥadīth—even though this narration of Wā'il coincides with the first part of the ḥadīth of Abū Hurayrah.

The correct position in my opinion is that a person should go down into prostration by placing his knees on the ground first, then his hands, then his forehead and nose according to the ḥadīth of Wā'il and the first part of the ḥadīth of Abū Hurayrah. As for the extra wording « let him place his hands before his knees » this is either a phrase that one of the narrators included, or the wording was mistakenly reversed by a narrator. The correct wording should be for a person to place his knees before his hands so that the first and second parts of the narration are in agreement as well as in agreement with the ḥadīth of Wā'il.

Title: What is Placed First When Prostrating: Hands or Knees?

Original Title: النزول على الركبتين عند السجود قبل اليدين

Original Author: `Abdul-`Azīz Ibn Bāz

In any case, the issue is open to interpretation, thanks to Allah, as these actions are Sunnah actions in the prayer. Still, what has preceded is the correct understanding in my opinion, unless of course someone is unable to do that (i.e., place his knees first) such as the elderly or someone who is ill since he may not be able to do that. In that case, he could put his hands down first since there is a need to do so and there is nothing wrong with that.