

## Significance of *Taravīh*<sup>1</sup> Prayers in the Month of *Ramadan*

It has often been seen and practised in many Muslim communities and in many countries, that there is an imposed compulsivity upon Muslims, to perform *Taravīh* prayers during the month of *Ramadan*. This imposition is further unjustifiably twisted by those communities, by also making compulsory upon Muslims, that *Taravīh* prayers must always be performed inside a mosque<sup>2</sup>.

Whilst fasting<sup>3</sup> during the month of *Ramadan* is an essential practising requirement, it is still not compulsory, but remains as one of the five pillars<sup>4</sup> of Islam. *Taravīh* prayers, (according

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<sup>1</sup> Some geographical variations in spellings are *Tarawee*, *Taravīh*, *Taravī* and *Tarawīh*: They all mean the same thing as “periods of rest between every four *raka’ahs*.”

<sup>2</sup> Every country in the world does not have Muslim majority population with many mosques within close proximity. In many countries Muslims are not only in the minority, but they live in locations where there may not even be a mosque or similar substitute (e.g. *Marakaz*) within close reach. Hence Muslims may also perform *Taravīh* prayers at home (Hadith *Sahih Bukhari* – 10: 80, 81) or at any other location, inasmuch as they are allowed to perform the five times daily compulsory prayers at home or at any other location.

<sup>3</sup> Sawm (or ritual fasting) is made compulsory during the month of *Ramadan* for men and women and boys and girls who are in good health. The Holy Qur’an states at HQ2: 183-185, as:

HQ2:183 “O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard against evil.” HQ2:184 “For a certain number of days. But whoever among you is sick or on a journey, (he shall fast) a (like) number of other days. And those who find it extremely hard may effect redemption by feeding a poor man. So whoever does good spontaneously, it is better for him; and that you fast is better for you if you know.” HQ2:185 “The month of *Ramadan* is that in which the *Quran* was revealed, a guidance to men and clear proofs of the guidance and the Criterion. So whoever of you is present in the month, he shall fast therein, and whoever is sick or on a journey, (he shall fast) a (like) number of other days. Allah desires ease for you, and He desires not hardship for you, and (He desires) that you should complete the number and that you should exalt the greatness of Allah for having guided you and that you may give thanks.”

The Holy Qur’an makes lucidly clear that fasting is only during daylight hours and normal life should continue after breaking of fast and before resumption of fast the next morning. This is at HQ2:187, as “It is made lawful for you to go in to your wives on the night of the fast. They are an apparel for you and you are an apparel for them. Allah knows that you acted unjustly to yourselves, so He turned to you in mercy and removed (the burden) from you. So now be in contact with them and seek what Allah has ordained for you, and eat and drink until the whiteness of the day becomes distinct from the blackness of the night at dawn, then complete the fast till nightfall, and touch them not while you keep to the mosques. These are the limits of Allah, so go not near them. Thus does Allah make clear His messages for men that they may keep their duty.”

In addition, the Holy Qur’an makes no distinction between men and women that both men and women can reach the thresholds of spiritual perfection and fasting is expected of both men and women; this is stated in the Holy Qur’an as HQ33:35 “Surely the men who submit and the women who submit, and the believing men and the believing women, and the obeying men and the obeying women, and the truthful men and the truthful women, and the patient men and the patient women, and the humble men and the humble women, and the charitable men and the charitable women, and the fasting men and the fasting women, and the men who guard their chastity and the women who guard, and the men who remember Allah much and women who remember — Allah has prepared for them forgiveness and a mighty reward.”

to the numbers of *raka'ahs* adopted variably by different communities, and guided by different *Imams*) are not compulsory, but practised as beneficial recommendation.

In a nutshell, *Taraviah* prayer is effectively the seasonal relocation of *Tahajjud* prayer from its usual post-sleep prayer performance to pre-sleep prayer performance, only in the month of *Ramadan*. Hence after completion of *Ramadan*, *Tahajjud* prayers should resume to regular practice of positioning, after sleep: between *Isha'a* and *Fajr* prayers, as stated in the Hadith.

This special seasonal change has been brilliantly intertwined to *Isha'a* prayers as a one-stop last prayer performances<sup>5</sup> before sleeping at night, and beneficially allowing some essential rest before awakening very early in preparation for fasting, the next morning. This practising beauty of Islam in terms of logical and seasonal flexibility remains functionally unique and that same aspect is also admired by millions of people throughout the world. *Taraviah* prayers have been in existence for over 1,400 years (*Hijri*).

It should also be noted, however, that *Taraviah* prayers do not substitute or replace the compulsory requirement of prayers five times<sup>6</sup> daily, and the compulsory Friday congregational prayer<sup>7</sup> and the supererogatory prayer<sup>8</sup> other than in the month of *Ramadan*.

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), in his admirable wisdom, decided to intertwine the essential *Isha'a* prayer with his *Tahajjud* prayer, so that he would be advantaged to some rest by sleeping after the prayers; and then wake up early for his breakfast in preparation for fasting the next morning. He was noticed by his close followers in the mosque (*Masjid Nabui*) who stood behind him and joined in the prayers, which they assumed, was *Isha'a* but had additional *raka'ahs*. The immediate following night, as word went around, more people came and joined and by the third night the congregation was quite large. On the fourth night, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) did not come for *Taraviah* prayers.

When his obedient and dependable followers questioned his absence, he replied that he did not want *Taraviah* to become compulsory upon Muslims every night throughout the whole year. There was some mixed understanding whether or not the *Taraviah* prayers were

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<sup>4</sup> The five pillars (or essential principles) of Islam are: (1) Shahada (*belief there is only One God and Muhammad is His final Prophet*), (2) Salat (*prayers*), (3) Zakat (*Charity*), (4) Sawm (*Fasting*); and (5) Hajj (*pilgrimage to Mecca*).

<sup>5</sup> It has become customary practice in the month of *Ramadan* at each sunset, that there is *adhan*, followed by breaking of the fast, then followed by *magrib* prayers, then consumption of dinner and finally the performance of *Taraviah* prayers. This routine has been stated in the six *Sahih Hadith* of: Practices of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) are recorded in *Hadith*, especially in the cases of six authenticated (*Sahih Hadith*), such as listed 1-6 in order of highest elevation, with highest at 1: 1. *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, 2. *Sahih Muslim*, 3. *Sunan al-Sugra*, 4. *Sunan Abu Dawood*, 5. *Jami al-Trimidhi* 6. *Sunan ibn Majah*.

<sup>6</sup> Prayers five times daily are: *Fajr*, *Zuhr*, *Asr*, *Magrib* and *Isha'a*, which includes 3 *raka'ahs* *Witr*.

<sup>7</sup> Friday compulsory congregational prayer is called *Jumu'ah*.

<sup>8</sup> Supererogatory prayer is *Tahajjud*.

classifiable as *Sunnah*? The six *Sahih* Hadith<sup>9</sup> are clear on this point that *Taraviah* prayers are not compulsory. The author has decided not to mention on the numbers of *raka'ahs* performed, as the numbers differ 12-20 and some of the Hadith, which differ in *raka'ahs* numbers, are considered as rather weak.

Immediately during the inception stages of *Taraviah*, small groups of Muslim followers were performing *Taraviah* prayers as separate satellite groups within the mosque (*Masjid Nabui*). It was then that Hazrat Umar ibn Al-Khattab (ra) directed that the various groups must unite and pray together as a single congregation and must be led by a single Imam. Thereafter, this brought about uniformity in control and unison in practise as a single congregation.

Whilst there are variations between mainstream Sunni groups (e.g. *Hanafi* and *Shafi'i*) and the other mainstream Shiite groups, it is not the mission objective of the author of this article to deliberate upon or criticise any of those mainstream groups<sup>10</sup> and sects regarding their purposeful differences and practices in performing *Taraviah*.

May Allah bless them all; regardless of whatever differences they may have inherited as sects. Amin.

In order to bring about uniformity in understanding the significance of *Taraviah* prayers, it is strongly recommended that the information in this document gets widely disseminated to other Muslims.

It is for all correct thinking Muslims to guide and assist other Muslims; the Holy Qur'an has sanctioned that correct advice shall be given to those who need to be guided. This is given in the Holy Qur'an at HQ3:103, as "*And from among you there should be a party who invite to good and enjoin the right and forbid the wrong. And these are they who are successful.*"

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<sup>9</sup> Hadith *Sahih* Bukhari (Hadith No 872), Hadith *Sahih* Muslim (Hadith No 1271), Hadith *Sahih* Abu Dawood (Hadith No 1166) are a few *Sahih* Hadith as authenticity.

<sup>10</sup> There are total of 72 subsects between the mainstream Sunni (60 subsects) and Shiite Divisions (12 subsects). The sects have their own differences, which are very much respected.