82619 - A non-Muslim is asking why Sunnah prayers are offered before the obligatory prayers

the question

This question has been asked by a non muslim and i do not know how to answer it. muslims believe allah is before everything, why do you pray sunnah before farz? eg fajar, zahur,assar sallah etc.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

We thank you for your interest in matters of your religion, and your keenness to seek goodness for yourself and others. We should point out that discussion with the kuffaar about matters of Islam should only be undertaken by specialists, lest one of them instil doubts in the mind of the Muslim who wants to call them and he becomes confused as to how to answer them.

Although we appreciate your sending his question to us and not answering him yourself, we advise you – and those who call others to Allaah in general – not to give the kuffaar the opportunity to debate minor practical issues. Rather discussion with them should be about basic issues from which these minor issues stem and on which they are based. So you should speak about the Oneness of God (Tawheed), proving the Resurrection and the Reckoning, the message of our Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), explaining the beauties of Islam and how it is in accordance with sound human nature and commonsense, refuting shirk, and presenting proof and evidence to support that.

There is no reason why you should not reply concerning some of these issues to one whom you know wants to find out the truth; this response may open the door to his entering the religion of Allaah.

Secondly:

There are some misunderstandings in this non-Muslim's question, and these mistakes must be addressed before starting to answer in detail. There is no connection between Allaah's being before all things and the regular Sunnah prayers being offered before the obligatory prayers, because the prescription of doing prayers in this order comes from Allaah.

Perhaps he thinks that the naafil and regular Sunnah prayers are offered to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him)! Perhaps this is why he is confused about this issue, so he thinks that we draw near to Allaah by offering the regular Sunnah prayers to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), and the obligatory prayers to Allaah, may He be exalted. Undoubtedly this is ignorance of the religion of Islam, and it will not be difficult for the Muslim to refute it.

Whatever the case, we are the slaves of our Lord, may He be glorified and exalted, and we do what He commands us. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) did not enjoin upon the people anything other than that which Allaah commanded him to convey. He is a slave of his Lord just as we are, and the difference between him and us is that Allaah honoured him with the Revelation and Message. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"Say (O Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم): 'I am only a man like you. It has been revealed to me that your Ilaah (God) is One Ilaah (God __ i.e. Allaah)…'"

[al-Kahf 18:110]

"And when Our clear Verses are recited unto them, those who hope not for their Meeting with Us, say: "Bring us a Qur'aan other than this, or change it." Say (O Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم): 'It is not for me to change it on my own accord; I only follow that which is revealed unto me. Verily, I fear the torment of the Great Day (i.e. the Day of Resurrection) if I were to disobey my Lord'"

[Yoonus 10:15].

Thirdly:

The regular Sunnah prayers offered by the Muslim in a day and a night add up to twelve rak’ahs. Concerning the virtue of these, it is narrated that the one who prays them regularly will have a house built for him in Paradise. This has been discussed in the answer to question no. 1048. They are: two rak'ahs before Fajr, four rak’ahs before Zuhr and two rak’ahs after, two rak’ahs after Maghrib and two rak’ahs after ‘Isha’.

Fourthly:

The scholars (may Allaah have mercy on them) have mentioned some rulings concerning prayers offered before the obligatory prayer. It is well known that the one who enters the mosque should pray two rak’ahs before sitting down. It is also Sunnah to pray two rak'ahs after doing wudoo’, and also to offer regular Sunnah prayers before some prayers such as Fajr and Zuhr – as stated above. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) also encouraged praying four rak’ahs before ‘Asr, and he prescribed a (Sunnah) prayer before Maghrib, and between the adhaan and iqaamah. All of this is a prescription to offer naafil prayers before the obligatory prayers, and there is great wisdom in that.

1.

Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Azeez ibn Baaz (may Allaah have mercy on him) said:

There are many benefits in these regular Sunnah prayers, and offering them regularly is one of the means of entering Paradise and being saved from Hell, along with offering the obligatory prayers and avoiding haraam things. They are voluntary and not obligatory, but as it says in the hadeeth, the obligatory prayers are perfected by them. They are among the means of attaining Allaah’s love, and doing them is following the example of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him). So the believer should offer them regularly and pay attention to them as the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) did with the Sunnah prayer of Duha, and tahajjud at night and Witr, so the believer should pay attention to all of that. End quote.

Fataawa al-Shaykh Ibn Baaz (11/381).

2.

Shaykh ‘Attiyah Saalim (may Allaah have mercy on him) said:

The Muslim should offer the naafil prayer before the obligatory one so as to prepare himself to stand before Allaah when he has the best presence of mind possible. This is a kind of preparation or introduction, because it makes you more alert and focused, and more eager to seek that which is with Allaah. If you start the obligatory prayer straightaway, you may realize that you need some preparation for it. But if you pray the sunnah prayer first, you will be more prepared. Every obligatory prayer – as we said – has a naafil prayer before it. Fajr has two rak’ahs before it, Zuhr has two or four rak'ahs before it, and ‘Asr has four rak’ahs before it. They used to pray two rak’ahs before Maghrib; al-Raawi said: So that if a stranger entered the mosque, and saw people standing behind the pillars, he would think that the people had already prayed Maghrib. It says in the hadeeth: “Pray before Maghrib, pray before Maghrib, pray before Maghrib,” and the third time he said: “for those who wish,” because he did not want the people to take it as a binding Sunnah. And he said: “Between each two calls there is a prayer,” and Maghrib like all other prayers has two calls, namely the adhaan and iqaamah. Similarly before ‘Isha’ there is a naafil prayer, and another after it. End quote.

Sharh al-Arba’een al-Nawawiyyah (hadeeth no. 30)

3.

Shaykh Muhammad al-Mukhtaar al-Shanqeeti (may Allaah preserve him) said:

The regular Sunnah prayers were prescribed for important reasons. If the worshipper starts with the obligatory prayer straight away, his focus and presence of mind is less than it would be if he had offered the Sunnah prayer before the obligatory prayer, as is the case with Zuhr. At the time of Zuhr people are tired and distracted because of their work and the toughness of seeking to earn a living, so if they start to pray when they have just come from doing business and so on, they will be less focused than if they had started with the Sunnah prayer and then started the obligatory prayer after that. Worship calms one down and makes one more focused, and this is learned from

the practice of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him). When he wanted to pray qiyaam al-layl, he started with two brief rak'ahs, and they said: Because this initial action prepares one to pray at length, and it helps one to focus properly. The regular Sunnah prayers serve the same purpose. This also happens with the person who comes late to the prayer, or who comes as the iqaamah is being given. When he starts to pray you will not find him having the same focus as if he had come between the adhaan and iqaamah and offered the regular Sunnah prayer and remembered Allaah. One good deed leads to another, so after offering the Sunnah prayer you will find that he is more focused and more calm, and this makes him more able to offer the obligatory prayer with proper presence of mind. This applies if the regular Sunnah prayer comes before the obligatory one. End quote.

Sharh Zaad al-Mustaqni' (Kitaab al-Salaah)

And Allaah knows best.