9061 - How to Pray Witr If You Don't Know Du’a Al-Qunut

the question

I have noticed that it takes me time to learn a certain du’a or surah by heart . I know that du’a al-qunut is obligatory in 3 witr prayer of the ‘Isha prayer. I always used to read some other surah instead of this du’a as I did not know the du’a by heart but I recently found out that it is obligatory so I tried to learn the du’a but it is taking me time. So for several days I have been doing this; when I do 3 witr prayer, in the third rak’ah I read from a book which I pick up from the side table during the prayer. I still face the qiblah when I pick it up, in fact I do not have to move to pick it up. I want to know if it is allowed that you read a surah or du’a from a book during the prayer.

Summary of answer

There is nothing wrong with reading du’a al-qunut from a piece of paper or a booklet in Witr prayer until one is able to memorize it. It is not obligatory for the du’a of Qunut to be in the words narrated from the Prophet.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Is it permissible to read du’a al-qunut from a paper?

There is nothing wrong with reading the du’a of Qunut from a piece of paper or a booklet in Witr prayer until one is able to memorize it, after which you can stop reading it and can recite it from memory. It is also permissible to recite Quran from the Mus-haf during nafl prayers for those who have not memorized a lot of Quran.

Shaykh Ibn Baz was asked about the ruling on reading Quran from the Mus-haf in Tarawih prayer, and what the evidence is for that from the Quran and Sunnah.

He replied:

“There is nothing wrong with reading from the Mus-haf when praying at night during Ramadan because that will enable the believers to hear all of the Quran. And because the evidence of Shari`ah from the Quran and Sunnah indicates that it is prescribed to recite Quran in prayer, which includes both reading it from the Mus-haf and reciting it by heart.

`Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her) narrated that she told her freed slave Dhakwan to lead her in praying night prayers during Ramadan, and he used to read from the Mus-haf. This was narrated by al-Bukhari (may Allah have mercy on him) in his Sahih, in a mu’allaq majzum report.” (Fatawa Islamiyyah, 2/155)

Can you read any du’a in al-Qunut?

It is not obligatory for the du’a of Qunut to be in the words narrated from the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him); rather it is permissible for the worshipper to say other words or to add to them. Even if he were to recite verses from the Quran that include words of supplication, that would be sufficient.

Al-Nawawi (may Allah have mercy on him) said: “Note that there is no specific du’a for Qunut according to the preferred point of view. Any du’a that is said will serve as Qunut, even if one recites a verse or verses from the Quran that include words of supplication, this will count as Qunut, but it is better to recite the words that were narrated in the Sunnah.” (Al-Adhkar al-Nawawiyyah, p. 50)

What to read in witr instead of du’a al-qunut?

As for what the brother mentions about reciting Quran instead of the du’a of Qunut , there is no doubt that he should not do this, because the purpose behind Qunut is du’a or supplication. Hence if these verses include words of supplication, it is permissible to recite them as Qunut, for example, the verse in which Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Our Lord! Let not our hearts deviate (from the truth) after You have guided us, and grant us mercy from You. Truly, You are the Bestower” [Al ‘Imran 3:8]

Is du’a al-qunut obligatory?

With regard to what the brother says about Qunut being obligatory, this is not correct, because Qunut is Sunnah. Based on this, if a worshipper omits Qunut, his prayer is still valid.

Shaykh Ibn Baz (may Allah have mercy on him) was asked about the ruling on reciting the du’a of Qunut in Witr during the nights of Ramadan, and whether it is permissible to omit it.

He replied:

“Qunut is Sunnah in Witr and if a person omits it sometimes, there is nothing wrong with that.”

And he was asked about a person who always recites Qunut in Witr every night – was that narrated from our forebears (the salaf)?

He replied:

“There is nothing wrong with that, rather it is Sunnah, because when the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) taught al-Husayn ibn ‘Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) to say Qunut in Witr, he did not tell him to omit it sometimes or to do it all the time. This indicates that either is permissible. Hence it was narrated that when Ubayy ibn Ka’b (may Allah be pleased with him) led the Companions in prayer in the Mosque of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), he used to omit Qunut some nights; perhaps that was in order to teach the people that it is not obligatory. And Allah is the Source of strength.” (Fatawa Islamiyyah, 2/159)

And Allah knows best.