21467 - Not doing regular Sunnah prayers whilst travelling apart from the Sunnah of Fajr

the question

When traveling i know it is better to short the prayers, however are thesunnah prayers to be omitted or not? in my knowledge i was praying the sunnah prayers but i have no hadith to support this act.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

It was the practice of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) when travelling to pray the obligatory prayers only, and it was not narrated that he used to pray the regular Sunnah prayers either before or after the fard prayers.

It was narrated that ‘Aasim ibn ‘Umar ibn al-Khattaab said: “I accompanied Ibn ‘Umar on the way to Makkah. He led us in praying two rak’ahs of Zuhr prayer, then he left and we left with him until he came to where his luggage was. He sat down and we sat with him, then he looked towards the place where we had prayed, and he saw some people standing and he asked, ‘What are these people doing?’ I said, ‘They are praying voluntary prayers.’ He said, ‘If I wanted to pray (naafil or Sunnah prayers) after the fard prayer I would have completed my prayer (i.e., not shortened it).’ O son of my brother, I accompanied the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) whilst travelling and he did not add anything to these two rak’ahs until Allah took him (in death); and I accompanied Abu Bakr and he did not add anything to these two rak’ahs until Allah took him (in death); and I accompanied ‘Umar and he did not add anything to these two rak’ahs until Allah took him (in death); and I accompanied ‘Uthmaan and he did not add anything to these two rak’ahs until Allah took him (in death). And Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

‘Indeed in the Messenger of Allah (Muhammad) you have a good example to follow’ [al-Ahzaab 33:21].”

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said: This demonstrates his understanding, may Allah be pleased with him. For Allah has reduced the four-rak’ah prayers for the traveller by half. If it were prescribed to pray the two rak’ahs (of Sunnah prayer) before and after, it would be more appropriate to pray the fard prayer in full.

Zaad al-Ma’aad, 1/316

Another factor which indicates that it is prescribed to omit the regular Sunnah prayers whilst travelling is the saheeh report from Ibn ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) who said: “The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) combined Maghrib and ‘Isha prayer in Jam’ (i.e., Muzdalifah), reciting the iqaamah for each of them, and he did not pray Sunnah in between or after either of them.”

Narrated by al-Bukhari, 1673.

And it was narrated that Jaabir ibn ‘Abd-Allah said: The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) traveled until he reached ‘Arafah, where he found that the tent had been set up for him in Namirah. He stayed there until the sun had passed its zenith, then he called for al-Qaswa’ (his camel) to be saddled, and he rode to the bottom of the valley, where he addressed the people. Then he told Bilaal to give the adhaan (call to prayer) then the iqaamah, then he prayed Zuhr, and then Bilaal recited another iqaamah and he prayed ‘Asr, and he did not pray anything in between.”

Narrated by Muslim, 1218.

But an exception is made from the above in the case of the regular Sunnah prayer of Fajr, which is to be performed when travelling just as it is performed when one is not travelling. Ibn al-Qayyim said:

“It was the practice of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) when travelling to

pray only the obligatory prayers, and it was not narrated that he used to pray the regular Sunnah prayers either before or after the fard prayers, apart from Witr and the Sunnah of Fajr, which he never omitted whether he was travelling or not.”

Zaad al-Ma’aad, 1/473

And he said:

“His adherence to praying the Sunnah of Fajr was stronger than with all other naafil prayers, so he did not omit it or Witr whether he was travelling or not. When he was travelling he would still pray the Sunnah of Fajr and Witr and adhere to that more than all other naafil prayers. It is not narrated that he prayed any other regular Sunnah prayer when he was travelling.”

Zaad al-Ma’aad, 1/315

It was narrated that Abu Qutaadah (may Allah be pleased with him) said: “The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was on a journey and the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) stopped to rest and I stopped with him. He said, ‘Look!’ I said, ‘Here is one rider, two riders, three…’ until there were seven of us. He said, ‘Make sure that we do not miss our prayer’ – meaning Fajr prayer. But they slept deeply and nothing woke them but the heat of the sun. Then they got up and traveled on for a while, then they stopped and did wudoo’, and Bilaal gave the adhaan and they prayed two rak’ahs of Fajr then they prayed Fajr, then they rode on. They said to one another, ‘We have been negligent concerning our prayer.’ The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, ‘There is no negligence in sleep, rather negligence comes when one is awake. If one of you forgets his prayer, let him pray when he remembers.’”

Narrated by Muslim, 681

In the chapter called Kitaab Salaat al-Musaafireen wa qasriha (The prayer of travelers and shortening the prayer) (no. 724), Imam Muslim narrates from ‘Aa’ishah that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was not more keen to pray any naafil prayers regularly than the two rak’ahs before Fajr.

Similarly it is prescribed for the traveller to continue to pray Witr, qiyaam al-layl (naafil prayers at night), Duha prayer and all prayers done for a reason such as praying after each wudoo', salaat al-tawbah (prayer of repentance), tahiyyat al-masjid (greeting the mosque), two rak'ahs following Tawaaf, etc. Similarly, it is not forbidden to pray naafil at all.

This is indicated by the following ahaadeeth:

1 – It was narrated that Abu Hurayrah said: My dear friend [the Prophet] (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) enjoined three things upon me which I will not give up whether I am travelling or not: two rak'ahs of Duha prayer, fasting three days of each month and not going to sleep until I have prayed Witr."

Saheeh Sunan Abi Dawood, 1269.

2 – It was narrated that Ibn 'Umar said: The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) used to pray qiyaam al-layl atop his camel when he was travelling, no matter what direction it was facing, gesturing to represent the movements of the prayer, apart from the obligatory prayers, and he would pray Witr atop his camel.

Narrated by al-Bukhari, 1000.

According to another report: The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) used to pray naafil prayers atop his camel, no matter what direction it was facing, and he would pray Witr like that too, but he did not pray the prescribed prayers like that.

Narrated by al-Bukhari, 1098.

3 – It was narrated that Jaabir ibn 'Abd-Allah said: The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) used to pray atop his camel, no matter what direction it was facing, but when he wanted to pray an obligatory prayer, he would dismount and face the qiblah.

Narrated by al-Bukhari, 400.

4 – It was narrated from al-Nadr the freed slave of 'Umar ibn 'Ubayd-Allah that Abu Murrah the

freed slave of Umm Haani' bint Abi Taalib told him that he heard Umm Haani' bint Abi Taalib say, "I went to the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) during the year of the Conquest [of Makkah] and I found him doing ghusl and his daughter Faatimah was screening him. So I greeted him with salaam and he said, 'Who is that?' I said, 'Umm Haani' bint Abi Taalib.' He said, 'Welcome, Umm Haani'.' When he had finished doing ghusl he stood up and prayed eight rak'ahs, wearing a single garment wrapped around his body. When he finished, I said, 'O Messenger of Allah, my brother said that he is going to kill a man to whom I have given protection, So and so the son of Hubayrah.' The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, 'We will give protection to the person to whom you have given protection, O Umm Haani,'' and that was at the time of Duha (forenoon)."

Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 357

The point is that it is prescribed to omit the regular Sunnah prayers for those who are travelling, and to limit it to the two Sunnah rak'ahs of Fajr. It is also prescribed for the traveller to continue to pray Salaat al-Witr, qiyaam al-layl, Duha and prayers done for specific reasons, and naafil prayers in general. From this you may understand that what some people say, that part of the Sunnah whilst travelling is not to pray Sunnah, is wrong. Apart from the fact that this does not make sense, it also goes against the saheeh Sunnah narrated from the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). The correct view is that not praying Sunnah whilst travelling refers to the regular Sunnah prayers that are done before and after Zuhr, and after Maghrib and 'Isha'.

And Allah knows best.