

Tahajjud - Praying at Night

Translated from the Indonesian, and extracted from "Pedoman Shalat",
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The verb *tahajjada* means "to stay awake at **night**, keep a **night** vigil, spend the **night** in prayer". Imam ash-Shafi'i stated that 'Prayer at **night**, whether before sleeping or after and the prayer of witr, is called **tahajjud**'. Ibn Faris said that a mutahajjid (one who performs **tahajjud**) was 'one who performs prayer at **night**'.

Salat at-**tahajjud** is classified as a prayer which is '*Sunnahtun raatibun Mu'akaadah*' (a sunnah prayer which is organised or regulated - regarding time-and the performance of which is emphasised).

The Messenger of Allah (salAllahu alayhi wasalam) used to perform such prayers habitually when resident in a community (hadar) and strongly encouraged his followers to perform them also. Salat at-**Tahajjud** is divided into:

- (a) two rak'as iftitaah ("opening" or "beginning"- that is before performing the salat at **tahajjud** proper),
- (b) eight or ten rak'ahs of salat at-**tahajjud**, which are finally followed by salatul witr.

The meaning of witr

A proportion of investigators (verifiers- ahlu-t tahqiq) have stated that witr is the name given to one rak'ah which is separated from those proceeding it, or the name given to prayer or an odd number of rak'as; that is five, seven, of nine rak'as offered one after the other. And witr constitutes the conclusion of the prayers at **night**.

The times for tahajjud and witr

The times for offering the sunnah of **tahajjud** and witr are from the completion of salat ual 'isha and its sunnah prayers until the time for offering salat al fajr.

The Messenger of Allah (salAllahu alayhi wasalam) sometimes offered salat al witr early in the **night**, sometimes in the middle of the **night**, and sometimes at the end of the **night**. Whenever one is unable to offer salat al witr before Fajr, he should offer it before per- forming salat al Fajr.

The Messenger of Allah (salAllahu alayhi wasalam) would get up from sleeping after midnight, or sometimes before midnight, and sometimes when the cocks were

crowing. After he had got up, he would wipe his eyes with his hand and would then go and brush his teeth and make wudu'. At this time he would recite the ending of Surah ali-'Imran from ayah 190 to ayah 200 (from inna fi Ahalqi-s samaawaati wa-l ard ...). Having done this he would quickly begin his **praying** for the **night** with two rak'ahs iftitatah offered lightly.

Al Hafiz Ibnu Hajar al Asqalani has stated that the Prophet (salAllahu alayhi wasalam) did not have a definite time for performing **Tahajjud**, simply following that which he was able to do easiest. However, the best time is that we should delay until the last third of the **night**.

Abu Muslim asked Abu Dharr, "Which time is the best for us to perform the prayers at **night**?" Abu Dharr replied, "I once asked the Messenger of Allah just as you have asked me.

The Messenger replied (jawfu-l layli-l ghabee wa qaleelun faa'iluh). *'Past the middle of, the **night** and few are those who do it'* "

[Ahmad].

Umar said that those who perform it at the end of the **night** are better than those who perform it at the beginning of the **night**.

The number of rak'ahs is not limited for prayer at **night**, and it is considered that we have offered it if we offer one rak'ah of witr after offering salat alIsha. At-Tabarani (in Al habir) reports from Abdullah ibn Abbas,

"The Messenger of Allah (salAllahu alayhi wasalam) commanded us to perform the prayer at **night** (amaranaa . . . bi salaati-l layli), and requested us (eagerly) to perform it until he said, 'Look to your prayer at **night**, even if it be one rak'ah' "

The best is that we should regularly perform either 11 or 13 rak'as (plus 2 rak'as iftitaah)- that is, eight or ten rak'as plus three rak'as of witr. We can choose whether to offer them one after the other, or to split them up. If we are unable to perform them at **night** because of illness or other cause, we ought to offer 12 rak'as during the morning.

It is related by the Jama'ah of Muhaddithin (except Bukhari) from 'Umar that the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said

"Whoever over- slept his portion (of prayer, etc.) or anything of it and he recited it between salat al-Fajr and salat ad-Duhr it would be written as though he had recited it at **night**" (man naama 'an hizbihi aw 'an shay'in minhu faqara'ahu maa bayna salaatu-lfajri wasalaatu-z zuhri kataba ka'annamaa qar'ahu mina-l layl).

The manner of performing Prayer at Night

There could be many methods of offering Prayer at **Night**, and so for simplicity we could adhere to one manner only or follow one manner on one occasion and another on another, The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, performed the Prayer at **Night** according to two general methods:

- (a) combining Salaat ut **Tahajjud** with salat al witr, and
- (b) offering salat al witr only.

Salat at Tahajjud combined with witr

Among the ways of offering salat at-**Tahajjud** combined with salat al-witr are:

1. A method explained by Abdullah ibn Abbas - The Prophet (salAllahu alayhi wasalam) got up from sleeping, brushed his teeth, made wudu and recited the last ayats of Surah Ali-'Imran. Then he stood and prayed two rak'ahs drawing out the standing (qiyam), ruku' and sujud, and after that he slept again.

After sleeping for a while he got up and made wudu, brushing his teeth again, and then recited the last ayats of Surah ali-'Imran. He then offered two rak'as. Having done that he slept again. Having slept for a while he arose, cleaned his teeth, made wudu' and then recited the last ayats of Surah ali-'Imran.

Having done that he offered two rak'ahs and then three rak'ahs of salat al-witr. When adhan for Fajr sounded, he then went out to the mosque reciting at the same time,

'O Allah, cause light in my heart and light on my tongue (in my speech) and cause light in my hearing and cause light in my seeing, and cause light behind me and light in front of me and cause light above me and below me, O Allah grant me light'
[Muslim]

2. A method explained by A'isha - The Prophet (salAllahu alayhi wasalam) began Prayer at **Night** with two rak'as offered lightly. After that he performed ten rak'ahs of salat at-**Tahajjud** with five salaams, and after that he performed one rak'ah of salat al-witr.

3. A method from Ibn Yazid - The Prophet (salAllahu alayhi wasalam) offered thirteen rak'ahs, that is: two rak'ahs iftitaah, eight rak'ahs of Salat al **Tahajjud**, and three rak'ahs of Sunnat ul Witr.

4. A method from A'isha - The Prophet (salAllahu alayhi wasalam) performed two rak'ahs iftitaah. After that he offered six rak'ahs of salat at-**Tahajjud** of three salaams, and after that he offered five rak'ahs of salat al-witr all at one go, He only sat for tashahhud (saying the shahadah) at the end of the fifth rak'a.

5. A method from Umar - The Prophet (salAllahu alayhi wasalam) performed eight rak'ahs of salat at-**Tahajjud** of four salaams and then he performed one rak'ah of salat al-witr.

6. A method from A'isha - The Prophet (salAllahu alayhi wasalam) offered eight rak'ahs of salat at-**Tahajjud** with two salaams - and he sat for tashahhud at the end of each four rak'ahs - and after that he offered three rak'ahs of salat al-witr.

Clearly this athar from A'isha is saying that the Prophet offered each four rak'ahs straight off-four rak'ahs, one salaam. (vide Subh-e Salaam - sharh Bulughu-l Maram compiled by Imam 'Amir As San'ani)

7. We could also offer six rak'ahs of salat at-**Tahajjud** with three salaams and then offer one rak'ah of salat al-witr, just as we could offer four rak'ahs of salat at-**Tahajjud** with two salaams, and one rak'ah of salat al-witr, by bearing in mind the hadith

"The Prayer at **Night** is two by two, but if you are afraid you are entering subh then offer an odd one (of witr)" (salaatu-l layli mathnaa mathnaa fa'idha khashiya akhadhukummu-s subha fal youtir waahidatin)
[Ahmad, Bukhari and Muslim]

8. We could also offer two rak'ahs only of salat at-**Tahajjud** and then conclude with one rak'ah of salat al-witr, in conformity with the above hadith.

These are the ways in which the Messenger of Allah (salAllahu alayhi wasalam) used to offer salat at-**Tahajjud** when combining it with salat al-Witr.

The position of Iftitaah

Among the points which we ought to take note of is beginning the Prayer at **Night** with two rak'ahs of iftitaah. The Messenger of Allah (salAllahu alayhi wasalam) said,

"If one of you stands (to pray) at **night**, then let him begin his **praying** with two rak'ahs offered lightly" (idha qaama ahadukum inina-l layli fal yaftatih salaataliu bi rak'atayni khafiifatayn).

[Ahmad, Muslim, and Abu Dawud]

The quantity recited in each rak'ah of Prayer at Night

Ubay bin Ka'b and Tamin Ad-Darimi used to recite as many as two hundred ayats in each rak'ah of Prayer at **Night**. During the period of the Tabi'in (the generation following the Companions), surah al-Baqarah was divided up among eight rak'ahs. Malik and Ishaq used to like to read at the very least ten ayats in each rak'ah.

On one occasion, Huddhayfah performed the Prayer at **Night** behind the Messenger of Allah (salAllahu alayhi wasalam). He heard the Messenger recite surah al-Baqarah, Surah ali-'Imran, and surah al-Nisa.

Whenever he reached an ayah which conveyed a warning to be afraid of, he paused for a moment. As a result of this The Messenger of Allah (salAllahu alayhi wasalam) had only just completed his two rak'ahs when Bilal entered the mosque to give adhan for Fajr.

[[Mainpage](#)] [[Prayer](#)] [[Du'a](#)] [[Dhikr](#)] [[Tafakkur](#)] [[Stories](#)] [[Health](#)] [[Games](#)] [[Active](#)]