

— THE DARK KNIGHT RISES —



# FAQS on the Night Prayer in Ramadan

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## بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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## Why is the Night Special?

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ، قَالَ كَانَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يُرَعِّبُ فِي قِيَامِ رَمَضَانَ مِنْ غَيْرِ أَنْ يَأْمُرَهُمْ فِيهِ بِعَزِيمَةٍ فَيَقُولُ " مَنْ قَامَ رَمَضَانَ إِيمَانًا وَاحْتِسَابًا غُفِرَ لَهُ مَا تَقَدَّمَ مِنْ ذَنْبِهِ ". فَتُؤْفَى رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ وَالْأَمْرُ عَلَى ذَلِكَ ثُمَّ كَانَ الْأَمْرُ عَلَى ذَلِكَ فِي خِلَافَةِ أَبِي بَكْرٍ وَصَدْرًا مِنْ خِلَافَةِ عُمَرَ عَلَى ذَلِكَ.

Abu Huraira reported:

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) 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. When Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) died, this was the practice, and it continued thus during Abu Bakr's caliphate and the early part of 'Umar's caliphate.<sup>1</sup>

There is something special about the night. It is a time of rest and also when people tend to gather with their closest people. Whether it is spending time with family at home or going out with close friends, there is a special bond that is felt with moments shared late at night.

Modern neuroscience has actually shown that there is a profound physiological shift that occurs that could explain why the late evenings are perfectly suited for moments of close connection. Melatonin is released by the pineal gland in response to the darkness of the night. This hormone induces calm, relaxation and also plays a role in reducing anxiety.<sup>2</sup> Further, the activation of the prefrontal cortex involved with decisions and plannings generally starts to fade toward the evening. So the brain is preparing individuals for rest by transitioning a person to a state of calm and relaxation. It is in this time that moments of close connection are also well suited.

<sup>1</sup> Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 759

<sup>2</sup> Repova K, Baka T, Krajcirovicova K, Stanko P, Aziriova S, Reiter RJ, Simko F. Melatonin as a Potential Approach to Anxiety Treatment. Int J Mol Sci. 2022 Dec 19;23(24):16187

The Quran confirms this,

إِنَّ نَاشِئَةَ اللَّيْلِ هِيَ أَشَدُّ وَطْئًا وَأَقْوَمُ قِيلاً

“Verily the hours of the night are more impactful and more suitable for recitation.”  
(Quran, 73:6)

At-Ṭabarī (d. 310 AH) says, “the hours of the night are more impactful than the day time and more firmly established in the heart.”<sup>3</sup>

Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597 AH) says, “the recitation at night brings the heart, the tongue, and the hearing of the worshipper into harmony, enabling a deeper understanding of the Qur’an and a firmer grasp of its meanings.”<sup>4</sup>

The impact of the words of Allah in the evening time are far greater than in the day time. The next verse,

إِنَّ لَكَ فِي النَّهَارِ سَبْحًا طَوِيلًا

“Indeed, for you by day is prolonged occupation.” (Quran, 73:7)

During the day, goal-oriented thinking is dominated by our goal-oriented activity. In the evening time is when our mind switches to what is known as the default mode network (DMN). This is a mode characterized by self-reflection, narrative building, recall of personal experiences and envisioning of the future.<sup>5</sup> The Qur’ān confirms this cognitive circadian rhythm by describing the morning as ‘prolonged’ occupation and the evening as more suitable for deep reflection.

The night is where a person desires to spend time with their closest loved ones - whether it be socializing, family time or romance. Then shouldn’t a lover of God yearn to meet Him in these silent hours of the night? The believer arises at night and calls out to His Lord, engages in intimate conversation, admits his deepest regrets, shares his aspirations and seeks protection from his worst nightmares. He recites the Words of Allah, internalizes its meanings and feels a trembling calm as he stands in the presence of the King of Kings. He falls on his knees with his face to the ground, the closest he will ever be in this world to the One who possesses unimaginable mercy, love, tenderness and compassion. The troubles of his life seem

<sup>3</sup> Jāmi’ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān, 73:6

<sup>4</sup> Zād al-Masīr fī ‘Ilm at-Tafsīr, p. 1483

<sup>5</sup> Vinod Menon. 20 years of the default mode network: A review and synthesis. Neuron, 2023, 111(16): 2469-2487.

small as they are absorbed in the oceans of Divine mercy. For when water reaches two *qullas*,<sup>6</sup> it can never become impure.

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ يَنْزِلُ رَبُّنَا تَبَارَكَ وَتَعَالَى كُلَّ لَيْلَةٍ إِلَى السَّمَاءِ الدُّنْيَا حِينَ يَبْقَى ثُلُثُ اللَّيْلِ الْآخِرِ يَقُولُ مَنْ يَدْعُونِي فَأَسْتَجِيبَ لَهُ مَنْ يَسْأَلُنِي فَأُعْطِيَهُ مَنْ يَسْتَغْفِرُنِي فَأَغْفِرَ لَهُ

Abu Huraira reported:

The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “Our Lord Almighty descends to the lowest heaven in the last third of every night, saying: Who is calling upon Me that I may answer him? Who is asking from Me that I may give him? Who is seeking My forgiveness that I may forgive him?”<sup>7</sup>

These nights of Ramaḍān are even more blessed. As our days come to an end and food has satiated our stomachs, the soul craves for private moments with its Merciful Lord. The ifṭar of the body is at Maghrib, while the feast of the soul is after ‘Ishā’.

## Technical Definition of Key Terms

- **Qiyām ul-Layl**  
Any voluntary prayer between ‘Ishā’ and Fajr in any time of the year.
- **Tarāwīḥ**  
A specific form of Qiyām ul-Layl that is done in Ramadan in Congregation.
- **Tahajjud**  
Any voluntary prayer between ‘Ishā’ and Fajr after a period of sleep
- **Witr**  
The final rak’ah prayed anytime between ‘Ishā’ and Fajr to make the total prayer an odd number.

<sup>6</sup> Reference to an issue of *fiqh* in the chapter of purification. When a body of pure water reaches the amount of ‘two qullahs’, then even if impurity mixes with it - it won’t become impure because of how large the quantity of water is.

<sup>7</sup> Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 1145

## Understanding the Night Prayer in Ramaḍān

### Why is Tarāwīḥ prayed in sets of 2?

ابن عُمَرَ، يُحَدِّثُ أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ " صَلَاةُ اللَّيْلِ مَثْنَى مَثْنَى فَإِذَا رَأَيْتَ أَنَّ الصُّبْحَ يُدْرِكُكَ فَأَوْتِرْ بِوَاحِدَةٍ " . فَقِيلَ لِابْنِ عُمَرَ مَا مَثْنَى مَثْنَى قَالَ أَنْ يُسَلَّمَ فِي كُلِّ رَكْعَتَيْنِ

Ibn 'Umar reported Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) as saying:

The night prayer consists of pairs and when you see the approach of dawn, make this number odd by one rak'ah. Ibn 'Umar was asked: What does the (word) pair imply? He said: (It means) that salutation is uttered after every two rak'ahs.<sup>8</sup>

### Why is there a break after each 4?

سَأَلَ عَائِشَةَ كَيْفَ كَانَتْ صَلَاةُ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فِي رَمَضَانَ قَالَتْ مَا كَانَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يَزِيدُ فِي رَمَضَانَ وَلَا فِي غَيْرِهِ عَلَى إِحْدَى عَشْرَةَ رَكْعَةً يُصَلِّي أَرْبَعًا فَلَا تَسْأَلُ عَنْ حُسْنِهِنَّ وَطَوْلِهِنَّ ثُمَّ يُصَلِّي أَرْبَعًا فَلَا تَسْأَلُ عَنْ حُسْنِهِنَّ وَطَوْلِهِنَّ ثُمَّ يُصَلِّي ثَلَاثًا

‘Ā’isha said:

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) did not observe either in Ramadan or in other months more than eleven rak'ahs (of the night prayer). He (in the first instance) observed four rak'ahs. Ask not about their excellence and their length (i. e. these were matchless in perfection and length). He again observed four rak'ahs, and ask not about their excellence and their length. He would then observe three rak'ahs (of the Witr prayer).<sup>9</sup>

Ibn ‘Uthaymīn comments, “It was their habit that after praying 4 units they would sit for some time as a break based on the Hadith of ‘Ā’isha.”<sup>10</sup>

### Origin of the reward for praying with the Imam in Tarāwīḥ

عَنْ أَبِي ذَرٍّ، قَالَ صُمْنَا مَعَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فِي رَمَضَانَ فَلَمْ يَقُمْ بِنَا حَتَّى بَقِيَ سَبْعٌ مِنَ الشَّهْرِ فَقَامَ بِنَا حَتَّى دَهَبَ ثُلُثُ اللَّيْلِ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَقُمْ بِنَا فِي السَّادِسَةِ فَقَامَ بِنَا فِي الْخَامِسَةِ حَتَّى

<sup>8</sup> Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 749

<sup>9</sup> Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 738

<sup>10</sup> Sharḥ Mumtī’, vol. 4, p. 65

ذَهَبَ شَطْرُ اللَّيْلِ فَقُلْتُ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ لَوْ نَفَلْنَا بَقِيَّةَ لَيْلَتِنَا هَذِهِ . قَالَ " إِنَّهُ مَنْ قَامَ مَعَ الْإِمَامِ حَتَّى يَنْصَرِفَ كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَهُ قِيَامَ لَيْلَةٍ

It was narrated that Abu Dharr said:

"We fasted with the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) in Ramadan and he did not lead us in praying Qiyam until there were seven days left in the month, when he led us in praying Qiyam until one-third of the night had passed. Then he did not lead us in praying Qiyam when there were six days left. Then he led us praying Qiyam when there were five days left until one-half of the night had passed. I said: "O Messenger of Allah! What if we spend the rest of this night praying Nafil?" He said: "Whoever prays Qiyam with the Imam until he finishes, Allah (SWT) will record for him the Qiyam of a (whole) night."<sup>11</sup>

### How many units is Tarāwīḥ?

There are multiple reports from the Prophet Muḥammad and during the time of ‘Umar with different amounts. The way in which various scholars preferenced some narrations over others is the major reason for the differences.

The authorized position of the Ḥanafīs, Shāfi’īs and Ḥanbalīs and one position from Imām Mālik is 20 *raka’āt*. Ibn al-Qāsim reports from Imām Mālik that he used to prefer 36 *raka’āt*.<sup>12</sup>

Al-Tirmidhi writes,

“The scholars differed over the night prayer in Ramadan. Some of them are of the view that it is prayed with forty-one cycles including witr prayer, which is the opinion of the people of Medina as practiced in Medina. Most of the scholars are of the opinion that it is prayed with twenty cycles, as narrated from Umar, Ali, and others among the companions of the Prophet; it is the opinion of Sufyan al-Thawri, Ibn al-Mubarak, and Al-Shafi’i. Al-Shafi’i said: Such was done in our land of Mecca, praying twenty cycles. Ahmad said it has been narrated in various ways, and he did not fix any number for it.”<sup>13</sup>

As Imām Aḥmad said, there was never a number explicitly specified by the Prophet (ﷺ). The only thing specified is that the prayer is to be done in pairs.<sup>14</sup> Those who advocate for 8 *raka’āt* base their position on the descriptions of the Prophet’s

<sup>11</sup> Nasā’ī, 1605

<sup>12</sup> Bidāyat al-Mujtahid, p. 169

<sup>13</sup> Jāmi’ at-Tirmidhī, 806

<sup>14</sup> Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 749

personal prayer 8 rak'āt and 3 witr. Many scholars from the late-modern Ahl-ul-Ḥadīth movement argued for this formulation for Tarāwīḥ including Ash-Shawkānī, Siddiq Ḥasan Khan, Al-Albānī and Ibn 'Uthaymīn.

They were not the first to put forward this position. Ibn Taymiyyah references the practice of 11 total raka'āt for Tarāwīḥ as he explains how the specific number is not a significant issue,

“It has been established in the Ṣaḥīḥ from 'Ā'ishah that the Prophet did not exceed thirteen rak'ahs in Ramaḍān or outside it. Some people became confused about this principle when they thought that the authentic hadith contradicts what is established from the Sunnah of the Rightly Guided Caliphs and the practice of the Muslims. The correct view is that all of these are good, as Imam Aḥmad explicitly stated. There is no fixed number for the night prayer in Ramaḍān, because the Prophet did not determine a specific number for it. Therefore, increasing or decreasing the number of rak'ahs depends on the length or brevity of the standing (qiyām). The Prophet used to lengthen the night prayer, to the point that it is authentically reported in the hadith of Hudhayfah ibn al-Yaman that he recited in a single rak'ah al-Baqarah, al-Nisā', and Āl 'Imrān. Thus the length of the standing compensated for the smaller number of rak'ahs. When Ubayy ibn Ka'b led them in prayer while they were a large congregation, it was not possible to lengthen the standing for them as much, so he increased the number of rak'ahs to compensate for the shorter standing. They made the number approximately double his own night prayer, since he would pray eleven or thirteen rak'ahs at night. Later, the people of Madinah became weaker in maintaining very long standing, so they increased the number of rak'ahs until they reached thirty-nine.”<sup>15</sup>

### **What is the difference between Tarāwīḥ vs Qiyām ul-Layl in the last 10 nights?**

Qiyām ul-Layl, literally “standing of the night”, is a general term used to refer to any voluntary prayer between 'Ishā' and Fajr, whether they be performed individually or congregationally. Tarāwīḥ is a specific form of Qiyām ul-Layl that is done in Ramaḍān in congregation between 'Ishā' and Fajr. It is called *Tarāwīḥ* as people take short breaks between the units.

So there is no real distinction between “Tarawīḥ” and “Qiyām ul-Layl” during the last 10 nights. It is all considered “Tarāwīḥ”. The practice of instituting extra night congregational prayers for the last 10 nights was something that started fairly

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<sup>15</sup> Majmu' al-Fatāwa, vol. 23, p. 113

recently in Masjid ul-Haram during the late 1950s CE. According to the “Haramain Archive” social media page published 13th May, 2020,

“Sheikh Abdullah Khulaify was the first to introduce Tahajjud (optional night prayer) in congregation behind one Imam in the last 10 nights of Ramadan, prior to which the people would pray in small groups around Masjid Al Haram.

In the late 1950s, Sheikh Abdullah Khulaify would lead Tahajjud Salat in a small congregation at the entrance of Salam (bab al-Salam). Day after day the congregation would increase. It was decided that only 1 Imam would lead Tahajjud in the Haram in 1 Jama’ah. This continued until present, and many Masajid across Saudi and the world followed this ruling in the last 10 nights of Ramadan.”<sup>16</sup>

These extra congregatory prayers are simply extensions of *tarawīḥ*, and are considered permissible based on the general encouragement to spend the nights of Ramadan in prayer and the added virtue of the last 10 nights.

There are some modern scholars, especially those from the school of deoband, who do not consider this from the Sunnah - especially with how late this practice started. Their preference is solitary tahajjud later in the evenings over congregational, given this was the Sunnah of the Prophet, his companions and the rest of the scholars until recent times. Others argue that this is nothing more than another tarāwīḥ session that is simply delayed until later in the evening, allowing for more opportunities for prayers.

### **Tarāwīḥ in the Masjid vs Tarāwīḥ at Home**

Imam Nawawī states in his distinguished legal commentary, “The tarāwīḥ prayer is a Sunnah by the consensus of the scholars. It is permissible to perform it individually or in congregation. Which of the two is better? There are two well-known views. The correct view, agreed upon by our companions (The Shāfi’īs), is that praying it in congregation is better. The second view is that praying it individually is better. Our scholars said: the disagreement concerns one who has memorized the Qur’an, does not fear becoming lazy if he prays alone, and whose absence does not weaken the congregational prayer in the mosque. If any of these conditions are missing, then the congregational prayer is superior without any disagreement. The author of *al-Shāmil* said: Abū al-‘Abbās and Abū Ishāq said that praying tarāwīḥ in congregation is better than praying individually because of the

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/HaramainArchives/videos/history-of-tahajjud/1512488615595077>

consensus of the Companions and the consensus of the people of the cities upon that."<sup>17</sup>

Ibn Uthaymīn also states,

“Tarāwīḥ is to be prayed in congregation. If a person prays on his own in his home, then they have not done it according to the sunnah. The proof for this is the action of the Prophet, the command of Umar and the agreement of the companions about this.”<sup>18</sup>

### Tarāwīḥ in the Masjid vs Tahajjud at Home

The majority say that solitary tahajjud at home in Ramadan is more virtuous than Tarāwīḥ in congregation<sup>19</sup>. This is based on the general ḥadīth, “The best of your prayers is done at home except for the obligatory ones.”<sup>20</sup> This is confirmed by ‘Umar’s *ijtihād* (scholarly reasoning) as reported in this important moment,

عَنْ عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ بْنِ عَبْدِ الْقَارِيِّ، أَنَّهُ قَالَ خَرَجْتُ مَعَ عُمَرَ بْنِ الْخَطَّابِ - رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ - لَيْلَةً فِي رَمَضَانَ، إِلَى الْمَسْجِدِ، فَإِذَا النَّاسُ أَوْزَاعٌ مُتَفَرِّقُونَ يُصَلِّي الرَّجُلُ لِنَفْسِهِ، وَيُصَلِّي الرَّجُلُ فَيُصَلِّي بِصَلَاتِهِ الرَّهْطُ فَقَالَ عُمَرُ إِنِّي أَرَى لَوْ جَمَعْتُ هَؤُلَاءِ عَلَى قَارِيٍّ وَاحِدٍ لَكَانَ أَمْتَلًا. ثُمَّ عَزَمَ فَجَمَعَهُمْ عَلَى أَبِي بِنِ كَعْبٍ، ثُمَّ خَرَجْتُ مَعَهُ لَيْلَةً أُخْرَى، وَالنَّاسُ يُصَلُّونَ بِصَلَاةِ قَارِيهِمْ، قَالَ عُمَرُ نِعْمَ الْبِدْعَةُ هَذِهِ، وَالَّتِي يَنَامُونَ عَنْهَا أَفْضَلُ مِنَ الَّتِي يَقُومُونَ. يُرِيدُ آخِرَ اللَّيْلِ، وَكَانَ النَّاسُ يَقُومُونَ أَوْلَاهُ.

'Abdur Rahman bin 'Abdul Qari said,

"I went out in the company of 'Umar bin Al-Khattab one night in Ramadan to the mosque and found the people praying in different groups. A man praying alone or a man praying with a little group behind him. So, 'Umar said, 'In my opinion I would better collect these (people) under the leadership of one Qari (Reciter) (i.e. let them pray in congregation!)'. So, he made up his mind to congregate them behind Ubai bin Ka'b. Then on another night I went again in his company and the people were praying behind their reciter. On that, 'Umar remarked, 'What an excellent renovation this is; but the prayer which they do not perform, but sleep at its time is better than the one they are offering.' He meant the prayer in the last part of the night. (In those days) people used to pray in the early part of the night."<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Majmū', vol. 3, p. 526

<sup>18</sup> Sharḥ Mumti', vol. 4, p. 81

<sup>19</sup> Bidāyat al-Mujtahid, p. 168

<sup>20</sup> Bukhārī, 731

<sup>21</sup> Bukhārī, 2010

## Concluding Thoughts

The nights of Ramaḍān are a gift that returns only once each year, inviting the believer to step away from the noise of the world and stand quietly before his Lord. The Qurʾān reminds us that the hours of the night carry a deeper impact upon the heart, when distractions fade and the soul becomes more receptive to reflection, repentance, and intimate conversation with Allah. Whether through Tarāwīḥ in the masjid, Qiyām in the last ten nights, or a few humble rakʿāt alone at home, the goal remains the same: to seek forgiveness, renew faith, and allow the words of Allah to settle deeply within the heart. The scholars differed on details of number and form, yet they agreed on the essence — that the nights of Ramaḍān are among the greatest opportunities for salvation. As the body finds its satisfaction at ifṭār, the soul finds its true nourishment in standing before its Lord. Fortunate indeed is the one who answers this call, rising in the stillness of the night, seeking the mercy of the One who promises to forgive all who turn to Him with sincerity.