

Tarawih- An Innovation and a Deviation

There are numerous reports in the books of traditions, narrations and Sunnat quoted from the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) and the infallible Imams (a.s.) regarding the legality of the recommended prayers of the Ramazan month. Legality here means the governing laws, the number of units and the way of reciting these prayers. It can be concluded that these prayers are allowed.

The point of contention however, is, whether these prayers must be recited individually or in congregation? This topic will be covered extensively at a later stage in the article.

The books of Islamic laws and traditions of both Shias and Ahle Sunnat mention innumerable recommended prayers. Some of the prayers exceed a thousand units. The recommended congregational prayers of the Month of Ramzan, in the ahle sunnah sect is better known as Tarawih. The prayer of Tarawih is among the recommended prayers of the Ahle Sunnat and it is performed in congregation in the nights of Ramazan at an estimated twenty units daily. There is no doubt that prayers is the best form of worship and there is no specific limit for recommended prayers in Islamic jurisprudence. But the pertinent question is "has the law allowed for recommended prayers like *Naafela* for example, to be recited in congregation like obligatory prayers and those which have been specifically mentioned by Islamic law?

There exists a divergence of views between Shias and Ahle Sunnat in the matter of Tarawih.

Tarawih did not exist at the time of Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a)

Sunni scholars are unable to prove the veracity of Tarawih from the Prophet's (s.a.w.a.) Sunnah.

Was the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) in favour of Tarawih?

Does the Tarawih have any legitimacy in the Holy Quran and / or the Sunnah?

Was it prayed at the time of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.)?

The Tarawih finds no mention in the Holy Quran.

A cursory glance at the reports of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) indicates that the Tarawih never received the sanction of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) either. On the contrary Clearly the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) never offered the recommended prayers of the Month of Ramazan in congregation and repeatedly dispersed the congregation whenever he (s.a.w.a.) witnessed it. Hence to brand the Tarawih as Sunnah Muakkadah or any Sunnah for the matter is a lie. In fact it is an innovation which will take its founder along with the practitioners to the Fire.

All of the sunni scholars are unanimous that it was started by Umar b. Khattaab in the 14th Hijri during his own caliphate. It neither existed in the time of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) nor during the

caliphate of Abu Bakr.

We find in some traditions that the first person to establish the Sunnat congregational prayer in the month of Ramazan is Umar b. Khattab when it did not exist in the time of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) or the Caliphate of Abu Bakr. But Umar gave his opinion for it based on its fondness and goodness and exhorted the people to practice it. He admitted it was an innovation although a good one. Interestingly, he himself was not regular in the congregation but recited in solitude at home. This fact has been revealed by great scholars of the Ahle Sunnat like Qastalani, Ibne Qaddamah, Qalqashqandi, etc. We will discuss their writings later.

Umar ordered Muslims to pray Tarawih based on his whim. He admitted it was an innovation although a good one.

Ibne Shahaab says: The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) passed away and things continued in this manner during the reign of Abu Bakr and the first part of Umar's caliphate.

(Saheeh-e-Bukhaari, vol1 pg 343)

Qastalaani comments: Umar called this prayer as innovation. This is because the Prophet (s.a.w.a.) had not ordered its performance in congregation. It was not performed in the first part of night in the caliphate of Abu Bakr. It was not recited every night. Also, the prayers performed in the time of the Prophet (s.a.w.a.) did not have the same number of units.

(Irshaad al-Saari, vol 4 pg 657)

Ibne Qudaamah says: Tarawih has been related to Umar since he ordered its performance in congregation to Ubayy b. Kaab and he did accordingly.

(Al-Mughni, vol 2 pg 166)

Al-Aini opines: Umar called it an innovation because the Prophet (s.a.w.a.) has not established it as Sunnah. It was also not acted upon in the caliphate of Abu Bakr.

(Umdah al-Qaari, vol 11 pg 126)

More evidence of the fact that the Tarawih is a Bidah with no trace of it during the Prophet's (s.a.w.a.) life time can be found in the confusion regarding the number of units of the Tarawih.

There is conflict among the Sunnis regarding the number of units of Naafilah. The reason for this is that they do not have a clear link from the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) regarding it. According to many Sunni scholars it is 20 units. However, others have varyingly recorded it to be 36 units, 23 units, 16 units, 13 units, 24 units, 34 units and 14 units.

Sayyid Murtaza (r.a.) declares: As far as the congregation of the Tarawih prayers is concerned, it is without doubt an innovation.

The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) declared – O people, the recommended congregational prayers in the nights

of the Month of Ramazan is an innovation...surely a little from the Sunnah is better than much from innovation. Beware every innovation is deviation and leads to the Fire.

Taqreeb al-Maarif p 347

Nahj al-Haqq p 289-290

Imam Sadiq (a.s.) narrates – The Prophet (s.a.w.a.) used to increase his prayers (nafilah) during the Month of Ramazan. When he (s.a.w.a.) used to pray (obligatory prayers) at early night, he would pray (nafilah) after it. The people would assemble behind him (to pray in congregation). So he would enter (his chamber) and leave them. Then he (s.a.w.a.) would come out and again they would assemble and pray behind him (s.a.w.a.). So he would leave them and he would enter (his chamber) time and again.

Al-Kafi v 4 p 155, v 7 p 616

Wasail al-Shia v 8 p 22, p 23 (with variation), p 46

1. Shaikh Toosi (r.a.) by his chain of narration has related through Masadah b. Sadaqah from Imam Sadiq (a.s.): The method of Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) in the blessed Ramazan month was that he would increase his recommended prayers progressively from the beginning of the month to the twentieth day to twenty additional units. Eight units after Maghrib and twelve units after Eshaa. And he recited thirty units in the last ten days. Twelve after Maghrib and eighteen after Eshaa. In addition to this, he read the tahajjud prayer and supplications a great deal. He prayed a hundred units in both the twenty-first and twenty-third nights and was awake throughout the nights.[13]

2. Also, Shaikh Toosi (r.a.) has narrated from Imam Sadiq (a.s.) through Mufazzal thus:

More than 1,000 units of prayers are recited in the Ramazan month.[14]

Mufazzal asked: Who has the strength to recite so many prayers?

Imam (a.s.) replied: O Mufazzal, it is not as you assume. Can prayers of more than 1,000 units not be recited? Is it not possible to recite 20 units in every night, 100 units each in the 19th, 21st and 23rd nights and 30 units in the last eight nights would bring the total to 920 units? [15]

In addition to this, there are numerous other traditions from the Imams (a.s.) which clarify that 20 additional units to be recited in the first twenty nights and 30 units in the last ten nights. This has already come in detail.

Sayyid Murtaza (r.a.) continues " Umar himself acknowledged it to be in contravention of the Sunnat and therefore an innovation. The Ahle Sunnat scholars have themselves recorded the warning of the Prophet (s.a.w.a.)

In another incident the people gathered in the Kufa Mosque and requested Ameerul Momineen (a.s.) Ali b. Abi Talib to appoint a person to lead the congregation of worshippers for the recommended prayers of Ramazan. He chastised them for this request and said: This is against the Sunnat.

Sayyid Murtaza (r.a.) records that the Jurist of the Jurists claims that the recommended prayers of Ramazan month were performed in congregation in the era of the Prophet (s.a.w.a.), but then he abandoned them. The claim that the Prophet (s.a.w.a.) performed it in congregation is nothing but a lie. Clearly, Shiites are not against the recitation of the recommended prayers, its only that they don't accept the preference for reciting it in congregation. And if someone claims that the Prophet (s.a.w.a.) performed it in congregation, it is just that "â" a mere claim, without any documentary evidence whatsoever. Such claims are made dime a dozen and have no legality whatsoever in Islam unless backed by an endorsement from the Quran or the Sunnat. More importantly, if there was a shred of truth in these claims, why would Umar call it an innovation?

It is clear that the Shiite viewpoint on the recommended prayers are backed by both Ijma (consensus) and Ehteyaat (precaution). This is because one who recites the recommended prayers in the privacy of his house is neither a sinner nor an innovator according to the consensus. However, one who recites the recommended prayers in congregation carries the burden of both sin and innovation.

"Every innovation is deviation and every deviation will be in the Fire."

There are numerous traditions in Shiite books on the illegitimacy of the Tarawih prayers. Those interested in researching this topic further can refer to the books of both the sects to distinguish truth from falsehood.

[1]Beharul Anwaar, vol.1, pg. 363; Fathul Baari, vol 4, pg. 294; Irshadus Saari, vol.4, pg. 694; Sharhuz Zarqaani, vol1, pg 237, An-Nihaya vol.1, pg. 274; Lisanul Arab, Qamus,etc..