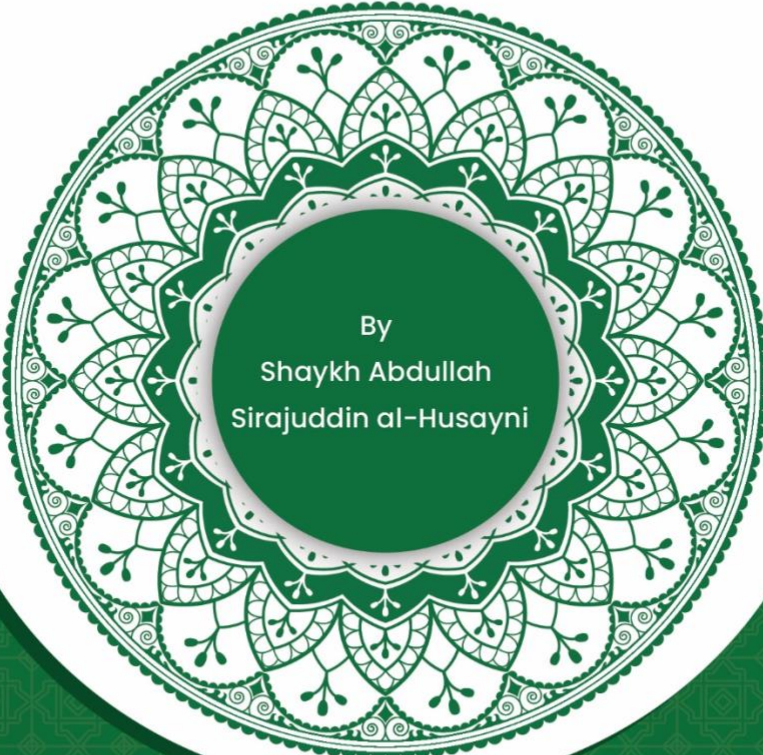


THE TARAWIH PRAYER

And The Number Of Its Units



By
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INTRODUCTION

Since the time of the Sahaba, till the present day, the *tarawih* prayer in Ramadan has been performed as twenty units. This is the case even now in the holy sanctuaries of Makkah and Medina. Nonetheless, there was historically always a discussion regarding the exact number of units to be performed amongst the great scholars of Islam. The vast majority opined that the Sunnah was to perform twenty units, yet a minority differed. What was never under question however was that the majority of the Sahaba and the Followers (*tabi'een*) would perform twenty units, and this as we will see, is one of the strongest proofs of the *tarawih* being twenty units, since it is inconceivable that the Sahaba could collectively abandon the Sunnah in such a way.

What is most problematic is not the differing of a minority of scholars, since Islamic law is vast enough to deal with and accept these types of differences. More problematic than this was the insistence in recent years of some who mistakenly claimed that twenty units was an innovation and contrary to the Sunnah. Such a claim causes a number of issues, one of them being that it accuses the blessed Sahaba of leaving the Sunnah and innovating in the religion!

For this reason, many of the people of knowledge took it upon themselves to refute the claims that the Sunnah of *tarawih* is eight units and that twenty is a baseless innovation. One of the works in this field is this booklet before you which is a translation of the chapter on *tarawih* from the book *Al-Salatu fil-Islam* by the late Syrian scholar,

Sheikh Abdullah Sirajuddin al-Husayni (may Allah have mercy on him). He authored many works and was known for his simple yet scholarly style of writing which make his books beneficial for both scholars and common Muslims. He returned to his Lord on the 4th March 2002 (1422).

As far as I am aware, this is the first time this work has been translated into English. When I first read the work I immediately desired to translate it so that more people could benefit. I suggested the idea to my teacher, Maulana Asim Awan and he said it was a good idea and he encouraged me to work on it. I ask Allah to accept these humble efforts and make this short work beneficial for all who engage with it. Anything good in this is purely from Allah Most High whilst any mistakes are mine.

Finally, at the beginning of all of his works, Sheikh Abdullah Sirajudeen requests the readers to recite *Surah al-Fatiha* and donate the reward to his father Sheikh Muhammad Najeeb Sirajuddin al-Husayni. I therefore request all of the readers of this work to recite *al-Fatiha* and to donate the reward to Sheikh Najib Sirajuddin and also Sheikh Abdullah Sirajuddin.

Bilal Choudhry (Leicester)
www.orthodoxmuslim.com
15th of Shaban 1443

The *Tarawih* prayer and the number of its units

The scholars differed regarding the number of units for the *tarawih* prayer.

Imam al-Tirmidhi said in his *Sunan* "The people of knowledge differed regarding the night prayer in Ramadan i.e. the *tarawih* prayer. Some of them opined that forty-one units should be performed including the *witr*. This is the saying of the people of Medina and this is to be practiced, according to them, in Medina.

Tirmidhi (also) said "The majority of the people of knowledge took the position that the *tarawih* prayer is twenty units as narrated from Umar, Ali and other Sahaba of the Prophet ﷺ. This was the position of (Sufyan) al-Thawri, (Abdullah) ibn al-Mubarak and Imam al-Shafi'i.

Imam al-Shafi'i said "This is what I found in our city of Makkah; they prayed twenty units."

Imam Ahmed bin Hanbal said "What has been narrated regarding this matter - the number of units in the *tarawih* prayer - are various positions, meaning there are differing narrations regarding the number of units." – He (Imam Ahmed) did not settle on a specific number.

Imam Ishaq said "Rather, we choose forty-one units based upon what was narrated from Ubay ibn Ka'b." (*Sunan Tirmidhi*)

Some of the scholars amongst the *Muhaditheen* and others considered that the number of units of the *tarawih* prayer was eight. They relied upon a narration in Sahih Bukhari and others as evidence.

Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) was asked “How was the prayer of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ in Ramadan?” She said “He would not increase, in Ramadan or other than it, to more than eleven units. He would pray four units, and do not ask about their beauty and length! Then he prayed another four units and do not ask about their beauty or length! Then he prayed three units (i.e., the *witr*). So I said ‘O Messenger of Allah. You sleep before you pray the *witr*? He said ‘O Aisha. Indeed, my eyes sleep but my heart does not sleep.’¹

The Proof of those who say the Tarawih prayer is twenty units:

Indeed, the proofs of the majority of the scholars and Imams of the Hanafis, Shafi’is, Malikis and Hanbalis that the *tarawih* prayer is twenty units are numerous. We shall mention a summary of them:

- 1) Imam al-Bayhaqi narrates in *Marifa al-Sunan wa I-athar* that al-Sa’ib bin Yazeed said “We used to stand in the time of Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) for twenty units and the *witr*.”

¹ (Translators note): The Sheikh here mentions the main narration which is used by those who insist on performing eight units. However, the scholars have clarified that the eleven units (eight plus three *witr*) mentioned by Sayidah Aisha in this Hadith are referring to the *tahajjud* (night prayer) of the Prophet ﷺ hence why she said ‘in Ramadan *or other than it*’. Another possible interpretation is that eleven units were performed initially but then the ruling changed to twenty. Also, as we will soon see, Sayidah Aisha never objected to Sayiduna Umar and the rest of the Sahaba performing twenty units, showing that she agreed with their actions.

Imam al-Nawawi said in *al-Khulasa*: It's chain of transmission (*isnad*) is sound (*saheeh*) as transmitted by (Mulla Ali) al-Qari in *al-Mirqat* and Ibn al-Humaam in *Fath al-Qadeer*.

- 2) Imam Malik narrates in *al-Muwatta* from Yazeed ibn Ruwman that he said "The people used to stand in the time of Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) in Ramadan for twenty-three units (including *witr*). It's chain of transmission is strong (*qawiy*) as noted in *Badh al-Majhud*.
- 3) Ibn Abi Shaybah narrates from Yahya ibn Sa'eed that Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) ordered a man to lead them in prayer for twenty units. It's chain of transmission is strong.
- 4) Ibn Abi Shaybah narrates in his *Musanaf* that Abd al-Aziz ibn Rafiy said: Ubay ibn Ka'b (may Allah be pleased with him) used to lead the people in twenty units of prayer during Ramadan in Medina and then pray three units of *witr*. It's chain of transmission is strong.
- 5) Ibn Abi Shaybah narrates that Ata said: I found the people praying twenty-three units including the *witr*. It's chain of transmission is good (*hasan*).
- 6) Al-Bayhaqi narrates that Abu al-Khaseeb said: Suwayd ibn Ghafalah used to lead us in prayer during Ramadan with five breaks (*tarwiyhaat*)² with twenty units. It's chain of transmission is good.

² (Translators note): The short breaks for rest we take after every four units are called *tarwiyhaat*.

- 7) Ibn Abi Shaybah narrates that Nafi said: Ibn Abi Mulaykah used to lead us in prayer in the month of Ramadan for twenty units. Its chain of transmission is sound.
- 8) Ibn Abi Shaybah narrates from Sa'd bin Ubayd that Ali ibn Rabi'ah used to lead them in prayer in Ramadan for five *tarwiyhaat* – meaning twenty units – and would perform the *witr* as three units. It's chain of transmission is sound as noted in *Badh al-Majhud Sharh Sunan Abi Dawud*.
- 9) Muhammad bin Nasr narrates in the chapter titled *the number of units in which the Imam leads the people in Ramadan*, that Zayd ibn Wahb said "Abdullah ibn Masud (may Allah be pleased with him) used to lead us in prayer during Ramadan. By the time he left it was night time."
- Al-A'mash said:** Ibn Masud (may Allah be pleased with him) used to pray twenty units and three units as *witr*.
- 10) Muhammad bin Nasr also narrates in the aforementioned chapter from Abdullah ibn Qays that Shatir, who was one of the known companions of Abdullah ibn Masud (may Allah be pleased with him), used to lead them in prayer during Ramadan for twenty units and three units of *witr*.

All of these *ahadith* and narrations, whilst combining and strengthening one another, establish a sound proof and clear evidence that the *tarawih* prayer is twenty units.

This is evident from a number of perspectives:

- 1) These narrations together prove that there is a basis (*asl*) for performing twenty units in the actions of the majority of the Sahaba and *Tabi'een*³ who were previously mentioned. It also proves that considering the *tarawih* prayer to be twenty units is not a weak opinion (*qawlan da'eefan*). Rather, the majority of the Sahaba and *Tabi'een* were upon this as proven through the previously cited reports.
- 2) These Imams from the Sahaba and *Tabi'een* who were previously mentioned, were certainly not innovators, rather, they were followers of the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ. So it is impossible, religiously and legally (*deenan wa shar'an*), that they would perform twenty units of prayer during Ramadan, lead the people in prayer, and the majority of the people would follow them and pray behind them; it is impossible for that to be from their own selves without them having an established proof from the Prophet ﷺ for the *tarawih* being twenty units.
- 3) Do you think that Umar ibn al-Khattab, Ibn Masud, Ubay ibn Ka'b (may Allah be pleased with them all) and those after them from amongst the *Tabi'een* who have been mentioned would forgo acting upon a Hadith which indicates that the *tarawih* prayer is eight units? And that they would perform twenty units without any established evidence from the Prophet? Never! Far be it from them to do such a thing! Rather, they certainly had from the Sunna of the Prophet ﷺ that which established this number of

³ (Translators note): The *Tabi'een* (followers) were those Muslims who met the Sahaba (Companions).

twenty, even if it has not been transmitted to us with a fully connected sound chain.

- 4) What we have mentioned is further supported by what is narrated by Imam al-Tabarani, Ibn Abi Shayba and al-Bayhaqi from the Hadith of Ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him and his father), which states that the Prophet ﷺ used to perform twenty units in Ramadan other than the *witr*. It's chain of transmission is weak however the aforementioned reports support it and raise it (the narration).
- 5) Our Master Umar's adherence to the Sunnah and opposition to innovations is well known and famous. It is soundly reported about him that when he kissed the black stone (*al-hajar al-aswad*) he said, "I know you cannot cause harm or give benefit. By Allah, if I had not seen the Messenger of Allah ﷺ kissing you, I would not kiss you!"

So if twenty units of *tarawih* was not something he had established from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, he would not have preceded with it nor encourage people upon it.

- 6) The silence of the Sahaba (may Allah be pleased with them) and their affirmation of Umar encouraging the people to perform twenty units of *tarawih* is a proof of this being established from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. Especially Sayidah Siddiqah the daughter of Sayiduna Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with her). Indeed her silence and absence of objection, is evidence of agreement with the action of Umar (may Allah be pleased with him), since if the action of Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) was not in conformity with the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ, then

Siddiqah certainly would have objected to it. Indeed Umar was not a tyrant whom people feared to oppose or criticise as is supported by his stance relating to the woman (in the following narration):

Hafiz Abu Ya'la narrates with his chain of transmission, that Masruq said: Umar bin Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) climbed the pulpit of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and then said "O People! What is this excess in your dowries to women? With the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and his Sahaba the dowry was four-hundred dirhams and what is less than that. If increasing upon that amount was considered piety in the sight of Allah or generosity then you would not have preceded them in doing it! So I must not know of a man who exceeds in giving a woman more than four-hundred dirhams." Then he descended from the pulpit.

A woman from Quraish objected to him and said: "O leader of the believers. Are you prohibiting the people from increasing the dowry of a women more than four-hundred dirhams?"

He said "Yes." So she said "Have you not heard what Allah sent down in the Quran?"

He said "And what is that?"

She said "Have you not heard Allah saying: ***"...even if you have given her a great amount of gold, then do not take any of it back."*** (Surah an-Nisa: 20)

So Umar said "O Allah, forgiveness! Everyone is more intelligent than you O Umar!"

According to another narration Umar said “The women was right and the man was wrong.” Then he returned to the pulpit and said “O people. I used to prohibit you from increasing the dowry of women more than four-hundred dirhams. However (now I say), whoever wants to give from his wealth whatever he wishes can do so.” The chain of transmission is good and strong.

- 7) Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) ordered the people to perform *tarawih* as twenty units. This is something in which there is no scope for opinion or *ijtihad*⁴. It is therefore inevitable that he had a proof which traces back to the Prophet ﷺ.

This is just as has been mentioned in *al-ikhtiyar* from Abu Yusuf who said “I asked Abu Hanifa about the *tarawih* prayer and Umar’s actions in relation to it.”

He (Abu Hanifa) said “The *tarawih* is an emphasised Sunnah (*Sunnah Muakadah*) and Umar did not fabricate something about it from himself, nor did he innovate anything in it and nor did he order others regarding it except that he had a basis for it and a covenant from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.”

- 8) When we perform the *tarawih* prayer as twenty units, we do not contradict the action of the Prophet ﷺ and his Sunnah. Rather, we establish the act according to his Sunnah and implement it in the way that the Sahaba understood the Sunnah of *tarawih* to be. Indeed Umar ibn

⁴ (Translator’s note) *Ijtihad* is when a qualified scholar strives to derive a legal ruling from the Quran and Sunnah on a matter.

al-Khattab, Ibn Masud and Ubay ibn Ka'b (may Allah be pleased with them) prayed it as twenty units and in doing so they were adhering to his ﷺ Sunnah as established according to them. So we also pray similarly and thereby act upon the Sunnah; in accordance with what was established by those Sahaba i.e. twenty units.

- 9) When we perform the *tarawih* prayer as twenty units, we are establishing the act according to the Sunnah of *tarawih* in a way which the Messenger of Allah ﷺ commanded us when he said "Follow two people after me; Abu Bakr and Umar." (Narrated by al-Tirmidhi)

There is also his ﷺ saying "Indeed some of you who live will soon see much disagreement. I therefore order you to adhere to my Sunnah and the Sunnah of the Rightly Guided Caliphs⁵. Cling to it with your teeth! And be wary of newly invented matter for indeed every innovation is misguidance."

From this we know that Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali (may Allah be pleased with them) were not innovators! Rather, they were Imams who followed. And when we perform *tarawih* as twenty units, we are in line with following the established truth from him ﷺ in the way which was understood and established by Umar (may Allah be pleased with him); and adopted by the people.

Imam Tirmidhi narrated (and authenticated the narration) that (Abdullah) ibn Umar (may Allah be pleased with him

⁵ (Translator's note) The Rightly Guided Caliphs are Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali.

and his father) said that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said “Indeed Allah has placed the truth upon the tongue of Umar and in his heart.”

And Ibn Umar said “There was never a situation that afflicted the people, they spoke about it and Umar would also speak about it, except that verses of the Quran would be revealed regarding it in confirmation of what Umar said.”

It is therefore said to the one who rejects twenty units and believes that the truth is contrary to what Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) ordered: Twenty units is correct just as Umar ordered and just as the Sahaba (may Allah be pleased with them) confirmed. This is because Allah Most High placed the truth on his tongue and heart as testified by the Prophet ﷺ.

- 10)** All of this is not contradicted by what is narrated in *al-Muwatta*⁶, that Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) would order that the *tarawih* including the *witr* to be performed as eleven units. The interpretation for this is that Umar only commanded this initially, as established by the Hadith of Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) which was previously mentioned. Then after that he ordered people to pray the *tarawih* in twenty units, as when he and others had established via strengthened evidence that the Prophet ﷺ would perform twenty units, he ordered people to do that.

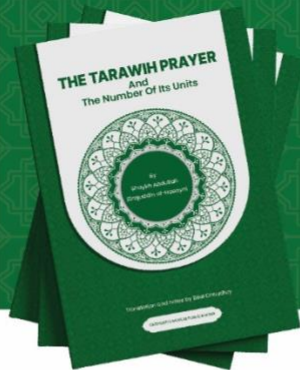
⁶ (Translators note) A book of Hadith compiled by Imam Malik bin Anas

- 11) What further proves this, is that Imam Malik (may Allah be pleased with him), who narrated the report which mentions eight units as well as the report mentioning twenty units, did not adopt the narration of eight units but rather adopted the narrations of twenty units, as mentioned in *Mukhtasar Khalil*. He said "Then it was made thirty-six units." The commentator (of *Mukhtasar Khalil*) said "And it (thirty-six units) is the preferred opinion of Malik in *al-Mudawanah* where he says "This is what the people have continued acting upon (i.e. in *al-Medina al-Munawarah*)."⁷

Finally we say, indeed the previously mentioned Sahaba and *Tabi'een* (may Allah be pleased with them) all established the practise of twenty units as did the Four Imams⁸ and those who follow them. All of these were reliable, God-fearing, pious, followers (of the Sunnah) who were not innovators. Considering them to be ignorant, criticising them or calling them unreliable in transmission, is tantamount to criticism of the core of the *sharia* and its rulings! This is because *they are* the conveyors of the *sharia* and the people of its chains of transmission.

⁷ (Translators note) At the time of Imam Malik in the city of Medina they would add an extra sixteen units to the twenty. The reason they did this was because in Makkah after every four units they would perform *tawaf* around the *Ka'bah*. Since they could not do this in Medina, they would pray an extra four units individually between each four with the congregation.

⁸ (Translators note) I.e. Imam Abu Hanifa, Imam Malik, Imam al-Shafi'i and Imam Ahmed bin Hanbal



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