

Praying behind an Imaam who Prays 23 rak'ah Taraaweeh

source: *silsilat ul-hudaa wa nnoor* – the series of guidance and light - tape no. 254

Article taken and slightly adapted from: <http://asaheeha.wordpress.com>

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Shaykh al-Albaanee (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ)¹ talks about the situation that many of our brothers and sisters upon the Sunnah face when praying *taraaweeh* (the night prayer) during Ramadhaan behind an Imaam who lengthens the prayer to more than 11 rak'ah:

"I read from some of the scholars there in Saudi that they severely criticize those who pray 10 rak'at then leave (the Imaam), and they urge them [with] the hadeeth that I indicated earlier, [saying] that they did not leave with the leaving of the Imaam. So the answer now, whether concerning Madeenah or Makkah, is... indeed we find in the Sunnah that which is harder or more serious than this phenomenon that those scholars criticise – those who criticize the people who leave (the Imaam) after them praying 10 rak'at."

Shaykh al-Albaanee (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) then relates the following narration found in both Saheeh al-Bukhaaree and Saheeh Muslim. There are some extra details that the Shaykh mentions as he narrates it, but it is the same hadeeth:

"Mu'aadh bin Jabal (rad iyallaahu `anhu) used to pray the 'Ishaa prayer with the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم)², then come to his people and lead them in prayer [Shaykh al-Albaanee (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) comments: 'As Jaabir (rad iyallaahu `anhu) (the narrator) said, it (this latter 'Ishaa prayer) was a supererogatory prayer for him (Mu'aadh) and an obligatory prayer for them (his people)]. One night, he led his people in prayer and recited Soorah al-Baqarah, so a man [Shaykh al-Albaanee (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) mentions that he was a man from the Ansaar] left (the congregation) and prayed a light prayer (of 4 rak'at) by himself, and went away. Then, that (occurrence) reached Mu'aadh (rad iyallaahu `anhu), and he said, 'Indeed, he is a hypocrite' [Shaykh al-Albaanee (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) comments: 'Why? Because he had left the prayer in congregation. But it will become clear to us later on that Mu'aadh (rad iyallaahu `anhu) was wrong and that what that Ansaaree had done was correct. **So what one of us does in our times (by leaving the Imaam after praying 10 rak'at) is not more severe in opposing the Imaam than that Ansaaree.** Then, that (Mu'aadh's criticism) reached the man, so he came to the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) and said, 'O Messenger of Allaah! (صلى الله عليه وسلم) Indeed, we are in charge of camels for watering; we work during the daytime. And indeed Mu'aadh led us in the prayer last night and he recited Soorah al-Baqarah.'" So, the Messenger of Allaah (صلى الله عليه وسلم) turned to Mu'aadh (rad iyallaahu `anhu) and said, 'O Mu'aadh! Are you one who puts (the people) to trial? (three times) Recite wash-shamsi wa duhaaha (Surat ush-Shams) and sabbihhi sma rabbika l-'alaa (Surat ul-A'laa) and the like, for indeed the old, the weak and the needy pray behind you.'"

The Shaykh continues:

"Now, we find the Messenger (of Allaah) (صلى الله عليه وسلم) not blaming the one who had left (the Imaam), but rather he (صلى الله عليه وسلم)³ blamed the one who had lengthened (the prayer) [beyond its proper

¹ (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) (rahimahullaah) May Allaah have mercy on him

² (صلى الله عليه وسلم) May the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him

³ (عليه السلام) (alaihi-salaam) Peace be upon him

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limits]. And we consider those who pray 20 rak'ah (for taraaweeh) to be those who lengthen (the prayer), while being aware that the basis of lengthening is allowed; meaning, its basis is allowed for he who prays alone and he lengthens and lengthens, there is absolutely no harm upon him. But when he (Mu'aadh (rad iyallaahu `anhu)) prayed in congregation, and he lengthened (the prayer) and opposed the Sunnah, then the one who cut off the prayer (the Ansaaree), and it is actually not allowed in normal circumstances, **but when there was an Islaamically legislated excuse for him, which was the lengthening of recitation in the obligatory prayer more than the legislated Sunnah, the Messenger (of Allaah) (عليه السلام) did not criticize that Ansaaree for his cutting off his prayer.**

So then why do some of the mashaikh there criticise us, (saying) that we cut off the prayer, while (in reality) we don't cut it off – rather we exit (the prayer) with them with the salaam!, (in accordance with) the hadeeth: 'The takbeer makes (the unlawful acts during prayer) unlawful, and the tasleem makes (those acts) permissible.' So we don't cut it off as that Ansaaree had done. So why do they criticise? My assumption, and Allaah knows best, goes back to two matters. It (the first matter) is: the predominant opinion with them is that the 20 (rak'ah for taraaweeh) is allowed or the Sunnah of 'Umar [rad iyallaahu `anhu]. And the second matter is that they don't go deep into studying the excuse of those whom they criticise. Because if they don't go deep into studying the excuse of that Ansaaree, they would join with Mu'aadh (rad iyallaahu `anhu) in criticising the Ansaaree, but when the judgment took place between them in front of the Messenger (of Allaah) (عليه السلام), relief and forgiveness was for who? For that Ansaaree, over that Imaam, and he was Mu'aadh bin Jabal...

Therefore, one should not have this over-enthusiasm to refute the followers of the Sunnah when they make the (final) tasleem with the Imaam at 10 rak'at, because **indeed we say that if any man prays (just) two rak'ah of the night prayer behind the Imaam, there is no way for anyone to criticise him**, because this (the night prayer) is a supererogatory prayer, so he may pray whatever he wishes from it."⁴

⁴ asaheeha translations