

The Number Of Rak'ats In Taraweeh

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For about twelve hundred and fifty years, until the 20th century, there was little controversy surrounding the issue of how many rak'at are to be performed in taraweeh. There was a general consensus among Muslim scholars that taraweeh is no less than twenty rak'ats, and some scholars were even of the opinion that it was more than twenty.

Until recently, there was also no mention of any masjid in which less than twenty rak'ats were performed or of any scholar holding such a view. It has only been in the last hundred years that some people have begun insisting that the tarawih prayer consists of only eight rak'ats. The practise of the Companions (Sahaabah – radiallahu anhum), Followers (Tabi'een), and other scholar (rahmatullahi alaihim) who preceded them has always been of performing twenty rak'ats.

A consensus (ijma') was reached among the Companions (radiallahu anhum) at the time of the Leader of the Faithful (Amir al-Mu'mineen) 'Umar ibn al-Khattab (radiallahu anh) that taraweeh was twenty rak'ats. He had appointed Ubay ibn Ka'b (radiallahu anh) to lead the people in twenty rak'ats, as is understood from authentic reports. He was not met with any refutation or argument concerning this agreement; neither from the Companions (radiallahu anhum) who had performed taraweeh with the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam), nor from any of the wives of the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam). If it had been a practise he had innovated himself, it would have most certainly been rejected and refuted by the Companions and household of the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam).

Opinions Of The Scholars

Imam Abu Hanifa, Imam Shafi'i, and Imam Ahmad (rahmatullahi alaihim) are unanimous that twenty rak'ats are to be performed for taraweeh during Ramadan. There are different opinions recorded from Imam Malik (rahmatullahi alaihi): one states twenty rak'ats; another is of thirty-six rak'ats, about which Imam Malik (rahmatullahi alaihi) said, **"This is our former opinion;"** and a third view is of thirty-eight rak'ats. There is also an opinion which states forty-one rak'ats (Bidayat al-Mujtahid 1:210). 'Allama 'Ayni (rahmatullahi alaihi) mentioned the second of view of thirty-six rak'ats to Imam Malik's (rahmatullahi alaihi) more popular opinion.

What becomes clear at this point is that none of the four prominent Imams held a view of taraweeh being less than twenty rak'ats. Twenty is the minimum number mentioned, and the reason for Imam Malik's (rahmatullahi alaihi) view of thirty-six is that it was the practise of the people of the noble city of Makkah to perform tawaf (circumambulation) of the Ka'bah after every four rak'ats of taraweeh. During the pause between each four rak'ats of taraweeh, the people of the illuminated city of Madinah would observe an extra four rak'ats of prayer in place of the tawaf. (see al-Mughni 2:167)

Therefore, since taraweeh was performed as twenty rak'ats, consisting of five sets of four rak'ats (each set called a 'tarweeha'), the people of Madinah would perform an extra four rak'ats after

every tarweeha, bringing the total number of extra rak'ats to sixteen. Sixteen extra rak'ats plus the twenty rak'ats of taraweeh make thirty-six rak'ats. Hence, the actual number of rak'ats of Taraweeh was twenty even according to Imam Malik (rahmatullahi alaih).

Taraweeh During The First Generations

For centuries, ever since taraweeh came to be observed in congregation, no less than twenty rak'ats were performed by Muslims throughout the Islamic world. Nafi' (rahmatullahi alaih), a prominent tabi'ee states, **"I never found any one performing less than thirty-nine rak'ats (three of which were Witr)."** Nafi' (rahmatullahi alaih) remained in Madinah for most of his life and passed away in 117 A.H. (Fath al-Bari 4:254). At that time, the number of rak'ats observed for taraweeh in Madinah were thirty-six (twenty rak'ats taraweeh and sixteen supererogatory (nafl) rak'ats).

Thereafter, Imam Shafi'ee (rahmatullahi alaih) states, **"I observed the people performing thirty-nine rak'ats in Madinah (which included three Witr), and twenty-three rak'ats in Makkah."** Imam Shafi'ee (rahmatullahi alaih) was born in 150 A.H. and passed away in 204 A.H. Hence, this report accounts for the second century of Islam. Furthermore, Ibn 'Abd al-Barr (rahmatullahi alaih) states, **"Twenty rak'ats was the opinion followed by the majority of scholars, including those of Kufa, Imam Shafi'ee (rahmatullahi alaih), and most other jurists."** This specifies that, throughout the earlier period of Islam, the minimum number of rak'ats performed in taraweeh was twenty.

Sufyan al-Thawri (rahmatullahi alaih) (died 161 A.H.) and Imam Abu Haneefah (rahmatullahi alaih) (died 150 A.H.) of Kufa both held the opinion of twenty rak'ats. Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal (rahmatullahi alaih) of Baghdad (died 235 A.H.) held the same opinion as did Dawud al-Zahiri (rahmatullahi alaih) (died 270 A.H.). 'Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak (rahmatullahi alaih) (died 181 A.H.), one of the prominent scholars of Khurasan, also held the view of twenty rak'ats (Bidayat al-Mujtahid 1:210).

From the above, one can comfortably conclude that the predominant view of the scholars from Makkah to Khurasan and beyond was of taraweeh being twenty rak'ats. There is not a single opinion of eight rak'ats to be found during this extensive period, neither from the great Imams nor from any other jurist.

The mass of people who follow the Hanafi, Shafi'ee, Maliki and Hanbali schools of thought, and who constitute the majority of the Ummah, have until today adopted the view of twenty rak'ats for taraweeh. In the two sanctified sites of Islam – Makkah and Madinah – twenty rak'ats are performed in congregation for taraweeh until today. It was not until approximately a century and a half ago, that the first arguments were made, after the consensus reached by 'Umar (radiallahu anh); claiming that taraweeh was only eight rak'ats and not twenty.

Imam Tirmidhi (rahmatullahi alaih), well known for recording in his Sunan the various opinions held by different scholars in jurisprudential (fiqhi) issues, does not mention so much as even a weak opinion of taraweeh being eight rak'ats when discussing the issue. If there had been an opinion of eight rak'ats concurrent among the earlier scholars, he would not have failed to mention it. (see al-Tirmidhi 1:166)

Absence Of Authentic Narrations Concerning The Number Of Rak'ats In Taraweeh

Another point to be taken into consideration in this issue is that many scholars state that there are no authentic (saheeh) and direct (marfu') chains of narration (from the Messenger – salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) mentioning the exact number of rak'ats performed by him in taraweeh.

1) Shaykh al-Islam ibn Taymiya (rahmatullahi alaihi) writes: **“Whoever assumes that there is a fixed number of rak'ats reported from the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) concerning taraweeh, and does not accept any greater or lesser amount, has erred.”** (Majmu' al-Fatawa 46, Mirqat al-Mafatih 3:381)

2) 'Allama Subki (rahmatullahi alaihi) writes, **“Let it be known that it has not been narrated as to how many rak'ats the Messenger of Allah (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) performed during those nights (in congregation), whether they were twenty or less.”** (Tuhfat al-Akhyar 116)

3) 'Allama Suyuti (rahmatullahi alaihi) says, **“The scholars have differed on the number of rak'ats (in taraweeh). If it (the number) had been established through the practise of the Messenger of Allah (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam), they would not have differed (regarding it).”** (al-Masabih 42)

4) 'Allam Shawkani (rahmatullahi alaihi) writes: **“What has been understood from the hadiths in this chapter is the validity of the nightly prayers of Ramadan, and that they can be performed either in congregation or individually. However, to confine the prayer known as taraweeh to a stipulated number of rak'ats...is not understood from the Sunnah.”** (Nayl al-Awtar 3:53)

5) Mawlana Wahid al-Zaman (rahmatullahi alaihi) states: **“There is no fixed number (of rak'ats) for the prayer in the nights of Ramadan, i.e. taraweeh.”** (Nazl al-Abrar 1:126)

The scholarly statements mentioned above clearly establish that there are no authentic narrations stating that Allah's Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) performed a fixed number of rak'ats for taraweeh. Hence, this strikes down the claim that the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) only performed eight rak'ats and that to perform anything besides eight is a “reprehensible innovation” (bid'ah), as claimed by some.

There are however a handful of weak reports which inform us of the number of rak'ats performed by the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) in taraweeh. For instance, there is a narration of Ibn 'Abbas (radiallahu anhuma) which states that the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) performed twenty rak'ats. Although the hadeeth scholars have classified this narration to be weak, it could still be used as evidence, because it is supported by the consensus of the Companions (radiallahu anhum) and the practise of the whole Ummah, generation after generation, for more than twelve hundred years.

Other weak reports from the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) on this issue that are not substantially supported by the practise and statements of the pious predecessors, will be rejected. One must understand though that even if the narration of Ibn 'Abbas (radiallahu anhuma) is

rejected, the scholarly consensus (ijma') reached by 'Umar (radiallahu anh) – which established that taraweeh was twenty rak'ats – would be sufficient evidence to prove that taraweeh is indeed twenty rak'ats.

The reason why there are no authentic and direct reports from the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) concerning the number of rak'ats in taraweeh, is that the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) performed the prayer in congregation for a few days only, after which he performed taraweeh in the confines of his home. Hence, many of the the Companions (radiallahu anhum) did not observe him performing the prayer. Thereafter, the prayer continued to be performed individually or in small groups until the time of 'Umar (radiallahu anh), when he appointed an Imam to lead everyone in twenty rak'ats. Thus, it came to be performed as twenty rak'ats in a large congregation. The few Companions fortunate enough to have observed it with Allah's Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) in congregation did not voice any objection to the decision of 'Umar (radiallahu anh). If the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) had performed more or less than twenty rak'ats on any of the nights during Ramadan, these Companions would surely have refuted 'Umar's (radiallahu anh) decision for establishing taraweeh as twenty rak'ats.

The Hadiths On This Issue

Since it has been established that there are no authenticated hadiths from the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) regarding the number of rak'ats in taraweeh, all that remains in terms of proof for taraweeh being twenty rak'ats is the agreement of scholars with 'Umar's (radiallahu anh) decision; for once this is established, the Ummah must follow it wholeheartedly as it is incumbent on Muslims to follow the rulings of the Companions (radiallahu anhum).

1) 'Irbad ibn Sariya (radiallahu anh) narrates (that the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) said): **“Keep to my Sunnah and the Sunnah of the guided Caliphs who followed the right way (al-Khulafa' ar-Rashidun al-Mahdiyyin). Hold fast to it, and cleave onto it with your teeth.”** (Sunan Abi Dawud 2:287, al-Tirmidhi 2:97, Ibn Majah 5)

First, the Messenger of Allah (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) very strongly instructed, “Keep to my Sunnah and the Sunnah of the guided Caliphs who followed the right way.” This means that the rightly Guided Caliphs (radiallahu anhum) must also be followed in their rulings, just as the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) is to be followed. 'Umar (radiallahu anh), being the second rightly guided Caliph, is the one who put forth the verdict that taraweeh was to be performed as twenty rak'ats, which the Companions (radiallahu anhum) unanimously agreed upon. Due to the above hadith, his decisions will have to be accepted just as if it had come from the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) himself.

Second, it should also be remembered that the amount of rak'ats stipulated by 'Umar (radiallahu anh) could have only been acquired from the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) himself. This is obviously assumed because the number of rak'ats for any prayer cannot be determined through one's own preference, but rather must be set by Allah (azza wa jal) through His Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam). For 'Umar (radiallahu anh) to have ruled on this matter and not have received any objections from the Companions (radiallahu anhum) regarding it, indicates that the number of

rak'ats performed by the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) in taraweeh was twenty. Ibn 'Abbas's (radiallahu anh) narration (mentioned earlier) confirms that the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) performed twenty rak'ats.

'Umar (radiallahu anh) determined the number of rak'ats of taraweeh to be twenty and appointed Ubay ibn Ka'b (radiallahu anh) to lead the people in congregation. This then remained the practise of the Muslim Ummah throughout the caliphate of 'Uthman and 'Ali (radiallahu anhuma), and then on and on for twelve hundred years. Hence, it will be necessary to follow suit. Some of the following hadiths mention this in more detail.

2) 'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Abd al-Qari (rahmatullahi alaih) relates: **One night during Ramadan, he went out to the masjid with 'Umar ibn al-Khattab (radiallahu anh). People were scattered around in groups. One person was praying alone, whereas another was leading a group of people in prayer. 'Umar (radiallahu anh) remarked, "If I could have them all congregated behind one Imam it would be better." He then made a firm commitment to do so and had them all pray behind Ubay ibn Ka'b (radiallahu anh).** 'Abd al-Rahman (rahmatullahi alaih) states that **he went out with him again on another night and found the people congregated behind their Imam. Upon seeing this, 'Umar (radiallahu anh) remarked, "How great an innovation this it" (ni'mat al-bid'atu hadhihi, i.e. a practise that has been revived).**" (Sahih al-Bukhari 1:269, Muwatta Imam Malik 42)

The Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) had performed the taraweeh in congregation for a few days and then discontinued it for fear of it turning into an obligation on the Ummah. It then remained like this throughout the caliphate of Abu Bakr (radiallahu anh), who remained occupied with the many issues that arose in his time. Thereafter, 'Umar (radiallahu anh) revived the practise and had everyone perform twenty rak'ats taraweeh behind one Imam. He called it a good practise saying that if it was an innovation, that it was indeed a good one. This practise was then continued throughout the generations.

Hadeeth 1 above makes it clear that a reprehensible innovation cannot be attributed to 'Umar (radiallahu anh) or any of the other three Caliphs. Regarding 'Umar's (radiallahu anh) statement of the practise being such a 'wonderful innovation,' Allama Tibi (rahmatullahi alaih) writes: **"'Umar (radiallahu anh) was referring to the praiseworthy deed of encouraging the prayer and re-establishing the congregation after it had not been observed during the caliphate of Abu Bakr (radiallahu anh), even though it had been observed for a few days in the time of the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) in this manner. However, the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) had discontinued it for fear of it becoming an obligation (fard) on his Ummah. 'Umar (radiallahu anh) was aware of this and established this procedure as Sunnah for time to come (i.e. as a Sunnah Mu'akkadah, not a Fard). Hence, for him is the reward of this tradition and the reward of all who observe it until the Day of Judgment."** (Fath al-Mulhim 2:319)

This clarifies that 'Umar's (radiallahu anh) practise was in line with that of the Messenger of Allah (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam). Because Abu Bakr (radiallahu anh), for most of his caliphate, remained occupied with the important task of dealing with the apostates and those who either claimed prophet-hood after the Messenger's (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) death or demanded certain radical changes in the religion, many issues that were under debate in his time were clarified during the

time of 'Umar (radiallahu anh).

3) Yazid ibn Khusayfa (rahmatullahi alaih) narrates Sa'ib ibn Yazid (rahmatullahi alaih) as saying: **"They would perform twenty rak'ats tarweeh during the month of Ramadan in the time of 'Umar (radiallahu anh), and they would recite the chapters containing a hundred or so verses; and during the time of 'Uthman ibn 'Affan (radiallahu anh) they would lean on their staffs from standing (for so long)."** (Sunan al-Bayhaqi 2:296)

The narrators of this hadeeth have all been rigorously approved as 'Allama Nimawi (rahmatullahi alaih) confirms in his Athar al-Sunan. This hadeeth is clear evidence that twenty rak'ats were observed during the time of 'Umar as well as during the time of 'Uthman (radiallahu anhuma).

4) Yazid ibn Ruman (rahmatullahi alaih) relates: **"The people would perform twenty-three rak'ats during Ramadan in the time of 'Umar (radiallahu anh)."** (Sunan al-Bayhaqi 2:496, Muwatta Imam Malik 1:71)

Although this is a rigorously authenticated hadeeth, it is mursal, or one with a broken chain. However, this does not alter its effectiveness for a number of reasons:

A) By consensus of the hadeeth scholars, mursal narrations can be used as evidence.

B) This is a hadeeth narrated by Imam Malik (rahmatullahi alaih), and it is an established fact that the mursal narrations of Imam Malik (rahmatullahi alaih) in his Muwatta rank alongside his mawsul narrations (i.e. those with unbroken chains).

C) There are many other mursal and mawsul narrations which strengthen this one; for instance, hadeeth 2 above.

D) Shah Waliyullah (rahmatullahi alaih) writes that Imam Shafi'ee (rahmatullahi alaih) said: **"The most authentic book after the Qur'an is the Muwatta of Imam Malik (rahmatullahi alaih), and the hadeeth scholars are unanimous that all its narrations are authentic according to the judgment of (Imam) Malik (rahmatullahi alaih), and all its mursal narrations reach the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) in some way or another."** (Hujjatullah al-Baligha 1:106)

5) Yahya ibn Sa'id (rahmatullahi alaih) narrates that: **'Umar ibn al-Khattab (radiallahu anh) appointed an Imam to lead them in twenty rak'ats."** (Musannaf Ibn Abi Shayba 2:393)

6) 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Rafi' (rahmatullahi alaih) narrates that, **Ubay ibn Ka'b (radiallahu anh) would lead the congregation in twenty rak'ats in Madinah during Ramadan, followed by three (rak'ats) Witr.** (Musannaf Ibn Abi Shayba 2:393)

7) 'Ata' (rahmatullahi alaih) reports: **"I found the people observing twenty-three rak'ats, which included witr."** (Musannaf Ibn Abi Shayba 3:393)

8) Abu Khusayb (rahmatullahi alaih) narrate: **Suwayd ibn Ghafala (rahmatullahi alaih) would lead them in prayer during the month of Ramadan. He would perform five tarweehas (sets of four**

rak'ats) – twenty rak'ats (in all). (Sunan al-Bayhaqi 2:496)

9) Nafi' ibn 'Umar (rahmatullahi alaihi) narrates that, **Ibn Abi Mulayka (rahmatullahi alaihi) would lead them in twenty rak'ats prayer during Ramadan.** (Musannaf Ibn Abi Shayba 2:393)

10) Sa'id ibn 'Ubayd (rahmatullahi alaihi) narrates that, **'Ali ibn Rabi'ah (rahmatullahi alaihi) would lead them in five tarweehas (i.e. twenty rak'ats) and three witr during Ramadan.** (Musannaf Ibn Abi Shayba 2:393)

11) Ibn Abbas (radiallahu anhuma) relates: **"The Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) would perform twenty rak'ats during Ramadan and three rak'ats witr."** (Musannaf Ibn Abi Shayba 2:394)

This hadeeth may be weak since a narrator in its chain, Abu Shayba Ibrahim ibn 'Uthman, has received some criticism. However, as mentioned earlier, since the Ummah has adopted the same number of rak'ats for the greater part of history, it will not be totally rejected but rather used as supplementary evidence.

12) It has been narrated from Shutayr ibn Shaki (rahmatullahi alaihi) (a companion of 'Ali – radiallahu anh) that, **He would lead them during the month of Ramadan in twenty rak'ats (taraweeh) and three rak'ats witr.** (Sunan al-Bayhaqi 4:496)

13) Muhammad ibn Ka'b al-Qurazi (rahmatullahi alaihi) says, **The people would perform twenty rak'ats in the month of Ramadan during the caliphate of 'Umar (radiallahu anh). They would lengthen the recitation and perform three rak'ats witr.** (Qiyam al-Layl 91)

14) A'mash (rahmatullahi alaihi) reports that 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ood (radiallahu anh) **would perform twenty rak'ats (taraweeh) and three rak'ats witr.** (Qiyam al-Layl 91)

All of these reports mention the rak'ats of taraweeh as being twenty and no less.

The Opinions Of Various Jurists And Scholars

1) The author of Bidayat al-Mujtahid, Ibn Rush (rahmatullahi alaihi), writes: **"Imam Malik (in one of his opinions), along with Imam Abu Haneefah, Shafi'ee, Ahmad ibn Hanbal, and Dawood al-Zahiri (rahmatullahi alaihim), has preferred that the taraweeh performed in the month of Ramadan be twenty rak'ats excluding witr. Ibn al-Qasim (rahmatullahi alaihi) reports from Malik (rahmatullahi alaihi) that he preferred thirty-six rak'ats with three witr (according to another of his opinions)."** (Bidayat al-Mujtahid 210)

2) The great hadeeth master Imam Tirmidhi (rahmatullahi alaihi) presents a detailed report on various opinions surrounding this issue: **"The knowledgeable people have disputed over the number of rak'ats to be performed for taraweeh during Ramadan. Some say forty-one rak'ats including witr; this is the opinion of the people of Madinah and such is their practise. However, the opinion of the majority is that taraweeh is twenty rak'ats, and this opinion is more in agreement with the narrations of 'Ali, 'Umar, and the other Companions (radiallahu anhum) of the**

Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam), and it is also the opinion of Sufyan al-Thawri, 'Abdullah ibn Mubarak, and Imam Shafi'ee (rahmatullahi alaihim).

In fact, Imam Shafi'ee (rahmatullahi alaihim) states, "I found the people of my city, Makkah, performing twenty rak'ats." Imam Ahmad states, "There are various reports to be found concerning taraweeh, but no exact number is confirmed." Ishaq (rahmatullahi alaihim) states, "We prefer forty-one rak'ats, according to what has been narrated from Ubay ibn Ka'b (radiallahu anh)." (Sunan al-Tirmidhi 1:166)

In such a detailed analysis of the opinions, there is not even a mention of taraweeh being eight rak'ats, even as a weak opinion.

3) In his commentary on Saheeh al-Bukhari, 'Allama Qastalani (rahmatullahi alaihim) writes: "Imam Bayhaqi (rahmatullahi alaihim) has reconciled the various narrations and concluded that initially the Companions (radiallahu anhum) performed eleven rak'ats for taraweeh, after which they performed twenty with three witr. The scholars accepted the agreement on twenty rak'ats during the time of 'Umar (radiallahu anh) as a consensus."

4) In the Maliki fiqh text, al-Anwar al-Sati'ah, it states: "We say that that twenty rak'ats of taraweeh following the 'Isha prayer is an emphasised (mu'akkadah) Sunnah during the month of Ramadan, with salams to be made on every second rak'ah (i.e. to be performed in two rak'ah units)."

5) Ibn Qudama (rahmatullahi alaihim) writes: "It is reported from 'Ali (radiallahu anh) that he appointed an Imam to lead the people in twenty rak'ats taraweeh during Ramadan." (al-Mughni)

This narration proves that the practise of twenty rak'ats continued on into the time of 'Ali (radiallahu anh).

6) The great Shafi'ee scholar Imam Nawawi (rahmatullahi alaihim) writes: "The number of rak'ats in taraweeh remained twenty, since this was constantly accepted century after centry."

7) It is reported in the Mirqat al-Mafatih that Hafiz Ibn Hajar (rahmatullahi alaihim) said: "The Companions (radiallahu anhum) reached a unanimous verdict that taraweeh was twenty rak'ats." (Mirqat al-Mafatih 3:382)

8) Ibn Taymiya (rahmatullahi alaihim) states: "This is the opinion most Muslims follow (i.e. of taraweeh being twenty rak'ats)." (A'zami in his Rak'ate Taraweeh 92)

9) Shaykh Mansur ibn Idris al-Hanbali (rahmatullahi alaihim) writes: "Taraweeh is twenty rak'ats during Ramadan."

10) Asad ibn 'Amr (rahmatullahi alaihim) reports that Imam Abu Yusuf (rahmatullahi alaihim) said: "I asked Abu Haneefah (rahmatullahi alaihim) regarding taraweeh and concerning 'Umar's (radiallahu anh) role in it. He informed me that taraweeh is an emphasised Sunnah. It is not something 'Umar (radiallahu anh) established through his own preference or innovated, but he established it based

on some evidence or information he possessed from the Messenger (salallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam).”
(I’la al-Sunan 46)

11) Imam Ghazali (rahmatullahi alaih) writes: **“Taraweeh is twenty rak’ats, its method is well known, and it is an emphasised Sunnah.”** (Ihya ‘Ulum al-Deen 1:139)

12) Sayyid ‘Abd al-Qadir Jilani (rahmatullahi alaih) writes: **“Taraweeh is a Sunnah of the Messenger of Allah (salallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam) and is twenty rak’ats.”** (Ghunyat al-Talibin 567)

13) Imam Nawawi (rahmatullahi alaih) says, **“Let it be known that taraweeh is a Sunnah by agreement of all the Muslims, and it is twenty rak’ats.”** (Kitab al-Adhkar 83)

14) Ibn Taymiya (rahmatullahi alaih) says, **“It has been established that Ubay ibn Ka’b (radiallahu anh) would lead the people in twenty rak’ats of taraweeh throughout the month of Ramadan, after which he would perform three rak’ats of witr. Hence, most scholars have taken twenty rak’ats to be Sunnah, as Ubay ibn Ka’b (radiallahu anh) performed this number of rak’ats amidst the Emigrant (Muhajireen) and Helpers (Ansar) (radiallahu anhum) and none refuted him.”**
(Fatawa Ibn Taymiya 23:112)

Other Important Points To Be Noted

First, it has to be fully comprehended that the amount of rak’ats for any prayer is not something which can be made up and established through one’s own intellect and reasoning. It has to come from Allah (azza wa jal) and His Messenger (salallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam). Hence, the scholars state that whenever anything of this nature (i.e. that which is not established through human reasoning alone) is reported by a Companion, it will be considered as being directly acquired from Allah’s Messenger (salallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam).

According to the agreement of hadeeth scholars, all the Companions (radiallahu anhum) are considered trustworthy and legally upright (‘adul). It cannot be believed that they would introduce a new concept into the religion which is contrary to the principles of the Shari’ah. Hence, even though there are no marfu’ (directly related from the Messenger – salallahu alayhi wa sallam) hadeeths to be found concerning the number of rak’ats in taraweeh, the decision of ‘Umar (radiallahu anh) of taraweeh being twenty rak’ats is accepted. It is believed, as explained by Imam Abu Haneefah (rahmatullahi alaih) (see hadeeth above), that the number was acquired from the Messenger of Allah (salallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam) and not something ‘Umar (radiallahu anh) established through his own desire.

Second, once the unanimous agreement concerning the number of rak’ats was reached, not a single Companion of the Messenger (salallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam) was reported to have refuted it. The Companions (radiallahu anhum) who had performed taraweeh with the Messenger (salallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam) (during the few days he performed it in congregation) and who were present at the time of ‘Umar (radiallahu anh), also did not refute his decision.

‘Umar (radiallahu anh) did not even receive criticism from the wife of the Messenger (salallahy

'alayhi wa sallam), who constantly observed the Messenger's (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) taraweeh prayer at home after he had abandoned performing it in congregation. This indicates that the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) must have performed twenty rak'ats, and it was because of this fact that the Companions (radiallahu anhum) supported 'Umar's (radiallahu anh) decision to set the taraweeh prayer at twenty rak'ats.

Third, 'Allama Halabi (rahmatullahi alaih) has made a very noteworthy point as to why the number of rak'ats of taraweeh may have been set at twenty. He states: **"The Sunnah and Nawaafil (supererogatory) prayers are supplementary prayers which make up for any deficiencies that may have been left in the obligatory (fard) prayers. The obligatory prayers of the day, along with the three rak'ats of witr, total to twenty rak'ats. Hence, it is appropriate to have twenty rak'ats of taraweeh, so that there is a balance between the two types of prayers, i.e. between the rak'ats of the obligatory prayers and rak'ats of the supplementary nafl or sunnah prayers."**

Analyzing The Narrations Concerning Eight Rak'ats

Those who claim the taraweeh to be eight rak'ats try to establish this opinion in two ways. One way is claiming that the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) only performed eight rak'ats, and the other is by claiming that 'Umar (radiallahu anh) also ordered only eight rak'ats to be performed; hence, their rejection of Umar's (radiallahu anh) decision establishing twenty rak'ats. We will now look at the narrations which they have used to substantiate these two claims.

1) It is reported from Abu Salama (rahmatullahi alaih) that he asked 'A'isha (radiallahu anha) regarding the prayer of the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) during Ramadan. She explained, **"The Messenger of Allah (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) would not perform more than eleven rak'ats, neither in Ramadan nor out of it. He would perform four rak'ats, and do not ask of their beauty and length, followed by another four, and do not ask of their beauty and length, after which he would perform three (witr)."** 'A'isha (radiallahu anha) continued, **"I asked, 'O Messenger of Allah, do you sleep before you perform the witr?' He replied, 'O 'A'isha, my eyes sleep, but my heart does not.'"** [Saheeh al-Bukhari 1:154]

This hadeeth is probably the most widely used in claiming that taraweeh is only eight rak'ats. However, there are a number of reasons why this hadeeth cannot stand as evidence:

A) The prayer mentioned in this hadeeth is clearly not Taraweeh but rather the Tahajjud (night-vigil) prayer. Abu Salama's (rahmatullahi alaih) inquiry was regarding whether or not the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) performed any extra rak'ats of Tahajjud during Ramadan. 'A'isha (radiallahu anha) answered by stating that the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) would perform no more than eight rak'ats (tahajjud) throughout the year, regardless of what month it was.

Hence, 'A'isha (radiallahu anha) was speaking of a prayer that was performed by the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) both in and out of Ramadan, which is why she used the words 'neither in Ramadan nor out of it.' She could not have been speaking about taraweeh since taraweeh is not performed out of Ramadan. The question of Abu Salama (rahmatullahi alaih) therefore had to be

about tahajjud (which is performed throughout the year) and not about taraweeh.

What further supports this explanation is that there are some narrations of 'A'isha (radiallahu anha) which speak of the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) increasing his worship during the month of Ramadan. She states: "**The Messenger of Allah (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) would exert himself (in worship) during the last ten days of Ramadan more than at any other time.**" (Saheeh Muslim 1:372)

This narration and many others like it indicate that the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) would perform more prayer in Ramadan than in any other month, even though the rak'ats of tahajjud performed by him would remain constant throughout the year. This means that the increase in worship by him during Ramadan was through performance of taraweeh and other supererogatory prayers. Hence, the narration of 'A'isha (radiallahu anha) above is concerning tahajjud, since the rak'ats of his tahajjud prayer remained constant in all the months of the year.

B) Imam Muhammad ibn al-Nasr al-Marwazi (rahmatullahi alaih), in his book, Qiyam al-Layl, has compiled many narrations under a chapter entitled, "Chapter on the Rak'ats Performed by the Imam in Ramadan for Taraweeh." However, he does not mention the above hadeeth of Abu Salama (rahmatullahi alaih) in that chapter despite it being a regorously authenticated hadeeth of Saheeh al-Bukhari. Like al-Marwazi (rahmatullahi alaih), there are many other authors who, in their works, have not mentioned this hadeeth to be concerning taraweeh.

C) Many compilers of hadeeth, such as Imam Muslim, Nasa'i, Abu Dawood, Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah, Ibn Khuzayma, and Imam Malik (rahmatullahi alaihim), have not included this hadeeth in their chapters on taraweeh, despite it being such a rigorously authenticated hadeeth. Instead, they mention it in their chapters on tahajjud or witr. Indeed, had this narration been in regards to taraweeh, they would have surely included it in their chapters on taraweeh.

D) Furthermore, if this hadeeth was concerning taraweeh, then why did 'A'isha (radiallahu anha), the narrator, not reject the consensus (ijma') reached by 'Umar (radiallahu anh)? She could have informed him in some way or the other that the correct number of rak'ats for taraweeh was eight. Thus, the prayer she describes in the above hadeeth can be none other than tahajjud.

Another narration popularly used to claim that the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) performed only eight rak'ats for taraweeh is the following:

2) Jabir (radiallahu anh) narrates that **the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) led them in prayer during Ramadan. He performed eight rak'ats followed by Witr.**" (Saheeh Ibn Hibban, Ibn Khuzayma, I'la al-Sunan 7:60:7)

The following explanations have been given for this hadeeth:

A) This hadeeth furnishes details of only one night in which the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) led the congregation in taraweeh prayer. The following narration is actually more detailed in this regard:

Jabir (radiallahu anh) narrates that **the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) performed eight rak'ats during one night of Ramadan followed by witr. The following night, we gathered together in the masjid hoping that he would come out to us. We remained waiting for him until morning, when he (came out and) said, 'I did not desire....' or (he said), 'I was afraid that the witr would be made obligatory (yaktubu) upon you.'** (Qiyam al-Layl 91)

There are many narrations which mention that the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) performed the taraweeh in congregation for three nights then failed to appear on the fourth night (see the narrations of 'A'isha (radiallahu anha) in Saheeh al-Bukhari and Saheeh Muslim). However, the above narration indicated that the congregation did not turn up on the second night; which means that both are concerning two different occasions.

Other differences between and 'A'isha's (radiallahu anha) other narrations is that 'A'isha's (radiallahu anha) other narrations do not mention the number of rak'ats performed for taraweeh (despite these narrations being so widely transmitted) whereas this one does. Also, the other narrations of 'A'isha (radiallahu anha) mention that Allah's Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) was fearful of taraweeh becoming obligatory in the Ummah whereas the hadeeth of Jabir (radiallahu anh) he was fearful of witr becoming obligatory. Hence, Hafiz Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani (rahmatullahi alaih) has hesitated in accepting this narration to be concerning the same incident mentioned in the other narrations. (Fath al-Bari 2:12)

B) The other point Mawlana Habib al-Rahman A'zami (rahmatullahi alaih) makes about this narration is that there is only one person relating it from Jabir (radiallahu anh). This single narrator, 'Isa ibn Jariya, has been strongly criticized by the scholars of hadeeth. Hafiz Dhahabi (rahmatullahi alaih) and Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani (rahmatullahi alaih) have recored much criticism about him, and Yahya ibn Ma'een (rahmatullahi alaih) states that "He is not strong" (laysa bi dhaka). Likewise Imam Nasa'i, Abu Dawood, 'Uqayli, Saji, and Ibn 'Adi (rahmatullahi alaihim) all have grave statements to make about him, either rejecting his narrations outright or labelling him as weak. Only Ibn Hibban (rahmatullahi alaih) Abu Zur'a (rahmatullahi alaih) have not criticized him. However, since the criticism of the former group is very severe, it will take precedence over the opinions of the latter in determining his status as a narrator.

Hence, his narrations are weak and cannot be accepted as evidence for the claim of taraweeh being eight rak'ats; even more so, in that no one else has reported that the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) performed eight rak'ats in congregation during those nights he performed it in congregation. (A'zami in Rak'ate Taraweeh 28)

C) Some scholars have explained that even if the hadeeth were to be accepted, it would only inform as to the number of rak'ats the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) could have performed in congregation, and does not negate the possibility that the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) could have performed the remaining twelve rak'ats at home. Jabir (radiallahu anh) does not negate this possibility either, but merely informs us of the number of rak'ats that the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) performed in congregation with the Companions (radiallahu anhum), before retiring to the confines of his home.

There are also other narrations of Jabir (radiallahu anh) on this issue which mention that the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) performed eight rak'ats in congregation; however, since they are all narrated through 'Isa ibn Jariya, they are all classified as weak and not to be used or related as evidence.

3) Sa'ib ibn Yazid (radiallahu anh) relates: **'Umar (radiallahu anh) appointed Ubay ibn Ka'b and Tamim al-Dari (radiallahu anhuma) to lead the people in eleven rak'ats.** (Muwatta Imam Malik 1:71)

This is the narration presented to substantiate their second claim that 'Umar (radiallahu anh) ordered only eight rak'ats to be performed for taraweeh and that there was never a consensus on twenty. However, this claim is even weaker than the first due to the following reasons:

A) This hadeeth has been related from Sa'ib ibn Yazid (radiallahu anh) by two people - Muhammad ibn Yusuf and Yazid ibn Khusayfa. Five people have then related it from Muhammad ibn Yusuf. However, all five reports are different from one another, even though each one relates it from the same person. Due to its inconsistency and conflicting nature, this narration cannot stand as evidence to prove that taraweeh is eight rak'ats. This different reports from Muhammad ibn Yusuf are as follows:

(1) The version mentioned above, transmitted by Imam Malik (rahmatullahi alaih), mentions eleven rak'ats, but does not mention Ramadan.

(2) Yahya ibn Qattan's version mentions that 'Umar (radiallahu anh) brought the people together behind Tamim al-Dari (radiallahu anh) and they would perform eleven rak'ats. It does not mention 'Umar (radiallahu anh) issuing any specific command on the number of rak'ats, nor does it mention the month of Ramadan.

(3) The version narrated by 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Muhammad simply mentions that they performed eleven rak'ats during the caliphate of 'Umar (radiallahu anh). There is no mention of any specific command or of Ubay ibn Ka'b (radiallah anh), Tamim al-Dari (radiallahu anh), or Ramadan.

(4) Ibn Ishaq's report mentions that they would perform thirteen rak'ats in Ramadan during the period of 'Umar (radiallahu anh). It does not speak of 'Umar's (radiallahu anh) instructions, Ubay ibn Ka'b (radiallahu anh), or Tamim al-Dari (radiallahu anh).

(5) Lastly, 'Abs al-Razzaq's version describes 'Umar (radiallahu anh) commanding that twenty-one rak'ats be performed instead of eleven.

Some versions of this narration mention eleven rak'ats, others thirteen rak'ats, and one also mentions twenty-one/ So what is the reason for choosing the version of eleven rak'ats over the rest? In fact, the great Maliki jurist Ibn 'Abd al-Barr (rahmatullahi alaih) has given preference to the narration of twenty-one rak'ats and called the narrations of eleven to be an 'erroneous assumption' (wahm). (Rak'ate Taraweeh 39). Hence, the version of twenty rak'ats has been adopted in light of

these and other similar factors that only serve to strengthen its authenticity.

B) The other narrator of this hadeeth from Sa'ib ibn Yazid (radiallahu anh) is Yazid ibn Khusayfa. And Yazid's two students, Ibn Abi Dhi'b and Muhammad ibn Ja'far, relate this narration from him (see hadeeth 3 in 'hadeeths on this issue' above). All versions of this narration through Yazid ibn Khusayfa are unanimous in mentioning twenty rak'ats; and Imam Nawawi, 'Iraqi, Suyuti, and others (rahmatullahi alaihim) have judged its chains (isnad) to be strong and reliable.

Hence, the question is: Why would the version of Muhammad ibn Yusuf mentioning eight rak'ats be adopted, despite it being so confusing and inconsistent in its mention of the number of rak'ats, and the version of Yazid ibn Khusayfa be abandoned despite it being consistent? Justice would demand that the narrations of Sa'ib ibn Yazid (radiallahu anh) through Yazid ibn Khusayfa be accepted since they are consistent and have classified as rigorously authenticated by many scholars; and that the narrations through Muhammad ibn Yusuf, because of their confusing nature, be interpreted and reconciled with those of Yazid ibn Khusayfa.

C) Some scholars have reconciled various versions of Sa'ib ibn Yazid's (radiallahu anh) narration by stating that 'Umar (radiallahu anh) initially ordered eleven rak'ats to be performed but then changed his decision to twenty after learning that it was the more correct view. Nobody refuted this decision, and twenty rak'ats continued to be performed for the most part of Islamic history.

Imam Bayhaqi (rahmatullahi alaih), after mentioning the eleven and twenty rak'at narrations, states: **"It is possible to reconcile the two types of narrations because the Companions (radiallahu anhum) would (initially) perform eleven rak'ats in congregation after which they began to perform twenty rak'ats and three witr."** (Sunan al-Kubra li'l-Bayhaqi 2:296)

Imam Bayhaqi (rahmatullahi alaih) makes the same point at another place in his Sunan al-Kubra. Many other scholars have also provided similar explanations. Ibn Habib Maliki (rahmatullahi alaih) writes: **"It was initially (performed as) eleven rak'ats, but they would prolong the recitation in them, which proved difficult on the people, so they increased the number of rak'ats and shortened the recitation. They would perform twenty rak'ats excluding witr."** (Tuhfat al-Akhyar 192)

Conclusion

It is only recently that some people have emerged with the opinion of only eight rak'ats being sunnah for taraweeh. Some have even gone as far as saying that performing any more than eight rak'ats would be considered a 'reprehensible innovation' (bid'ah) (may Allah forbid).

None of them have been able to produce a single example of any masjid in the world in which a taraweeh congregation of less than twenty rak'ats was held during the first twelve hundred years or more of Islam. Likewise, not a single scholar from among the pious predecessors (salaf us saliheen) held an opinion of eight rak'ats. Can the opinions of contemporary men be preferred over the scholarship and opinions of those who enjoyed a greater proximity to the fountain of Prophet-hood?

Also, how does one overlook the fact that over a period of twelve hundred long years, nobody had

any dispute with regards to the rak'ats of taraweeh being twenty? How absurd it is to call it a reprehensible innovation in religion when 'Umar (radiallahu anh) himself reached an agreement with the Companions (radiallahu anhum) on that amount, and his decision was made through what he must have acquired from the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) himself. Neither the Companions nor the household (radiallahu anhum) of the Messenger (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) refuted him. He then remarked as to "how wonderful a practise he had revived" (ni'mat al-bid'atu hadhihi), since people had not performed it in a large congregation during the time of Abu Bakr (radiallahu anh).

It can therefore be concluded quite easily that since there has been an agreement among the four Imams and the overwhelming majority of scholars of this Ummah concerning taraweeh being twenty rak'ats, it is considered the Sunnah amount.