

# Misconceptions Concerning Taraweeh

Shaykh 'Abdul-'Aziz bin Baaz rahimahullaah

A Publication of JIMAS

---

1. *What number of raka'at is the Taraaweeh prayer consist of? Does it have a specific number? What number of raka'at is best?*

By the Name of Allaah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful. All Praise is due to Allaah, and may the Peace and Blessings of Allaah be upon Allaah's Messenger, and upon his family, companions, and whoever follows his guidance.

What has authentically been reported from the Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam confirms the fact that there is much latitude with respect to the number of raka'at to be performed in the night prayer, and that there is no definite number. But it is the Sunnah (way of the Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam) that the believer, male and female, pray in pairs of twos, making tasleem after every two.

Amongst these narrations is that which has been reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim in the hadith of ibn 'Umar radiallaahu 'anhu, that the Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam said, *"Salaat al-Layl (the night prayer) is in pairs of two, and whosoever amongst you fears the break of dawn, let him pray one rak'ah, for it will be a Witr for all the raka'at he has previously offered."*

And his saying, *"Salaat al-layl is in pairs of two,"* is a declarative statement, but has the implication [in Usool al-Fiqh] of a command; it is equivalent to his sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam saying, *"Pray in the night in pairs of two."*

What is intended here by praying in pairs of two is that one is that the tasleem is to be pronounced after every two raka'at. Then, the prayer is to be concluded by performing one rak'ah, which is known as the Witr (odd) prayer. This is how the Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam would perform his prayer. He sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam would pray in the night in pairs of two, and then pray one rak'ah of Witr, as was described in the different narrations of 'Aa'ishah, Ibn 'Abbaas, and other Sahaabah, may Allaah be pleased with them all. 'Aa'ishah radiallaahu 'anha said, *"The Messenger of Allaah sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam would perform ten raka'at of prayer, pronouncing the tasleem after every two, and then perform one rak'ah of Witr."*

And she radiallaahu 'anha also said, *"The Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam would not increase the number of raka'at in the night prayer more than eleven, neither in Ramadaan nor in any other month. He would pray four raka'at, let alone their excellency and their length, then he would pray another four, let alone their excellency and their length, and then he would pray three..."* [al-Bukhari and Muslim]

Some people have mistakenly presumed that these four raka'at are to be performed with one tasleem, but this is not correct. What is meant here is that the Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam would conclude the prayer by pronouncing the tasleem every two raka'at, as is mentioned in the previous

hadith, as well as in his sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam saying, *"The night prayer is in pairs of two."* Another evidence is what has been authentically reported in Saheeh al-Bukhari by Ibn 'Abbaas, that the Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam used to pronounce the tasleem after every two raka'at.

And 'Aai'shah's statement, may Allaah be pleased with her, **"The Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam would not increase the number of raka'at in the night prayer more than eleven, neither in Ramadaan nor in any other month,"** is an evidence that what is preferred in the night prayer, whether in Ramadaan or in any other month, is that one performs eleven raka'at, pronouncing the tasleem after every two, and then concluding the prayer with one rak'ah of Witr.

And it has also been narrated by 'Aai'shah and other Sahaabah that the Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam would also at times pray thirteen rak'ah.

Performing eleven or thirteen rak'ah is what is preferred and what has been most authentically reported of the Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam. And of the two, performing eleven raka'at is preferred, but if he was to perform thirteen, including the Witr, then this is also Sunnah and good. And praying this number is more gentle on the people. It is more favorable to the Imam's khushoo' and recitation, its beauty, his reflection upon its verses, and the rukoo' and sujood. It also does not cause him to haste in his prayer.

And if one prayed twenty-three rak'ah, including the Witr, as 'Umar radiallaahu 'anhu and other Sahaabah did in some nights of Ramadaan, then there is no harm in that, because there is much latitude in this matter. It has been reported that 'Umar radiallaahu 'anhu and other companions prayed eleven rak'ah including the Witr, as in the hadeeth of 'Aai'shah radiallaahu 'anha, and also that he prayed twenty three. And it has also been reported that he ordered whom he appointed to lead the night prayer from the Sahaabah to pray eleven rak'ah, as has been reported that he ordered them to pray twenty-three. This gives evidence to the fact that there is much latitude in this matter, as does his sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam saying, *"The night prayer is in pairs of two."*

But what is preferred is to pray eleven or thirteen rak'ah as this is what the Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam did. And it has been previously mentioned that of the two, praying eleven rak'ah is best, on account of the saying of 'Aai'shah radiallaahu 'anha, "The Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam would not increase the number of raka'at in the night prayer more than eleven, neither in Ramadaan nor in any other month." What is meant here is that he would not increase most of the time, and this is due to the fact that she and other Sahaabah also reported that he sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam performed thirteen rak'ah, This confirms that he would sometimes increase the prayer more than eleven rak'ah.

'Aa'ishah radiallaahu 'anhu was the most understanding in the religion and most knowledgeable of the Sunnah of the Messenger sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam from amongst the women. She would investigate and question what the Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam would do when she was with him and would inform other Sahaabah of it. She would ask other wives of the Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam and companions as well. Because of her devotion to knowledge and her extensive memory, she preserved a substantial amount of knowledge and numerous ahaadith of the Messenger of Allaah sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam.

Therefore, if the Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam diversified his prayer by performing eleven rak'ah in some nights and thirteen in others, then there is no harm in that, for it is all considered Sunnah. But what is not permissible is to pray four raka'at uninterruptedly. Rather it is obligatory to pray in pairs of two due to his sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam saying, *"The night prayer is in pairs if two,"* for this is a declarative statement which [in Usool al-Fiqh] has the implication of a command.

Also, if one prayed the Witr prayer by performing three or five raka'at uninterruptedly with one sitting, then there is no harm in this, for the Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam also prayed in this way. However, one is not to pray four, six, or eight raka'at simultaneously, as this has not been reported of the Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam. It also contradicts his command, *"The night prayer is in pairs of two."* And if one were to continuously perform seven or nine raka'at, then there is no harm in this either, but what is preferred is to sit for the first tashahhud after the sixth or the eighth rak'ah, and then to stand and complete the rest of the prayer.

All of this has been transmitted of the Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam and there is much latitude in this. But what is best is to pronounce the tasleem after every two raka'at, and then to perform one rak'ah of Witr prayer, as was previously quoted in the hadith of ibn 'Umar, *"Salaat al-Layl (the night prayer) is in pairs of two, and whosoever amongst you fears the break of dawn, let him pray one rak'ah, for it will be a Witr for all the raka'at he has previously offered"*

This is what is preferred and easier for the people, for some people might have necessities to fulfill and might have to leave after two, four, or six raka'at. So what is best and more befitting is that the Imaam pray in pairs of two raka'at, and not perform five or seven continuously. However, if he were to do that sometimes to clarify the Sunnah, there is no harm.

As for praying the Shaf'a and Witr continuously like the Maghrib prayer by sitting after two raka'at, this is not befitting, and at the very least it is makrooh (hated). This is due to the prohibition of making it resemble the Maghrib prayer. He is to continuously pray three raka'at with one tasleem and one sitting, and Allaah is the Owner of Tawfeeq.

*2. Is it better for the Imaam to vary in the number of raka'at he performs, or to limit it to eleven?*

I do not know any harm in the Imaam varying in the number of raka'at. If he prays eleven rak'ah in some nights and twenty three in others, then there is nothing wrong in this. Even if he were to pray more than twenty-three, there is no harm, for there is much leeway in the matter regarding the number of raka'at to be performed in Taraaweeh. However, if he limits the prayer to eleven rak'ah to reaffirm the Sunnah and to teach the people, then there is no harm in that either.

*3. What about people, if they pray with an Imaam who prays twenty three rak'ah, pray eleven, and in doing that do not complete the prayer with the Imaam? Is their action in terms with the Sunnah?*

The Sunnah is to complete the prayer with the Imaam, even if he were to pray twenty three rak'ah, for the Messenger of Allaah sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam said, *"Whosoever stands [in prayer] with the Imaam until he completes it, Allaah writes for him [the reward] as if he has prayed the whole night."* It has been reported in another wording, *"...the remainder of the night."* Hence it is better for the one praying to perform the prayer with the Imaam until he completes it, whether it consists of eleven, twenty three, or any other number of raka'at. This is what is better, that he follows the Imaam until he completes the prayer. As for the authenticity of praying twenty three rak'ah, it was performed by 'Umar radiallaahu 'anhu and other Sahaabah as well, so there is no shortcoming in that. In fact, it is from the Sunnah, the Sunnah of the rightly guided successors. The evidence for this is that in the hadith of ibn 'Umar radiallaahu 'anhu previously mentioned, the Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam did not specify any particular number of raka'at, rather, he sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam said, *"The night prayer is in pairs of two."*

*4. Is it preferred that the Imaam complete the entire Qur'aan in Taraaweeh?*

There is much latitude in this matter. I do not know of any evidence that proves that it is better, except for the fact that some scholars have mentioned that it is praiseworthy (mustahab) for the Imaam to recite the entire Qur'aan for the congregation, in order that they receive the opportunity to listen to its entirety. However, this is not a clear evidence. What is most important is that the Imaam has khushoo' in his prayer, that he feels at rest, and that the people benefit from him, even if he did not complete except for half of the Qur'aan. What is important is not that he completes it, but that the people benefit and find peace in his prayer, his khushoo', and his recitation. However, if it is made easy for him to complete the recitation, then all praise is for Allaah, and if it is not made easy, then what he does recite for them is sufficient, for his concern should be for the people and that they have khushoo' in their prayer. That the people benefit is more important than the mere completion of the Qur'aan, but if he does finish the Qur'aan without causing difficulty for the people, then this is well and good.

*5. Is it permissible for one or more people from the congregation to carry a mushaf during the Taraaweeh prayer?*

I do not know any evidence to support this. What is apparent is that one should have khushoo' and feel at peace in his prayer, and not carry a mushaf. He should put his right hand over his left hand as is the Sunnah. He should place his right hand on his left hand, wrist, and forearm, and put them on his chest. This is what is better and more correct. Carrying a mushaf prevents one from doing these acts of Sunnah and concentrating on the Imaam and his recitation, and keeps his heart and eyes busy in examining the pages and verses. So what I believe is that leaving it is the Sunnah, and that one should listen and concentrate on the recitation, and not use the mushaf. And if someone from the congregation comes to know that the Imaam made a mistake, he should correct him, and if he does not, then someone else should correct him. But if the Imaam does make a mistake in recitation and he is not corrected, it does not harm the prayer. A mistake only harms the prayer if it is made in Surah al-Faatihah, for it is a rukn of the prayer. But if one was to carry a mushaf and correct the Imaam when it necessitates, then there may be no harm in that. But as for every person carrying a mushaf, then this is contrary to the Sunnah.

**6. What is the ruling concerning the apparent raising of people's voices in weeping that has become very apparent in the masaa'jid?**

I have warned many of those who have called me from this act. This is not a befitting act on account of the fact that it distracts others and also the one reciting the Qur'aan. So what is incumbent upon the believer is that he be cautious in that he is not heard weeping, and that he be cautious in that he does not show off by it, for Shaytaan might lead him to that. It is incumbent that he does not disturb the people by his weeping. It is known that some people do not do it by their choice, but that it is something that overwhelms them without intending it. This is forgiven if it occurred without his choice. It has been authentically reported that when the Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam recited, a sound like the wheezing of a cauldron could be heard from his weeping. And it has also been reported that when Abu Bakr t recited the Qur'aan, people could not hear due to his weeping. And also it has been reported of 'Umar t that his weeping could be heard from the last rows of the congregation. This does not mean, though, that they would intentionally raise their voice in crying, but that it was something that overwhelmed them by the khashyah of Allaah. Therefore if weeping does subdue someone without him intending it, then is no blame in that.

**7. Some people, when the Imaam and he pronounces tasleem in the Witr, stand and perform another rak'ah in order that they can pray the Witr at a later time in the last part of the night. What is the ruling concerning this? Is this considered completing with the Imaam?**

We do not know any harm in this, as the scholars have mentioned, because a person does this so that he can pray the Witr at a later time in the last part of the night. It will be counted as if he stood with the Imaam until he completed the prayer since he did stand with the Imaam until he turned away, but merely added another rak'ah. He did this in the interest of the religioneer, which is that the Witr could be performed in the last part of the night, so there is no harm in this. He is not disqualified from gaining the reward of standing with the Imaam, but in fact he stood with the Imaam until he completed his prayer. He did not complete it with him, rather delayed it shortly.

**8. If a person came to the masjid and found the congregation praying Taraaweeh, and he had not as yet prayed 'Ishaa, can he join them in prayer with the niyyah of praying 'Ishaa?**

There is no harm in that one pray with the niyyah of 'Ishaa with others who are praying Taraaweeh. This is the correct opinion of the two held by the scholars. And when the Imaam pronounces the tasleem, he should stand and complete the remainder of his prayer. It has been reported in al-Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of Mu'aadh bin Jabal radiiallaahu 'anhu, that he used to pray the 'Ishaa prayer with the Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, then return to his people and lead them in theirs, and the Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam did not object to that. This proves the permissibility of praying an obligatory prayer behind the one praying a superogatory one. It has been reported in Saheeh al-Bukhari, that the Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, in some types of the prayer of fear, prayed two rak'ah with a group of believers, prayed another two with the next group, and then made the tasleem. So the first two rak'ahs was considered obligatory prayer, and the second was considered superogatory for

**him, and obligatory for the congregation.**