45268 - How to Offer a 4-Rak`ah Sunnah Prayer

the question

My question is about the optional prayer that is offered before Dhuhr and before `Asr: is it done with four Rak`ahs and one Taslim, or should the Taslim be said after each two Rak`ahs?

Summary of answer

According to the majority of scholars, the 4-Rak`ah Sunnah prayer should be performed in sets of two, with Taslim after every two Rak`ahs. This ruling is based on the Hadith where the Prophet said, "The prayers of the day and night are to be offered two by two."

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Understanding the Scholarly Consensus on 4-Rak`ah Sunnah

The majority of scholars are of the view that it is better to offer the optional prayers of both day and night two by two. Some scholars – such as Imam Ahmad – were of the view that it is obligatory to do it this way, and that these prayers are not valid if more than two Rak`ahs are done with one Taslim, except for Witr, because of the reports to that effect in authentic Sunnah.

They quoted as evidence for that the Hadith of Ibn `Umar (may Allah be pleased with him), according to which the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “The prayers of the day and night are to be offered two by two.” (Narrated by At-Tirmidhi, 597; Abu Dawud, 1295; An-Nasa’i, 1666 and Ibn Majah, 1322; Classed as authentic by Shaykh Al-Albani in Tamam Al-Minnah, p. 240)

The Correct Way to Pray a 4-Rak`ah Sunnah

What is meant by “two by two” is two Rak`ahs by two Rak`ahs. This is how it was explained by Ibn `Umar (may Allah be pleased with him).

In Sahih Muslim, it is narrated that `Uqbah ibn Hurayth said: I said to Ibn `Umar: “What does two by two mean?” He said: “Saying the Taslim after each two Rak`ahs.”

Insights from Scholars on 4-Rak`ah Sunnah Prayer

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

The words two by two mean that you should not pray all four Rak`ahs together, rather you should pray them two by two, because it is proven in Sahih Al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim from Ibn `Umar that a man asked the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him): “What do you think about the night prayers?” He said: “Two by two, then if any one of you fears that dawn will come, let him pray one Rak`ah and that will make what he has prayed odd-numbered for him.”

With regard to the word An-Nahar (day), this was narrated by the authors of As-Sunan, and the scholars differed on whether it is authentic or not.

The correct view is that it is proven, as it was deemed to be authentic by Al-Bukhari (may Allah have mercy on him).

Based on this, the nighttime prayers and the daytime prayers should both be offered two by two, saying the Taslim after each two Rak`ahs. Every Hadith which mentions four Rak`ahs without clearly stating that the Taslim should not be said should be interpreted in this manner, i.e., it should be understood as meaning that the Taslim should be said after each two Rak`ahs, because this is the principle, and minor issues are to be understood in the light of the basic principles.

`Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her) said that when she was asked about how the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) prayed in Ramadan, she said: “In Ramadan and at

other times he did not pray more than eleven Rak`ahs. He would pray four, and do not ask how beautiful and how long they were." This would appear to mean four Rak`ahs with one Salam, but it should be interpreted according to the general principle, which is that the nighttime prayers are offered two by two, as that was proven from the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). It may also be said that she mentioned four on their own, then four on their own, because he would pray four and then rest, as is indicated by the word Thumma (then) which is indicative of the sequence of events and also suggests a slight pause between the events described. (End quote from Ash-Sharh Al-Mumti`, 4/76, 77)

In his Sahih (2/214), Ibn Khuzaymah included the Hadith of Ibn `Umar in a chapter which he called Bab At-Taslim fi kulli Rak`atayn min Salat At-Tatawwu` Salat Al-Layli wan-Nahari jami`an (Saying the Taslim following each two Rak`ahs of voluntary prayer during both the night and the day). He followed this with a chapter entitled Bab Dhikr Al-Akhbar Al-Mansusah wal-Dallah `ala Khilaf Qawli man za`ama anna tatawwu` An-Nahar arba`an la mathna (Reports which indicate the opposite of the view of those who claim that the voluntary daytime prayers are to be offered four by four not two by two), in which he quoted a great deal of evidence to show that the voluntary daytime prayers are to be offered two by two.

The Hadith, "May Allah have mercy on those who pray four (Rak`ahs) before `Asr" is to be understood in the manner explained above, which is that they are to be offered two by two.

Ibn Hibban (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

When the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said "Four", he meant with two Taslims, because in the report of Ya`la ibn `Ata' from `Ali ibn `Abdullah Al-Azdi from Ibn `Umar, it says that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "The prayers of the night and the day are (to be offered) two by two." (Sahih Ibn Hibban, 6/606) He also said something similar – in 6/631 – regarding the four Rak`ahs which are to be offered after Jumu'ah prayer.

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

What is prescribed is for the Muslim to offer the optional prayers of the day and the night two by

two, because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “The night prayers are (to be offered) two by two” (Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim). And according to an authentic report he said: “The prayers of the night and the day are (to be offered) two by two.” (Narrated by Imam Ahmad and the authors of As-Sunan with an authentic chain of narration) (End quote from Majmu` Fatawa Ash-Shaykh Ibn Baz, 11/390)

Check these answers for more details: (10889, 6653, 175137, 22209, 91290)

And Allah knows best.