135415 - How to Pray `Isha’ When Twilight is Delayed

the question

We are Saudi students who have been sent to study in the UK, specifically in the city of Birmingham. Nowadays, with the beginning of summer, we are faced with the problem of a long time between the beginning of the time for Maghrib and the beginning of the time for `Isha’. Every year there are arguments among the Muslims about what to do. Some mosques to pray `Isha’ 90 minutes after the time for Maghrib begins, whilst others wait until the red afterglow disappears, for a period of up to 3 hours on occasion! Which causes hardship for people, especially as the night is so short.

On days like this, the Muslims in the student halls of residence pray `Isha’ in two congregations: the first group prays after 90 minutes, based on the following:

(a) Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen (may Allah have mercy on him) said in one of his khutbahs that the longest time between the beginning of Maghrib and `Isha’ is one hour and thirty-two minutes;

(b) based on a fatwa from one of the famous shaykhs in Saudi Arabia;

(c) the red afterglow does not disappear all night in some regions and during some seasons of the year;

(d) some mosques and Islamic centres rely on the 90-minute idea;

(e) the Two Holy Sanctuaries (Al-Haramain) follow this system.

As for the other group, they pray later, based on the following:

(a) the fatwa of the Standing Committee which says that each prayer should be offered at the time prescribed in sharee‘ah, in accordance with the signs described in sharee‘ah (if night is distinct from day);

(b) a fatwa from another famous shaykh in Saudi Arabia, in which he affirmed that the 90-minute idea is based on mistaken ijtihad;

(c) some mosques and Islamic centres do that;

(d) the timetable that is approved by the Muslim World League. But in fact the timetable of the MWL causes us hardship and difficulty during some seasons of the year. We follow the prayer timetable to be found on the following link: www.islamicfinder.org which gives all timetables according to the well-known calculation methods; it is also possible to customise it. As we have not found, on the Internet or elsewhere, any research on this issue that is based on clear evidence from the Qur'an and Sunnah, we are waiting for you to give us an adequate discussion and clear answer, by means of which we ask Allah to unite people and bring us together on the basis of truth concerning this issue. May Allah reward you with good.

Summary of answer

If the twilight disappears long enough before dawn that they can pray `Isha', then they have to wait until it disappears. Otherwise if it is too hard for them to wait, in that case it is permissible for them to put `Isha' together with Maghrib at the time of the earlier prayer, so as to avoid hardship and difficulty.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

The Importance of Prayer Timing in Islam

One of the conditions of prayer being valid, on which there is consensus among the scholars, is that the time for the prayer should have begun . Allah, may He be Exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): "Surely the Prayer is prescribed to the Believers at specified timings." [An-Nisa' 4:103]

Shaykh `Abd Ar-Rahman As-Sa`di (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

That is, it is obligatory and it has a specific time and is not valid if offered at any other time. These are the times that are established and well known to Muslims, young and old, knowledgeable and ignorant. (End quote from Tafsir As-Sa`di, p. 198)

Defining `Isha' Prayer Time in Normal Conditions

The beginning of the time for Maghrib is when the disc of the sun disappears beneath the horizon, and the end of it – at which the time for `Isha' begins – is when the red afterglow (or twilight) disappears.

It was narrated from `Abdullah ibn `Amr ibn Al-`As (may Allah be pleased with him) that he said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "The time for Maghrib is when the sun sets, so long as the twilight has not disappeared. The time for `Isha' is up until half of the night has not passed." (Narrated by Muslim, 612)

When Regular Prayer Timings Do Not Apply

These times that are defined in Shari`ah only apply in lands where night and day occur within twenty-four hours, and it does not matter how long the day is and how short the night is in this case, unless the time of `Isha' is not long enough to offer the prayer. In that case, it is as if there is no time for it, so it is to be worked out according to the nearest land in which night and day give enough time for each prayer to be offered at its allocated time.

Praying `Isha' in Regions with Late Twilight

Your question concerns an issue to which the scholars paid attention; they discussed it and issued fatwas concerning it, and one of them wrote an essay on it, entitled Waqtu Salat Al-`Isha' wa Waqt al-Imsak fil-Manatiq allati la yughibu fiha ash-Shafaqu illa muta'akhkhiran wa yatlu`u Al-Fajr Mubakkiran (The Time of `Isha' and the time of Stopping Eating (for fasting) in Regions where the

Twilight does not disappear until very late and the Dawn breaks very early). He is the director of the Islamic Research Centre in Istanbul, Dr. Tayyar Alati Qawlaj. The scholars differed concerning this issue and there are three opinions:

- That one may avail oneself of the concession that allows putting Maghrib and `Isha' together because of the difficulty involved that is no less than the difficulty caused by rain and other reasons that make it permissible to put two prayers together.
- That the time for `Isha' should be worked out. Some scholars called for adopting Makkah Al-Mukarramah as the standard in this case. One of those who supported this view is the author of the essay referred to above.
- That the time for `Isha' that is prescribed in Shari`ah, namely the disappearance of the twilight, should be adhered to so long as the time is sufficient to offer the prayer.

This last opinion is the one that we think is most likely to be correct and is the opinion that is indicated by the Hadith texts. It is mentioned in fatwas issued by the Council of Senior Scholars, the Standing Committee for Issuing Fatwas, Shaykh Al-`Uthaymin, Shaykh Ibn Baz, and other scholars.

Shaykh Muhammad ibn Salih Al-`Uthaymin (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

These specified times only apply in places where night and day occur within twenty-four hours, whether night and day are equal in length or one of them is longer than the other by a short or long period.

As for places in which night and day do not occur within twenty-four hours, that applies either throughout the year or only for a few days:

- If it is only for a few days, such as if it is a place in which night and day occur within twenty-four hours throughout the seasons of the year, but during some periods there may be twenty-four hours or more of either night or day, in that case if there is a phenomenon on the horizon by means of which you can work out the time, such as if the light starts to increase or when it disappears completely, then deciding the time may be connected to this

phenomenon. Or if there is no such phenomenon, you can work out the times of prayer as they were on the last day before night or day began to last for twenty-four hours.

- But if it is a place where night and day within twenty-four hours does not occur all year or in any season, then the times for prayer should be worked out, because of the Hadith narrated by Muslim from An-Nawwas ibn Sam`an (may Allah be pleased with him), according to which the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) mentioned the Dajjal who will appear at the end of time. They asked him how long he would stay on earth and he said: “Forty days: one day like a year, one day like a month, one day like a week, and the rest of his days will be like your days.” They said: O Messenger of Allah, on that day which will be like a year, will the prayers of one day be sufficient for us? He said: “No, work it out…”

So if it is established that in a place in which night and day do not occur (within twenty-four hours) the times for prayer are to be worked out, then how do we work it out?

… Some scholars think that it should be worked out according to the average time. So the night is to be estimated as being twelve hours, and the same for the day, because when it is not possible to work out the time of prayer based on the place itself, it should be worked out on the basis of a place where night and day are equal. This is like the case of the woman who is suffering Istihadah (non-menstrual vaginal bleeding) and does not have a period as such and cannot distinguish between menstrual and non-menstrual bleeding.

Others say that it should be worked out in accordance with the nearest land in which night and day occur throughout the year; because when it is not possible to work it out with regard to the land itself, then it should be worked out in accordance with the land that most closely resembles it, which is the nearest land to it in which night and day occur within twenty-four hours.

This view is more correct, because it is based on a stronger argument and is more realistic. (End quote from Majmu` Fatawa Ash-Shaykh Ibn `Uthaymin, 12/197, 198)

This is the view of the Council of Senior Scholars in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and is supported by the Standing Committee for Issuing Fatwas. We have quoted their fatwa in the answer to

question no. 5842, in which they said:

… And there are other Hadith which defined the times for the five daily prayers through the words and actions of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him). It makes no difference whether the day is long or short or the night is long or short, so long as the times of the prayers may be distinguished by the signs which were identified by the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him). (End quote)

With regard to the country in which you are studying, we find that night and day do occur within twenty-four hours there, and the time for `Isha' is not so short that you cannot offer the prayer. Based on that, what you have to do is offer the prayers at the times prescribed for them in Shari`ah.

Combining Maghrib and 'Isha' When `Isha' Is Very Late

If the time of `Isha is so late that offering the prayer on time will be too difficult, in that case there is nothing wrong with putting Maghrib and `Isha' prayers together at the time of the earlier prayer.

In the answer to question no. 5709 we quoted Shaykh Al-`Uthaymin (may Allah have mercy on him) as saying:

If the twilight disappears long enough before dawn that they can pray `Isha', then they have to wait until it disappears. Otherwise if it is too hard for them to wait, in that case it is permissible for them to put `Isha' together with Maghrib at the time of the earlier prayer, so as to avoid hardship and difficulty. (End quote)

In a statement of the Islamic Fiqh Council, belonging to the Muslim World League, the members of the council discussed the topic of the times of prayer and fasting in countries at high latitudes. They listened to Shar`i and astronomical studies presented by some members and other explanations of technical aspects that were on the agenda during the eleventh session of the Council, and the following was determined:

- … Thirdly: high latitude regions may be divided into three categories:

1. Those located between 45° and 48° north and south, where the signs for the times of prayer are distinct and clear in each twenty-four hour period, whether the time is long or short.
2. Those located between 48° and 66° north and south, in which some of the astronomical signs that define the time of the prayer are absent during some days of the year, such as when the the twilight, the disappearance of which signals that the time for `Isha' has begun, does not disappear, and the end of the time for Maghrib overlaps with the time for Fajr .
3. Those located above 66° north or south, as far as the pole, in which the signs for the times of prayer are absent during a long period of the year, whether by day or by night.

- Fourthly: the ruling concerning the first area is that the people there have to offer the prayers at the times prescribed in Shari`ah, and they have to fast according to the times prescribed in Shari`ah, from when the true dawn appears until the sun sets, in accordance with the Islamic texts having to do with the times of prayer and fasting. Whoever is unable to fast the day or complete a day's fast because the time is too long may break the fast, and has to make it up on suitable days … (End quote)

This case is the one that is asked about here, as is obvious.

In another statement by the Islamic Fiqh Council, the statement quoted above was confirmed and a concession was granted to the one who finds it too difficult to offer `Isha' prayer (at the prescribed time), allowing him to put it together with Maghrib. But they stated that this should not be made a habit for everyone; rather it is only for those who have legitimate reasons. It says in that statement:

But if the signs of the time for the prayer appear, but the disappearance of the twilight with which the time for `Isha' begins, is very late, the Council believes that it is obligatory to offer `Isha' prayer at the proper time as defined by Shari`ah. But those for whom it is too difficult to wait and offer the prayer on time – such as students, people with jobs and workers during the work week – can put the prayers together, in accordance with the texts which speak of protecting this ummah from hardship. For example, in Sahih Muslim and elsewhere it is narrated that Ibn 'Abbas (may

Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) put together Dhuhr and `Asr, and Maghrib and `Isha', in Madinah, when there was no fear or rain. Ibn `Abbas was asked about that and he said: He wanted not to put his Ummah through hardship.

But putting prayers together should not be something that is done by all the people in that country throughout that period, because that is changing the concession and making it become the norm.

As for the guideline on what constitutes hardship, reference should be made to custom and this is something that differs from one person to another, from one place and situation to another. (End quote from the nineteenth session, held in the headquarters of the Muslim World League in Makkah Al-Mukarramah, 22-27 Shawwal 1428 AH/ 3-8 November 2007 CE, second statement)

Is the Interval Between Maghrib and 'Isha' Fixed?

With regard to defining the time between Maghrib and `Isha' as being one hour and thirty-two minutes, we could not find anything concerning that from Shaykh Ibn `Uthaymin or anyone else. We have previously quoted the words of the Shaykh (may Allah have mercy on him) and he did not mention this opinion or regard it as more correct.

Perhaps this is a mistake on the part of the one who quoted the Shaykh, and the Shaykh was referring to the usual time between Maghrib and `Isha' in countries where night and day are more equal, or in Saudi in particular, which is more likely to be the case.

- He (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The time for `Isha' is not defined by the adhan only, in fact, because the time of `Isha' may sometimes, during some parts of the year and in some seasons… the time between sunset and the beginning of the time for `Isha' may be one and a quarter hours, or sometimes one hour and 20 minutes, and sometimes one hour and 25 minutes, and sometimes one hour and 30 minutes. It varies and it cannot possibly be the same in every season. (End quote from Jalasat Ramadaniyyah)

- He also said (may Allah have mercy on him):

The time for Maghrib lasts from sunset until the disappearance of the red afterglow, which may sometimes be one and a half hours between Maghrib and `Isha', or sometimes it may be one hour and twenty minutes, or one hour and seventeen minutes; it varies. (End quote from Majmu` Fatawa Ash-Shaykh Al-`Uthaymin, 7/338)

To sum up,

- In countries where night and day occur in twenty-four hours, it is obligatory to pray at the times prescribed in Shari`ah, no matter how long or short the night.
- In countries where night and day do not occur in twenty-four hours, it is obligatory to follow the times of prayer in the closest land in which there is night and day.
- In countries where the twilight overlaps with the dawn, or it disappears but there is not sufficient time to pray `Isha', it is obligatory to follow the closest place where there is enough time to offer the prayer.
- It is permissible for people who have legitimate excuses to put together Maghrib and `Isha' if they are unable to wait until the time of `Isha'.

And Allah knows best.