226175 - The best is to pray only two rak`ahs, intending them to be both the regular Sunnah prayer of Fajr and the prayer to greet the mosque

the question

Regarding question no. 223271, you said that the reward may be multiplied if there is more than one intention in one deed, so if the one who enters the mosque prays two rak`ahs, intending them to be both the prayer to greet the mosque and the Sunnah prayer of Fajr, will he earn a reward equal to that of one who prays the two rak`ahs to greet the mosque and the two rak`ahs of the Sunnah prayer of Fajr, offering each prayer on its own?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

The basic principle is that the greater a deed is in quantity and effort, the greater the reward will be.

An-Nawawi (may Allah have mercy on him) said: The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “But it [the reward] will be commensurate with your efforts – or he said: your spending.” This clearly indicates that the reward and virtue of a particular act of worship will be greater when the effort and spending is greater. What is meant is effort that is not blameworthy according to Islamic teachings. End quote.

As-Suyuti (may Allah have mercy on him) said: The nineteenth principle: the greater the effort, the greater the reward and virtue. The basis for that is the words of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) to `A’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her): “Your reward will be commensurate with your effort.” Narrated by Muslim.

Hence separating Witr prayer [into two rak`ahs and one rak`ah] is better than praying all three rak`ahs consecutively [like Maghrib prayer], because of the increase in forming the intention (niyyah), takbir (saying Allahu akbar) and salaam [at the end of each prayer].

If the supererogatory prayer is offered sitting, it earns half the reward of a prayer offered standing, and a prayer offered lying down earns half the reward of a prayer offered sitting.

Doing each pilgrimage ritual [Hajj or `umrah] separately is better than doing them together [qiran, in which one enters ihram for both `umrah and Hajj].(*Al-Ashbah wa'n-Naza'ir*, p. 143).

Secondly:

Offering a voluntary` (nafil) prayer after the adhan of Fajr and before the obligatory prayer is permissible according to the correct scholarly view. But it is not prescribed. In the answer to question no. 136695 we mentioned the difference of scholarly opinion regarding this issue, and highlighted the view that is more likely to be correct.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Once dawn has broken, what is Sunnah is for the Muslims to offer the regular Sunnah prayer of Fajr and the obligatory prayer. Anything other than that is not Sunnah, but it is not forbidden, provided that it is not taken as a regular practice, as it says in the authentic hadith: "Between each two calls [the adhan and iqamah] there is a prayer, between each two calls there is a prayer." Then he said the third time: "for whoever wants to do that," lest people take that as a regular practice.

This indicates that it is permissible to pray between each two calls [the adhan and iqamah], as the Sahabah used to pray between the adhan and iqamah of Maghrib and the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) approved of their doing that. Similarly, one may offer a prayer between the adhan and iqamah of `Asr and `Isha', and between the adhan and iqamah of Fajr and Zuhr.

But between the adhan and iqamah of Fajr, the two rak`ahs are undoubtedly Sunnah, and

anything other than that is not to be taken as a Sunnah and regular practice, so it should not be done all the time and it should not be enjoined on all the Muslims.(*Majmu` al-Fatawa*, 23/204).

Shaykh Ibn Baz (may Allah have mercy on him) was asked:

What is the ruling on someone who enters the mosque after dawn has broken: should he offer the Sunnah prayer to greet the mosque, or should he offer only the Sunnah prayer of Fajr?

He replied: The best is for him to offer only the Sunnah prayer of Fajr, and that also count as a prayer to greet the mosque, as the obligatory prayer may also count as a prayer to greet the mosque. So if he arrives when the iqamah for the prayer has been given, he should pray with the congregation, and the obligatory prayer will also count as a prayer to greet the mosque.

Therefore what is prescribed is not to sit down until one has offered a prayer. So if someone offers the Sunnah prayer of Fajr, that is sufficient, but if he comes when the iqamah for prayer is given, it is sufficient for him to offer the obligatory prayer, and that will also count as the prayer to greet the mosque. But if he offers both prayers, offering a prayer to greet the mosque and then the Sunnah prayer of Fajr, there is nothing wrong with that, but not doing it is better. The best is to offer the regular Sunnah prayer of Fajr, and this will suffice and will also count as the prayer to greet the mosque, because after dawn had broken, the Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) would offer the two rak`ahs [of the regular Sunnah prayer] only, and he did not do more than two rak`ahs once dawn had broken; that is the Sunnah prayer of Fajr. So the best is to do no more than two rak`ahs, and if we pray them with the intention of offering the Sunnah prayer of Fajr, they will also count as the prayer to greet the mosque. But if someone offers the regular Sunnah prayer in his house, meaning that he offers the two Sunnah rak`ahs of Fajr in his house, then he comes to the mosque before the iqamah for prayer is given, he may offer the prayer to greet the mosque before he sits down.(*Fatawa Nur `ala ad-Darb*, 10/345).

Conclusion

In principle, doing more acts of worship is better and brings greater reward, but if there is a specific text or proven Sunnah, limiting oneself to what is mentioned in the text is better and

brings a greater reward in this case.

Based on that, the one who enters the mosque after the adhan of Fajr should offer two rak`ahs only, intending thereby to offer both the Sunnah prayer of Fajr and the prayer to greet the mosque.

Az-Zarkashi (may Allah have mercy on him) said: The greater the number of acts of worship and the effort involved, the better and more virtuous it will be than that which is not like that. In the hadith of `A'ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) it says: "Your reward will be commensurate with your effort." Narrated by Muslim. A small action may be greater than a bigger one in some cases, such as the following:

- Shortening prayers (when travelling) is better than offering them in full.
- Praying once with the congregation is better than offering twenty-five prayers on one's own.
- Making the two rak`ahs of Fajr brief is better than making them lengthy.
- Reciting a (complete) short surah in prayer is better than reciting part of a surah, even if it is a lengthy passage, because the Prophet's usual practice was to recite a complete surah (in the prayer).(*Al-Manthur fi'l-Qawa`id al-Fiqhiyyah*, 2/413-416).

And Allah knows best.