162318 - Can Tarawih Count as the Sunnah of `Isha'?

the question

We pray Tarawih; is it permissible for me to pray with the imam the first two Rak`ahs of Tarawih with the intention of the Sunnah prayer of `Isha'? I do that because there is not enough time between the obligatory prayer and Tarawih to pray the Sunnah prayer. Is it permissible?

Summary of answer

It is valid to pray Tarawih with the intention of `Isha' Sunnah, but scholars recommend performing the Sunnah of `Isha' separately. If needed, a person may pray the first two Rak`ahs of Tarawih with the intention of `Isha' Sunnah, as long as they understand that Tarawih is a distinct prayer.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

The Best Time for the Sunnah of 'Isha'

The one who is able should not delay the regular Sunnah prayer of `Isha' until after Tarawih, because the time for Tarawih begins after praying the two Rak`ahs [of Sunnah prayer].

It says in Al-Mawsu`ah Al-Fiqhiyyah (25/281):

With regard to Tarawih prayer, the time for it begins after finishing the Sunnah prayer of `Isha' , and lasts until just before dawn by the amount of time it takes to pray Witr after having prayed Tarawih. (End quote)

Is It Mandatory to Pray Sunnah Before Tarawih?

This does not mean that praying Tarawih without having done the Sunnah prayer of `Isha' is invalid.

Shaykh Mansur Al-Bahuti (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

If a person prays Tarawih after `Isha' and before the Sunnah prayer of `Isha', that is definitely valid, but it is better to do it (Tarawih) after the Sunnah prayer , according to what is stated by the scholars. (End quote from Kashshaf Al-Qina`, 1/426)

Combining Tarawih with the Sunnah of 'Isha'

But is it valid for a Muslim to pray two Rak`ahs of Tarawih with the intention of praying the Sunnah prayer of `Isha'?

The answer is: Yes, that is valid; in fact it is even valid to pray `Isha' behind someone who is praying Tarawih.

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

You may join the Imam in Tarawih with the intention of praying the obligatory prayer, i.e., with the intention of praying `Isha', then when he says the Taslim, get up and do two more Rak`ahs to complete the obligatory prayer, unless you are travelling, in which case you may say the tasleem with him, then join him in Tarawih with the intention of doing the Sunnah prayer of `Isha'. If you are not travelling, then when you have done the Sunnah prayer of `Isha', join the imam in Tarawih. It does not matter if the intentions of the imam and of the person praying behind him are different; in other words, it is permissible for the imam to intend to offer an optional prayer and for the person praying behind him to intend to offer the obligatory prayer. This is what was stated by Imam Ahmad, that it is permissible for a person to pray `Isha' behind someone who is praying Tarawih. (End quote from Ash-Sharh Al-Mumti` `ala Zad Al-Mustaqni`, 4/66).

But what he prays – in both cases – is not regarded as coming under the heading of praying Qiyam [voluntary prayers at night], because Tarawih prayer is separate in and of itself, and cannot be put together with the Sunnah of `Isha' with one intention – and this applies even more so to the obligatory prayer – rather he should intend to pray the Sunnah prayer of `Isha' on its own, and his Qiyam will be lacking those two Rak`ahs.

Shaykh `Abd Al-`Aziz ibn Baz (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The Sunnah prayer of `Isha' is a confirmed Sunnah, and is two Rak`ahs. The Sunnah is to offer this prayer before Tarawih, because it is a separate Sunnah, and Tarawih is a separate Sunnah. (End quote from Fatawa As-Shaykh Ibn Baz, 30/56)

Practical Solutions for Offering the Sunnah Prayer

In order to attain the virtue of all of them, he should speak to the Imam and ask him to wait, after the obligatory prayer of `Isha', so that the worshippers can recite Tasbih and Dhikr, and offer the Sunnah prayer , then he can begin the Tarawih prayer.

If the Imam refuses to do that, or if the time is too short and it is not possible to offer the Sunnah prayer within that time, then there he has the choice:

- Either he can delay the Sunnah prayer until after Tarawih, so long as that is not after half way through the night, because that is when the time for `Isha' and its Sunnah prayers ends;
- Or he can offer the Sunnah prayer of `Isha' in between the Rak`ahs of Tarawih, during the time when the worshippers have a rest, or when a short talk is given. This is not included in the advice that some scholars give that it is not allowed to offer optional prayer in the break in Tarawih, because this prayer is a regular Sunnah and is not optional in an absolute, unqualified sense.
- Or he may pray the first two Rak`ahs of Tarawih with the intention of praying the Sunnah prayer of `Isha'.

See these answers for more information: (128164, 37829, 189426)

And Allah knows best.