

## **The Truth About The Number Of Rak'ats In Taraweeh**

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### **The Truth about the Number of Rakahs in Tarawih**

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

In recent times there has been a growth in the number of lay people who, influenced by a certain ideology, claim that the tarawih consists of only eight rak'ahs rather than the established twenty rak'ahs. There is, therefore, a need to discuss the tarawih prayer, which is a special type of salah (ritual prayer) only offered in Ramadan.

The practice of performing tarawih in eight rak'ahs is in total contrast to the practice of the Ummah throughout the ages. Given the fact that tarawih is an emphasized sunnah (sunnah muakkadah), this issue should not be treated lightly. A staunch approach in opposition to this baseless view needs to be adopted, including highlighting the abhorrence of opposing the view of the majority (jamhur) and the sin of habitually abandoning an emphasized sunnah.

### **Ijma' of the Companions (radiallahu anhum)**

The issue of the tarawih consisting of twenty rak'ahs is one that the Companions (Sahabah) agreed upon by ijma' (consensus). Hafiz Ibn 'Abd al-Barr stated, **"The Companions had no dispute regarding this."**[1] 'Allamah Ibn Qudamah said, **"The Companions made ijma' upon this in the era of Sayyiduna 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him)"** (Al-Mughni). Hafiz Abu Zur'ah Al-'Iraqi stated, **"They (the 'ulama) have considered the approval of the Companions [when Sayyiduna 'Umar did so] as ijma'".**[2] Mulla 'Ali al-Qari stated that the Companions (may Allah be pleased with them) have made ijma' on the practice of twenty rak'ahs.[3] Ibn Hajar al-Haytami and many others have also claimed ijma' of the Companions on this issue.[4]

Furthermore, there exists no view in the four madhhabs (i.e. the Hanafi, Shafi'i, Maliki and Hanbali schools of Islamic jurisprudence) that support the view that tarawih consists of eight rak'ahs. The Hanafis, Shafi'is and Hanbalis state tarawih consists of twenty rak'ahs while Imam Malik is of the view that it consists of thirty-six rak'ahs, and according to one report he considers it to consist of forty-one rak'ahs. According to another report he had also approved twenty rak'ahs. Some claim that Imam Malik also has a view supporting eleven rak'ahs but Mawlana Habib al-Rahman Al-A'zami has adequately refuted this claim in his book Rak'ate Tarawih.[5]

From the above, we can deduce that almost all of the scholars of this Ummah held the opinion that tarawih does not consist of eight rak'ahs because throughout history all have adhered to one of the four madhhabs, although there may have been certain individuals who renegaded in this regard. Mawlana Habib al-Rahman Al-A'zami said in this regard, **"From after the era of Sayyiduna 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) up to the end of the 13th century, you will not find any mention of people performing only eight rak'ahs [in tarawih]"**. [6] Mawlana has also proven that offering

twenty rak'ahs has remained the practice of the Ummah up to the modern day.[7]

### **The practice of the Companions (radiallahu anhum) and the Followers (rahmatullahi alaihim)**

Sayyiduna Sa'ib ibn Yazid reports that **“the people would perform twenty rak'ahs in Ramadan during the era of Sayyiduna 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him)”**. [8] Others beside Sayyiduna Sa'ib ibn Yazid have also reported that the twenty rak'ahs were introduced by Sayyiduna 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) such as Sayyiduna Yazid ibn Ruman, Sayyiduna Yahya ibn Sa'id Al-Ansari, Sayyiduna Ubay ibn Ka'b and Sayyiduna Muhammad ibn Ka'b Al-Qurazhi. [9]

The following muhaddithin (hadith scholars) have accepted these reports, i.e. the reports of twenty rak'ahs from Sayyiduna 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him), to be authentic: Hafiz Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, Imam Al-Nawawi, Hafiz Al-'Iraqi, Imam Al-Subki, Imam Al-Suyuti and Mulla 'Ali al-Qari.

Imam al-Bayhaqi has narrated from several chains that Sayyiduna 'Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) also maintained the practice of twenty rak'ahs in tarawih. [10] This has also been reported as the practice of Sayyiduna 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud (may Allah be pleased with him), [11] Sayyiduna 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Abi Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him), [12] Sayyiduna Ubay ibn Ka'b (may Allah be pleased with him), [13] Shutayr ibn Shaki, [14] Ibn Abi Mulaykah, [15] Harith Al-Hamdani, [16] 'Ali ibn Rabi'ah, [17] Abu 'l-Bukhtari, [18] Sayyid al-Tabi'in Sa'id ibn Jubayr, [19] 'Ata (he said: “I found the people performing twenty-three rak'ahs including witr.”), [20] Sa'id ibn Abi 'l-Hasan, [21] 'Imran Al-'Abdi [22] and Suwayd ibn Ghafalah. [23]

### **The practice of the Messenger of Allah (salallahu 'alayhi wa sallam)**

In a narration it is stated that the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace) performed twenty rak'ahs in tarawih. [24] The chain of this narration is weak. However, it is a well established principle in the sciences of Hadith and Fiqh that if a hadith possesses a weak chain but is supported by the general practice of the Ummah in the era of the Companions and the Followers (Tabi'in) then that hadith will be considered authentic. [25]

Mawlana Habib al-Rahman Al-A'zimi has mentioned that this albeit weak narration is supported by the following points: (1) The fact that the general practice of the Muslims in the era of Sayyiduna 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) conformed to it, (2) this remained the practice even in the era of Sayyiduna 'Ali (may Allah be pleased with him), (3) all of the four madhhabs concur with it and (4) the fact that the entire Ummah has been practicing upon it till this day. These are sufficient reasons to strengthen this narration and raise it to the level of authenticity. (Rak'ate Tarawih, pg. 60)

Interestingly, Imam Ibn Abi Shaybah, under the chapter of **“The number of rak'ahs to be performed in Ramadan”**, first quotes the practice of twenty rak'ahs from ten different Companions and Followers (Tabi'i) and thereafter cites the narration of twenty rak'ahs from the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace). [26] This probably means he was alluding to the strength of this narration.

### **Twenty rak'ahs were established by Sayyiduna 'Umar (radiallahu anh)**

Those who prefer eight rak'ahs generally contest the fact that Sayyiduna 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) was the one who introduced the twenty rak'ahs and that it was in fact only eight rak'ahs that he had established. This claim is easily refutable in light of the quotations mentioned earlier. Furthermore, Imam Tirmidhi has stated the following in his Sunan: **“And most of the 'ulama have chosen twenty rak'ahs as has been reported from Sayyiduna 'Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) and Sayyiduna 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) and other Companions besides these two.”**[27]

The fact that Imam Tirmidhi did not even mention eight rak'ahs from Sayyiduna 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) or anyone else is a clear indication as to which is the proper view. Moreover, some 'ulama have reconciled this by stating that Sayyiduna 'Umar had probably first introduced eight rak'ahs which thereafter became twenty. This then became the constant practice in his era as well as in the era of those who came after him.[28]

On the other hand, Mawlana Habib al-Rahman Al-A'zimi and others have challenged the narration of eight rak'ahs from Sayyiduna 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him). Mawlana has classified it as weak due to idtirab (i.e., diverse conflict between the narrators). (Rak'ate Tarawih, pgs. 7-8)

The fact that the narration of eight rak'ahs was narrated by Imam Malik from Sayyiduna 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) and he (Imam Malik) still chose twenty, thirty-six or forty-one rak'ahs further weakens this narration.[29] Another weakening factor for this narration is that there are no other references from the Companions and Followers which support this version of eight rak'ahs.[30]

### **Sunnah of the rightly-guided caliphs (radiallahu anhum)**

The fact that Sayyiduna 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) approved of twenty rak'ahs and the other caliphs maintained this practice after him is sufficient to prove its importance. All of this is in light of the hadith in which the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said: **“You must then follow my sunnah and that of the rightly-guided caliphs”** (Abu Dawud). The 'ulama have ruled that the sunnah of the caliphs are also part of the emphasized sunnah in light of this particular hadith.[31]

Hafiz Ibn Rajab Al-Hanbali said: **“The directive in this hadith to follow the caliphs is as incumbent as following the Sunnah of the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace) himself.”**[32] This becomes even more clear knowing that this was one of the last advices of the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace).

### **The significance of the practices of Sayyiduna 'Umar (radiallahu anh)**

The sunnah (practice) of Sayyiduna 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) enjoy an added significance and this is due to several narrations which support this:

(1) The Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace) said: **“Allah has placed truth upon**

**‘Umar’s tongue and heart.’** (Abu Dawud)

(2) Sayyiduna ‘Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) would meticulously follow the practices of Sayyiduna ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) and would say: **“Indeed he (‘Umar) was always correct in his affairs.”**

(3) Sayyiduna ‘Abullah ibn Mas’ud (may Allah be pleased with him) said while on oath: **“The straight path is that which ‘Umar chose.”**

(4) The caliph ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz said in one of his addresses to the people: **“Behold! Whatever the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace) and his two Companions (Abu Bakr and ‘Umar) have implemented is a duty that we have to follow and adhere to in our religion.”**[33]

Imam Abu Hanifah (may Allah be pleased with him) said the following when asked concerning the tarawih and its introduction by Sayyiduna ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with him): **“Tarawih is an emphasized sunnah. Sayyiduna ‘Umar did not introduce it from his own intellect, neither was it an innovation from his side. He surely did so because of having some knowledge about it from Allah’s Messenger (Allah bless him and give him peace).”**[34]

‘Allamah Al-Mawsili, after quoting the above from Imam Abu Hanifah, stated: **“He (Sayyiduna ‘Umar) did so in the presence of a large group of Companions (may Allah be pleased with them), among them were the likes of Sayyiduna ‘Uthman , Sayyiduna ‘Ali, Sayyiduna Ibn Mas’ud, Sayyiduna ‘Abbas, Sayyiduna Ibn ‘Abbas, Sayyiduna Talhah, Sayyiduna Zubayr , Sayyiduna Mu’adh, Sayyiduna Ubayy and others among the muhajirun (emigrants) and ansar (helpers). None of them objected to him, rather they assisted him and concurred with him.”**[35]

### **Tarawih of the Two Noble Sanctuaries**

In the Two Noble Sanctuaries of the noble city of Makkah and the illuminated city of Madinah up to this day since the time of Sayyiduna ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) twenty rak’ahs of tarawih has been performed in congregation. The Companions (may Allah be pleased with them), the Followers (i.e. those who came after the Companions), the Imams of Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) and the rest of the Ummah — with the exception of the so-called Ahl al-Hadith (or Salafis) of recent times — have been unanimous on performing twenty rak’ahs.[36]

### **The Shi’ah resemblance**

Those who hold the view that the tarawih consists of eight rak’ahs hold the same belief as the Shi’ah in this regard. It is an accepted fact among the true scholars of Islam that for centuries the tarawih prayer was and is an additional prayer in the month of Ramadan. The Shi’ahs reject the practice of praying tarawih altogether. Similarly, the Ahl al-Hadith sect (or the Salafis) also reject there is an additional prayer in Ramadan. They believe that the tahajjud prayer which is performed during the latter portion of the night throughout the year was merely brought forward (i.e. to the earlier portion of the night) in Ramadan. Thus, in essence, there is no additional prayer in Ramadan according to their understanding.

Furthermore, to believe that the twenty rak'ahs is an innovation of Sayyiduna 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) is to undermine the integrity of this great Companion and in fact all the Companions who were present in his time. Generally speaking, this is precisely what the aims of the Shi'ahs are since it is an act of virtue for them to undermine the integrity of the Companions.

### **Difference between tarawih and tahajjud**

The claim is made that since the tahajjud prayer only consists of eight rak'ahs — which is also an incorrect claim as other hadiths suggest more rak'ahs — the same applies to tarawih. There are several differences between tarawih and tahajjud, some of which are as follows:

**(1) Tarawih consists of twenty rak'ahs while tahajjud consists of only eight or maximum twelve.**

**(2) Tarawih is an emphasized sunnah while tahajjud is preferable (mustahab).**

**(3) Tarawih should be performed in congregation while tahajjud is performed individually only.**

**(4) Tarawih is only performed in the month of Ramadan while tahajjud is performed throughout the year.**

**(5) Tarawih is performed in the earlier part of the night while tahajjud is performed in the latter part of the night.**

In addition to the above, there are several hadiths wherein the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace) has specifically encouraged qiyam (standing for prayers) in Ramadan:

(1) Sayyiduna Abu Hurayrah reported Allah's Messenger (Allah bless him and give him peace) as saying: **"He who observed prayer at night during Ramadan, because of faith and seeking his reward [from Allah], his previous sins would be forgiven."** (Sahih al-Bukhari and Muslim)

(2) The Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace) said: **"Allah has enjoined (fard) the fast of Ramadan, and standing for night prayers (i.e. tarawih) was made sunnah for you; so whoever fasts and stands for night prayers because of faith and seeking his reward [from Allah], he will be freed from his sins like on the day when his mother gave birth to him".** (Sunan al-Nasai; Al-Targhib, 2:105.)

(3) Sayyiduna Abu Hurayrah reported that the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace) used to exhort [his Companions] to pray [at night] during Ramadan without commanding them to observe it as an obligatory act, and say: **"He who observed the night prayer in Ramadan because of faith and seeking his reward (from Allah), all his previous sins would be forgiven".** (Sahih Muslim)

The above-mentioned hadiths prove the fact that there is an additional prayer to be performed during the nights in the month of Ramadan. Furthermore, Allah's Messenger (Allah bless him and

give him peace) said: **“Salah is a good action, so the one who can perform it excessively should do so.”**[37] Therefore, the more salah in this month the better.

### Concluding remarks

It should also be borne in mind that the month of Ramadan is a month in which Muslims generally exert themselves in worship. Hence, this concept of performing twenty rak’ahs surely displays more exertion than eight. In fact, those who choose to perform only eight rak’ahs should examine their souls, it should not be that laziness in worship leads them to opt for lesser rak’ahs.

Lastly, the general advice of the ‘ulama is that whatever a person inculcates during Ramadan will remain with him throughout the year that follows. Ramadan serves as an opportunity to recharge one’s self if one is lacking spiritually and it also serves as a training platform for the believer. We abstain from the lawful (halal) during fasting in the day so that we can acquire the ability to shun the unlawful (haram) as well for the rest of the year.

On this note it is worth mentioning that the amount of obligatory salahs (including the Witr) that are performed daily are twenty. Therefore, one who sacrifices during the blessed month by offering these twenty rak’ahs of voluntary salah will — by the will of Allah — be punctual the rest of the year in that which is obligatory.

The masses should be cautioned against accepting such innovative views from people who claim to have knowledge but refuse to follow the way of the Companions and the Ummah in general. The issue of tarawih is one of many such erroneous views held by these deviant entities. In fact, the masses are advised against arguing with such people. They should rather refer them to the ‘ulama. And Allah knows best.

Shaykh Mohammed H. Abasoomer

#### Notes:

1. See Al-Istidhkar, vol. 5, pg. 157.
2. See Tarh al-Tathrib, part 3, pg. 97.
3. See Mirqat al-Mafatih, vol. 3, pg. 194.
4. See Tuhfat al-Akhyar.
5. See Rak’ate Tarawih, pg. 86-87.
6. Ibid., pg. 6.
7. Ibid., pgs. 1-6.
8. See Sunan al-Kubra, vol. 2, pg. 496; Nasb al-Rayah, vol. 2, pg. 154.
9. See Rak’ate Tarawih, pgs. 63-68.
10. See Sunan al-Kubra, vol. 2, pgs. 494-495.
11. See Rak’ate Tarawih, pg. 66.
12. See Fada’il Shahr Ramadan Ibn Abi Dunya, pg. 54.
13. See Musannaf Ibn Abi Shaybah, vol. 2, pg. 285.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Mukhtasar Qiyam al-Layl li 'l-Marwazi, pg. 202.
22. Ibid.
23. Sunan al-Kubra, vol. 2, pg. 495.
24. Musannaf Ibn Abi Shaybah, vol. 2, pg. 286; Bayhaqi, vol. 2, pg. 496. ↔
25. There are several examples of this, for further reading on this topic see Shaykh Isma'il ibn Muhammad Al-Ansari's refutation of the view of eight rak'ahs.
26. Musannaf Ibn Abi Shaybah, vol. 2, pg. 285-286.
27. Sunan al-Tirmidhi, vol. 1, pg. 99.
28. Sunan al-Kubra, vol. 2, pg. 496; a similar statement was made by 'Allamah Baji in Sharh al-Muwatta.
29. See Ikhtilafe Ummat, pg. 498.
30. Ibid.
31. See 'Allamah 'Abd al-Hayy Al-Lakhnawi's discussion on this in Tuhfat al-Akhyar.
32. See Jami' al-'Ulum, vol. 1, pg. 774.
33. Above quotes (1-4) were extracted from Hafiz Ibn Rajab Al-Hanbali's Jami' al-'Ulum wa 'l-Hikam, vol. 1, pgs. 776-777.
34. Radd al-Muhtar, vol. 2, pg. 493, Dar al-Kutb al-Ilmiyyah ed.
35. See Al-Ikhtiyar, vol. 1, pg. 95.
36. Shaykh 'Atiyah Salim, a renowned scholar from the Arab lands, has written a book proving that the practice of performing twenty rak'ahs in tarawih in the masjid of the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace) has been taking place for over 1000 years!
37. Al-Tabarani from the narration of Abu Hurayrah; also see Majma al-Zawa'id, 2:249.