



Fatwa no. 3953

Q: What is the opinion of the Fuqaha' (Muslim jurists) and scholars of religion on Tarawih (special supererogatory night Prayer in Ramadan)? Is it twenty or eight Rak'ahs (units of Prayer) - according to the Sunnah? If the Sunnah is to offer it as eight Rak'ahs, why is it offered as twenty Rak'ahs in Al-Masjid Al-Nabawy (the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah)? Most people conclude from that it is the Sunnah to offer it as twenty Rak'ahs.

A: Tarawih is a Sunnah (supererogatory act of worship following the example of the Prophet) initiated by the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him). There are proofs that he (peace be upon him) never offered more than eleven Rak'ahs, whether in Ramadan or at any other time.

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Abu Salamah asked `Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her) about the manner in which the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) used to offer supererogatory Salah (Prayer) in Ramadan. She said, «The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) did not pray more than eleven Rak'ahs in Ramadan or at any other time. He would pray four Rak'ahs, and do not ask about their beauty and length, then he would pray four Rak'ahs, and do not ask about their beauty and length, then he would pray three Rak'ahs.» `Aishah added, 'I asked: O Messenger of Allah! Will you sleep before offering the Witr (Prayer with an odd number of units)?' He said, 'O `Aishah! My eyes sleep but my heart does not.'» (Agreed upon by Al-Bukhari and Muslim) It was also authentically reported that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) used to offer thirteen Rak'ahs on some nights. Thus, the words of `Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her) when she said that «The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) did not pray more than eleven Rak'ahs in Ramadan or at any other time» should be interpreted according to the more frequent practice of the Prophet (peace be upon him) in order to reconcile between the Hadiths. There is nothing wrong in offering more than this, as the Prophet (peace be upon him) did not set a specific limit for optional Night Prayer. When he was asked about it, he (peace be upon him) stated: «(Optional) Night Salah is two Rak'ahs followed by two Rak'ahs (and so on), and when one of you fears the break of dawn (Fajr Prayer), let them offer a single Rak'ah to make the Salah they have offered Witr (Prayer with an odd number of units).» (Agreed upon by Al-Bukhari and Muslim) He (peace be upon him) did not set a limit, whether eleven Rak'ahs or anything else, which indicates the flexibility in

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optional Night Prayer, whether in Ramadan or at any other time.

May Allah grant us success! May peace and blessings be upon our Prophet Muhammad, his family and Companions!

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Source: Fatwas of the Permanent Committee