3452 - The virtues of Qiyaam (prayer at night) during Ramadan

the question

What is the virtues of Qiyaam (prayer at night) during Ramadan ?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) said: “The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) used to encourage us to pray at night in Ramadan, without making it obligatory. Then he said, ‘Whoever prays at night in Ramadan out of faith and the hope of reward, all his previous sins will be forgiven.’ When the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) died, this is how things were (i.e., Taraaweeh was not prayed in congregation), and this is how they remained during the khilaafah of Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him), until the beginning of the khilaafah of ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with him).”

‘Amr ibn Murrah al-Juhani said: “A man from Qudaa’ah came to the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and said, ‘O Messenger of Allah! What do you think if I testify that there is no god except Allah, and that you, Muhammad, are His Messenger, and I pray the five daily prayers, and fast in the month (of Ramadan), and pray at night in Ramadan, and pay zakah?’ The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: ‘Whoever dies on that will be among the siddeeqeen (those who tell the truth) and the martyrs.’”

Laylat al-Qadr and its timing

2 – The best of its nights is Laylat al-Qadr, because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Whoever prays at night during Laylat al-Qadr and manages to “catch” it out of faith and the hope of reward, all his previous sins will be forgiven.”

3 – According to the most correct opinion, it is the twenty-seventh night of Ramadan. Most of the ahaadeeth state this, such as the hadith of Zurr ibn Hubaysh, who said: “I heard Ubayy ibn Ka’b saying – and it was said to him that ‘Abd-Allah ibn Mas’ood said: ‘Whoever follows the Sunnah will ‘catch’ Laylat al-Qadr!’ – Ubayy (may Allah be pleased with him) said: ‘May Allah have mercy on him, he did not want people to take it for granted and only stay up to pray on one night. By the One besides Whom there is no other god, it is in Ramadan – he was swearing without a doubt – and by Allah, I do know which night it is. It is the night in which the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) commanded us to pray (qiyaam). It is the night the morning of which is the twenty seventh, and the sign of it is that the sun rises on that morning white and without rays.’”

In another report, this was attributed to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). (Reported by Muslim and others).

Praying qiyaam in congregation

It is allowed to pray qiyaam in congregation, indeed it is better than praying individually, because this is what the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) did himself and explained its virtues. Abu Dharr (may Allah be pleased with him) said: “We fasted Ramadan with the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and he did not lead us in qiyaam at all until there were only seven days left, when he led us in prayer until a third of the night had passed. When there were six days left, he did not lead us in qiyaam. When there were five days left, he led us in prayer until half the night had passed. I said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, I wish that you had continued until the end of the night.’ He said, ‘If a man prays with the imaam until he finishes, it will be counted as if he prayed the whole night.’ When there were four nights left, he did not lead us in qiyaam. When there were three nights left, he brought together his family, his wives and the people, and led us in qiyaam until we were afraid that we would miss al-falaah. I asked, ‘What is al-falaah?’ he said, ‘Suhoor. Then he did not lead us in qiyaam for the rest of the month.’” (Saheeh hadith reported by the authors of Sunan).

The reason why the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) did not continually lead

the people in praying qiyaam in congregation

5 - The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) did not lead them in qiyaam for the rest of the month because he feared that it would then become obligatory, and they would not be able to do it, as is stated in the hadith of ‘Aa’ishah reported in al-Saheehayn and elsewhere. Following the death of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), that fear was no longer a factor, because Allah had completed the religion. The reason for not praying qiyaam in congregation during Ramadan no longer applied, and the previous ruling, that congregational prayer is something prescribed in Islam, remained in effect. So ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) revived the practice, as is recorded in Saheeh al-Bukhari and elsewhere.

Women can pray qiyaam in congregation

Women can attend the prayers too, as is stated in the hadith of Abu Dharr referred to above. Indeed, it is permissible to appoint an imaam just for them, apart from the imaam of the men. It was proven that when ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) gathered the people to pray qiyaam, he appointed Ubayy ibn Ka’b to lead the men and Sulaymaan ibn Abi Hathmah to lead the women. ‘Arfajah al-Thaqafi said: “ ‘Ali ibn Abi Taalib (may Allah be pleased with him) used to command the people to pray during the night in Ramadan, and he would appoint an imaam for the men and an imaam for the women. I was the imaam for the women.”

I say: this is fine in my view so long as the mosque is big enough so that they will not disturb one another.

Number of rak`ahs of qiyaam

7 – The number of rak`ahs is eleven, and it is preferable in our opinion not to exceed this number, following the practice of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), because he never did more than that in his life. ‘Aa’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) was asked about how he prayed in Ramadan. She said, “The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) never prayed more than eleven rak`ahs (of qiyaam), whether during Ramadan or any other time. He would pray four, and don’t ask me how beautiful or how long they

were. Then he would pray four, and don't ask me how beautiful or how long they were. Then he would pray three." (Reported by al-Bukhari, Muslim and others).

8- A person may do less than that, even if it is only one rak`ah of witr, because of the evidence that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) did this and spoke about it.

With regard to him doing it: 'Aa'ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) was asked how many rak`ahs the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) used to pray in witr? She said, "He used to pray four and three, or six and three, or ten and three. He never used to pray less than seven, or more than thirteen." (Reported by Abu Dawood, Ahmad and others).

With regard to him speaking about it, he said: "Witr is true, so whoever wishes can pray five, and whoever wishes can pray three, and whoever wishes can pray one."

Reciting Qur'aan in qiyaam

9 – As regards reciting from the Qur'aan during qiyaam, whether in Ramadan or at other times, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) did not set a limit or state what was too much or too little. His recitation used to vary, sometimes it would be long, at other times short. Sometimes in every rak`ah he would recite the equivalent of 'Yaa ayyuha'l-muzammil, which is twenty aayaat; sometimes he would recite the equivalent of fifty aayaat. He used to say, "Whoever prays at night and reads one hundred aayaat will not be recorded as one of the negligent." According to another hadith: "…and reads two hundred aayaat, will be recorded as one of the devout and sincere believers."

When he was sick, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) recited the seven long soorahs in his night prayers, i.e., al-Baqarah, Aal 'Imraan, al-Nisaa', al-Maa'idah, al-An'aam, al-A'raaf and al-Tawbah.

In the account of Hudhayfah ibn al-Yamaan praying behind the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), in one rak`ah he recited al-Baqarah, al-Nisa' and Aal 'Imraan, and he recited them in a slow and measured tone. It is proven with the soundest (most saheeh) of isnaads that

when ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) appointed Ubayy ibn Ka’b to lead the people in praying eleven rak`ahs in Ramadan, Ubayy used to recite aayaat by the hundreds, so that the people behind him would be leaning on sticks because the prayers were so long, and they did not finish until just before Fajr.

It is also reported in a saheeh account that ‘Umar called the readers during Ramadan, and told the fastest of them to recite thirty aayaat, the moderate ones to recite twenty-five aayaat, and the slowest ones to recite twenty aayaat.

However, is a person is praying qiyaam by himself, he can make it as long as he wishes; if others agree with the imaam, he may also make it as long as he wishes. The longer it is, the better, but a person should not go to extremes and spend the whole night in qiyaam, except on rare occasions, following the example of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) who said: “The best guidance is the guidance of Muhammad.” If a person is praying as an imaam, he should make it only as long as is easy for the people behind him, because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “If any of you leads the people in prayer, let him make it short, because among them are the young and the old, the weak, and those who have pressing needs. But if he is praying alone, let him make it as long as he likes.”

The timing of qiyaam

10 – The time for praying qiyaam is from after ‘Isha until Fajr, because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Allah has added one more prayer for you, which is witr, so pray it between Salaat al-‘Isha’ and Salaat al-Fajr.”

11 – Praying at the end of the night is better, for those who can manage it, because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Whoever is afraid that he will not get up at the end of the night, let him pray witr at the beginning of the night, but whoever feels that he will be able to get up at the end of the night, let him pray witr at the end of the night, for prayer at the end of the night is witnessed [by the angels???], and that is better.”

12 – If it is the matter of choosing between praying in congregation at the beginning of the night

and praying alone at the end of the night, it is preferable to pray with the jamaa'ah, because that is counted as if one had prayed the whole night through.

This is what the Sahaabah did at the time of 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him). 'Abd al-Rahmaan ibn 'Abd al-Qaari said: "I went out with 'Umar ibn al-Khattaab to the mosque one night during Ramadan, and saw the people scattered throughout the mosque, some praying individually, and some praying in small groups. He said, 'By Allah, I think that if I gathered all of them behind one reader it would be better.' So he resolved to do that, and he gathered them behind Ubayy ibn Ka'b. Then I went with him on another night, and the people were all praying behind their reader, and 'Umar said, 'What a good innovation this is. What they sleep and miss – meaning the latter part of the night – is better than what they are doing,' – the people used to pray qiyaam at the beginning of the night."

Zayd ibn Wahb said: "'Abd-Allah used to lead us in prayer in Ramadan, and he used to finish at night."

13 – The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) forbade praying witr as three rak`ahs, and explained this by saying: "Do not make it resemble Salaat al-Maghrib." Therefore the person who wants to pray three rak`ahs for witr must find a way to make it different (from Maghrib). There are two ways he can do this: either by giving salaam after the first two rak`ahs, which is the best way; or by not sitting after the first two rak`ahs (i.e., praying three rak`ahs non-stop). And Allah knows best.

Recitation during three rak`ahs of witr

14 – It is Sunnah to recite Sabbih bi ismi Rabbika al-'A'laa in the first rak`ah, Qul Yaa ayyuha'l-Kaafiroon in the second rak`ah, and Qul Huwa Allahu ahad in the third rak`ah. Sometimes Qul a'oodhu bi Rabbi'l-Falaq and Qul a'oodhu bi Rabbi'l-Naas may be added as well.

It was reported in a saheeh report that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) once recited one hundred aayaat of Soorat al-Nisa' in one rak`ah of witr.

Du`a al-Qunoot

15 – A person may also humble himself before Allah by reciting the du`a which the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) taught to his grandson al-Hasan ibn ‘Ali (may Allah be pleased with him), which is:

“Allahumma’hdinee fiman hadayta wa ‘aafinee fiman ‘aafayta wa tawallanee fiman tawallayta wa baarik lee fimaa a’tayta wa qinee sharra maa qadayt, fa innaka taqdee wa laa yuqdaa ‘alayk. Wa innahu laa yadhillu man waalayta wa laa ya’izzu man ‘aadayt. Tabaarakta Rabbanaa wa ta’aalayt. Laa majaa minka illa ilayk (O Allah, guide me along with those whom You have guided, pardon me along with those whom You have pardoned, be an ally to me along with those whom You are an ally to, and bless for me that which You have bestowed. Protect me from the evil You have decreed for verily You decree and none can decree over You. For surety, he whom You show allegiance to is never abased and he whom You take an enemy is never honored and mighty. O our Lord, Blessed and Exalted are You. There is no refuge from You except with You).”

Sometimes one may send blessings on the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and there is nothing wrong with adding other du`as that are known from the Sunnah.

16 – There is nothing wrong with reciting Qunoot after rukoo’, or with adding curses against the kuffaar, sending blessings on the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) or praying for the Muslims in the second half of Ramadan, because it is proven that the imaam used to do this at the time of ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with him). At the end of the hadith of ‘Abd al-Rahmaan ibn ‘Ubayd al-Qaari mentioned above, it says: “… They used to curse the kuffaar in the middle, saying, ‘Allahumma qaatil al-kafarata alladheena yasuddoona ‘an sabeelik wa yukadhdhiboona rusulak wa laa yu’minoona bi wa’dik. Wa khaalif bayna kalimatihim wa alqi fi quloobihim al-ru’b wa alqi ‘alayhim rijzaka wa ‘adhaabak ilaah al-haqq (O Allah, destroy the kuffaar who are trying to prevent people from following Your path, who deny Your Messengers and who do not believe in Your promise (the Day of Judgement). Make them disunited, fill their hearts with terror and send Your wrath and punishment against them, O God of Truth).” Then he would send blessings on the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and pray for good for

the Muslims as much as he could, and seek forgiveness for the believers.

After he had finished cursing the kuffaar, sending blessings on the Prophet, seeking forgiveness for the believing men and women and asking for his own needs, he would say: “Allahumma iyyaaka na’bud wa laka nusalli wa najud, wa ilayka nas’aa wa nahfud, wa narju rahmataka rabbanaa wa nakhaafu ‘adhaabak al-jadd. Inna ‘adhaabaka liman ‘aadayta mulhaq (O Allah, You do we worship, to You do we pray and prostrate, for Your sake we strive and toil. We place our hope in Your Mercy, O our Lord, and we fear Your mighty punishment, for Your punishment will certainly overtake the one whom You have taken as an enemy.” Then he would say “Allahu akbar” and go down in sujood.

What should be said at the end of witr

17 – It is Sunnah to say at the end of witr (before or after the salaam):

“Allahumma innee a’oodhu bi ridaaka min sakhatika wa bi mu’aafaatika min ‘aqoobatika, wa a’oodhu bika minka. La uhsee thanaa’an ‘alayka, anta kamaa athnayta ‘ala nafsik (O Allah, I seek refuge in Your good pleasure from Your wrath, and in Your protection from Your punishment. I seek refuge with You from You. I cannot praise You enough, and You are as You have praised Yourself.”

18 – When he gave salaam at the end of witr, he said: “Subhaan il-Malik il-Quddoos, subhaan il-Malik il-Quddoos, subhaan il-Malik il-Quddoos (Glory be to the Sovereign, the Most Holy), elongating the syllables, and raising his voice the third time.

Two rak`ahs after witr

19 – A person may pray two rak`ahs after witr if he wishes, because it is proven that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) did this. Indeed, he said, “This travelling is exhausting and difficult, so after any one of you prays witr, let him pray two rak`ahs. If he wakes up, this is fine, otherwise these two rak`ahs will be counted for him.

20 – It is Sunnah to recite Idha zulzilat al-ard and Qul yaa ayyuha’l-kaafiroon in these two rak`ahs.