46544 - How to Pray Witr

the question

What is the best way of offering Witr prayer?

Summary of answer

All the ways of offering Witr prayer have been mentioned in the Sunnah, but the best way is not to stick to one particular way; rather one should do it one way one time and another way another time, so that one will have done all the Sunnahs. For more about how to pray witr, see the detailed answer.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Is witr prayer obligatory or sunnah?

Witr prayer is one of the greatest acts of worship that draw one closer to Allah. Some of the scholars – the Hanafis – even thought that it is one of the obligatory prayers, but the correct view is that it is one of the confirmed Sunnahs (Sunnah muakkadah) which the Muslim should observe regularly and not neglect.

Imam Ahmad (may Allah have mercy on him) said: Whoever neglects Witr is a bad man whose testimony should not be accepted. This indicates that Witr prayer is something that is confirmed.

We may sum up the manner of offering Witr prayer as follows:

Time of witr prayer

The witr prayer starts when a person has prayed ‘Isha, even if it is joined to Maghrib at the time of

Maghrib, and lasts until dawn begins , because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Allah has prescribed for you a prayer (by which He may increase your reward), which is Witr; Allah has enjoined it for you during the time between ‘Isha prayer until dawn begins.” (Narrated by al-Tirmidhi, 425; classed as saheeh by al-Albani in Sahih al-Tirmidhi)

Is it better to offer witr prayer at the beginning of its time or to delay it?

The Sunnah indicates that if a person thinks he will be able to get up at the end of the night, it is better to delay it , because prayer at the end of the night is better and is witnessed (by the angels).

But whoever fears that he will not get up at the end of the night should pray Witr before he goes to sleep, because of the hadith of Jabir (may Allah be pleased with him) who said: The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Whoever fears that he will not get up at the end of the night, let him pray Witr at the beginning of the night, but whoever thinks 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.” (Narrated by Muslim, 755)

Al-Nawawi said:

“This is the correct view. Other ahadith which speak of this topic in general terms are to be interpreted in the light of this sound, specific and clear report, such as the hadith, “My close friend advised me not to sleep without having prayed Witr.” This is to be understood as referring to one who is not sure that he will be able to wake up (to pray Witr at the end of the night).” (*Sharh Muslim*, 3/277)

Number of rak’ahs in witr prayer

The minimum number of rak’ahs for Witr is one rak’ah, because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Witr is one rak'ah at the end of the night.” (Narrated by Muslim, 752)

And he (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “The night prayers are two (rak’ahs) by

two, but if one of you fears that dawn is about to break, let him pray one rak’ah to make what he has prayed odd-numbered.” (Narrated by al-Bukhari, 911; Muslim, 749)

If a person limits himself to praying one rak’ah, then he has performed the Sunnah. But Witr may also be three or five or seven or nine.

How to offer witr prayer with 3 rak`ahs

If a person prays three rak’ahs of Witr this may be done in two ways, both of which are prescribed in shari’ah:

1 – To pray them one after another, with one tashahhud, because of the hadith of ‘Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her) who said: The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) used not to say the tasleem in the (first) two rak’ahs of Witr. According to another version: “He used to pray Witr with three rak'ahs and he did not sit except in the last of them.” (Narrated by al-Nasai, 3/234; al-Bayhaqi, 3/31. al-Nawawi said in al-Majmu’ (4/7): it was narrated by al-Nasai with a hasan isnad, and by al-Bayhaqi with a sahih isnad.)

2 – Saying the tasleem after two rak'ahs, then praying one rak’ah on its own, because of the report narrated from Ibn ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with him), that he used to separate the two rak'ahs from the single rak'ah with a tasleem, and he said that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) used to do that. (Narrated by Ibn Hibban (2435); Ibn Hajar said in al-Fath (2/482): its isnad is qawi (strong).)

How to offer witr prayer with 5 or 7 rak`ahs

But if he prays Witr with five or seven rak’ahs, then they should be continuous, and he should only recite one tashahhud in the last of them and say the tasleem, because of the report narrated by ‘Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her) who said: The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) used to pray thirteen rak’ahs at night, praying five rak’ahs of Witr, in which he would not sit except in the last rak’ah. (Narrated by Muslim, 737)

And it was narrated that Umm Salamah (may Allah be pleased with her) said: The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) used to pray Witr with five or seven (rak'ahs) and he did not separate between them with any salam or words. (Narrated by Ahmad, 6/290; al-Nasai, 1714. al-Nawawi said: Its isnad is jayyid. Al-Fath al-Rabbani, 2/297. and it was classed as sahih by al-Albani in Saheeh al-Nasai.)

How to offer witr prayer with 9 rak`ahs

If he prays Witr with nine rak'ahs, then they should be continuous and he should sit to recite the tashahhud in the eighth rak'ah, then stand up and not say the tasleem, then he should recite the tashahhud in the ninth rak'ah and then say the tasleem.

It was narrated in Muslim (746) from 'Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her) that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) used to pray nine rak'ahs in which he did not sit except in the eighth, when he would remember Allah, praise Him and call upon Him, then he would get up and not say the tasleem, and he would stand up and pray the ninth (rak'ah), then he would sit and remember Allah and praise Him and call upon Him, then he would say a tasleem that we could hear.

How to offer witr prayer with 11 rak`ahs

If he prayed Witr with eleven rak'ahs, he would say the tasleem after each two rak'ahs, then pray one rak'ah at the end.

The least complete way of praying Witr and what is to be recited therein

The least complete way in Witr is to pray two rak'ahs and say the tasleem, then to pray one rak'ah and say the tasleem. It is permissible to say one tasleem, but one should say one tashahhud not two, as stated above.

In the first rak'ah one should recite *Sabbih isma rabbika al-'a'la* ("Glorify the name of your Lord, the Most High" – Surah al-A'la 87). In the second one should recite Surah al-Kafirun (109), and in

the third Surah al-Ikhlas (112).

Al-Nasai (1729) narrated that Ubayy ibn Ka’b said: The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) used to recite in Witr Sabbih isma rabbika al-‘a’la (“Glorify the name of your Lord, the Most High” – Surah al-A’la 87), Qul ya ayyuha’l-kafirun (“Say: O disbelievers…” – Surah al-Kafirun 109) and Qul Huwa Allahu ahad (“Say: He is Allah, the One” – Surah al-Ikhlas 112). Classed as sahih by al-Albani in Saheeh al-Nasai.

All these ways of offering Witr prayer have been mentioned in the Sunnah, but the best way is not to stick to one particular way; rather one should do it one way one time and another way another time, so that one will have done all the Sunnahs.

And Allah knows best.