187769 - Is It Sunnah to Make Supererogatory Prayers Brief?

the question

I want to ask about Nafl (supererogatory) prayers: is it permissible or obligatory to make them brief like the two Rak`ahs of Fajr?

Summary of answer

It is Sunnah to make these Nafl prayers brief:

1. Two Rak`ahs before Fajr prayer
2. Tahiyyat Al-masjid
3. Starting voluntary night prayers with two brief Rak`ahs
4. Two Rak`ahs following Tawaf.

It is Sunnah to make the following prayers lengthy:

1. The eclipse prayer
2. Qiyam Al-layl

With regard to Sunnah prayers other than that, one should do what helps him be more focused.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Nafl (supererogatory) prayers may be divided into three categories with regard to whether it is prescribed to make them brief or not:

1. The first category is Nafl prayers in which it is Sunnah to make them brief. These include:

- The two Rak`ahs before Fajr prayer.

Al-Bukhari (1165) narrated that `Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her) said: The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) used to make brief the two Rak`ahs before Fajr prayer,

to the extent that I would say: Did he recite the Mother of the Book (Umm Al-Kitab – i.e., Al-Fatihah)?

Shaykh Ibn `Uthaymin (may Allah have mercy on him) said: The Sunnah with regard to the Sunnah prayer of Fajr is to make it brief, and to recite in the first Rak`ah "Qul ya ayyuha Al-kafirun (Say (O Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) to these Mushrikun and Kafirun): O Al-Kafirun (disbelievers))" [Surat Al-Kafirun 109] and in the second Rak`ah "Qul Huwa Allahu Ahad (Say (O Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)): He is Allah, (the) One)" [Surat Al-Ikhlas 112], or to recite in the first Rak`ah "Say (O Muslims), `We believe in Allah and that which has been sent down to us…" [Al-Baqarah 2:136] and in the second Rak`ah "Say (O Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)): "O people of the Scripture (Jews and Christians): Come to a word that is just between us and you…" [Al `Imran 3:64]

Bowing should also be made brief; so it should be limited to the minimum recommended count, which means saying three times "Subhana Rabbiy Al-`Athim (Glory be to my Lord the Almighty)". Prostration should be made similarly brief, and the Tashahhud should also not be made lengthy. This is the Sunnah of the Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)." (Liqa` Al-Bab Al-Maftuh)

- Tahiyyat Al-Masjid (two Rak`ahs to "greet the mosque" upon entering), if the Imam is speaking (on Friday).

Muslim (875) narrated that Jabir ibn `Abdullah (may Allah be pleased with him) said: Sulayk Al-Ghatafani came on a Friday when the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was delivering the Khutbah, and sat down. He (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said to him: "O Sulayk, get up and pray two Rak`ahs, and make them brief." Then he said: "If one of you comes on a Friday and the Imam is delivering the Khutbah, let him pray two Rak`ahs and make them brief."

- Starting voluntary night prayers with two brief Rak`ahs.

Abu Dawud (1323) narrated that Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The

Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “If one of you gets up to pray at night, let him pray two brief Rak`ahs.” And that was proven in his actions (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), as was narrated in Muslim, in the Hadith of Ibn `Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him).

- That also includes the two Rak`ahs following Tawaf; what is prescribed in this case is to recite briefly, similar to the recitation in the Sunnah prayers of Fajr and Maghrib.

Shaykh Ibn `Uthaymin (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

“It should be noted that what is prescribed in the case of these two Rak`ahs is to make them brief, and to recite in them “Qul ya ayyuha Al-kafirun (Say (O Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) to these Mushrikun and Kafirun): O Al-Kafirun (disbelievers))” [Al-Kafirun 109] and “Qul Huwa Allahu Ahad (Say (O Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)): He is Allah, (the) One)” [Al-Ikhlas 112]. And there is no Du`a` to be recited before or after them.” (Majmu` Fatawa Ibn `Uthaymin, 24/463-464)

1. The second category is Nafl prayers in which it is Sunnah to make them lengthy, such as the eclipse prayer and Qiyam Al-layl .

It is proven that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) made the recitation lengthy in the eclipse prayer. Al-Bukhari (5197) and Muslim (907) narrated that `Abdullah ibn `Abbas (may Allah be pleased with them) said: The sun was eclipsed at the time of the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), and the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) prayed and the people with him. He stood for a long time, almost as long as it takes to recite Surat Al-Baqarah.

Shaykh Al-Mubarakfuri (may Allah have mercy on him) said: “The Hadith indicates that it is prescribed to make the standing lengthy by reciting a long surah in the eclipse prayer , and this is recommended according to all scholars.” (Mir`at Al-Mafatih Sharh Mishkat Al-Masabih, 5/136)

With regard to the description of the prayer of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon

him) at night, `Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her) described it in two words: long and beautiful. She (may Allah be pleased with her) said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did not pray more, in Ramadan or at any other time, than eleven Rak`ahs. He would pray four, and do not ask how beautiful and long they were. Then he would pray four, and do not ask how beautiful and long they were. Then he would pray three. (Narrated by Muslim, 738)

An-Nawawi (may Allah have mercy on him) said: "In this Hadith – along with the Hadiths that are mentioned after it – we see, concerning making the recitation and standing lengthy, evidence to support the view of Ash-Shafi`i and others who said that making the standing lengthy is better than doing a lot of bowing and prostrating." (Sharh Sahih Muslim)

1. The third category is Nafl prayers concerning which there is no report from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) to say whether he made them brief or lengthy.

With regard to this type of Nafl prayers, there is a difference of opinion among the scholars: is it better to make the standing lengthy, or is it better to do a lot of bowing and prostrating?

The Hanbalis (may Allah have mercy on them) are of the view that doing a lot of prostration and bowing is better than making the standing lengthy.

Al-Buhuti (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

"With regard to that in which it is narrated that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) made it brief, such as the two Rak`ahs before Fajr, the two Rak`ahs at the beginning of Qiyam Al-layl , or Tahiyyat Al-Masjid if one enters when the Imam is delivering the Khutbah on Friday; or it is narrated that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) made them lengthy, such as the eclipse prayer, then what is preferable is to follow him, because Allah, may He be Exalted, says (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him): "Indeed in the Messenger of Allah (Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)) you have a good example to follow" [Al-Ahzab 33:31]. Apart from that – i.e., apart from cases in which it was narrated from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) that he made the prayers brief or lengthy – doing a lot

of bowing and prostrating is better than making the standing lengthy, because the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “The closest that a person is to his Lord is when he is prostrating.” And it was narrated that Thawban (may Allah be pleased with him) said: I heard the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) say: “You should prostrate a great deal, for you will never prostrate to Allah once but He will raise you one degree in status thereby and erase one sin from you thereby.” … And because prostration in and of itself is better and of more significance, based on the fact that it is obligatory in both obligatory and supererogatory prayers, and it is not permissible to prostrate under any circumstances to any but Allah, may He be Exalted. In contrast, standing is waived in supererogatory prayers, and it is permissible in situations other than prayer, such as standing up out of respect for one`s parents, teachers, and the leader of the people. And doing a lot of that which is of greater significance and better is more appropriate.” (Kashshaf Al-Qina`, 1/441)

The Shafi`is (may Allah have mercy on them) are of the view that making the standing lengthy is better than doing a lot of prostration and bowing.

An-Nawawi (may Allah have mercy on him) said: “Making the standing lengthy, in our view, is better than making the prostration, bowing and so on lengthy, and it is better than doing a lot of Rak`ahs.” (Al-Majmu`, 3/537)

Some of the scholars are of the view that there should be a differentiation between prayers offered at night and prayers offered during the day.

Ash-Shawkani (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

“Ishaq ibn Rahawayh said: With regard to (prayers) during the day, doing a lot of bowing and prostration is better; with regard to (prayers) during the night, making the standing lengthy is better, unless a man has a Juz` that he recites at night, in which case doing a lot of bowing and prostrating is better, because he can recite his juz` and earn reward by bowing and prostrating.

Ibn `Adiyy (may Allah have mercy on him) said: Ishaq only said this because they described the prayers of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) at night as involving lengthy

standing, and his prayers during the day were not described as being lengthy in the way that his prayers at night were described." (Nayl Al-Awtar, 3/91)

In conclusion, with regard to that concerning which it is narrated from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) that he made it brief in word or deed, the Sunnah is to make it brief. With regard to Nafl prayers concerning which it is narrated that he made it lengthy, the Sunnah is to make it lengthy. With regard to Nafl prayers other than that, the scholars differed as to whether it is better to make the standing lengthy or to do a lot of bowing and prostration.

In such cases it may be said: Do what is better for you and what. If making the standing lengthy is better and makes you more focused, then you should do that. If doing a lot of prostration is better, then you should do that. It was narrated from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) that he said: "When one of you prays alone, let him pray as he likes." (Narrated by Muslim, 467)

Shaykh Ibn `Uthaymin (may Allah have mercy on him) said commenting on the phrase, "See what is better for you and makes you more focused, and do that":

"The person who is wise and guided will know how he should perform acts of worship that are not obligatory; he can compare and weigh up which interests may be served by different ways, and do what is most appropriate for him." (Ash-Sharh Al-Mumti`, 5/79-80)

And Allah knows best.