

Home > Salat al-Layl

Salat al-Layl

Taken from the Book: Weapon of the Believer

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A short article that explains methods of reciting Salat al-Layl (the night prayer). Includes Arabic along with English translations.

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Category:

Salaat (Ritual Prayer) [6]

Topic Tags:

Salat [7]

Weapon [8]

Introduction

In many of the verses of the Qur`an, the performance of Salat al-Layl and staying awake a portion of the night – after midnight – in the worship of Allah (Glory and Greatness be to Him) has been mentioned, of which, we present some of these verses:

وَالْمُسْتَغْفِرِينَ بِالْأَسْحَارِ.

“...and those who ask forgiveness in the morning times.”

وَمِنَ اللَّيْلِ فَتَهَجَّدْ بِهِ نَافِلَةً لَّكَ.

“Say your special (tahajjud) prayer during some part of the night...”

وَالَّذِينَ يَبِيتُونَ لِرَبِّهِمْ سُجَّدًا وَقِيَامًا.

“And they who pass the night prostrating themselves before their Lord and standing.”

تَتَجَافَى جُنُوبُهُمْ عَنِ الْمَضَاجِعِ يَدْعُونَ رَبَّهُمْ خَوْفًا وَطَمَعًا وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ.

“Their sides draw away from (their) beds, they call upon their Lord in fear and in hope, and they spend (benevolently) out of what We have given them.”

كَانُوا قَلِيلًا مِّنَ اللَّيْلِ مَا يَهْجَعُونَ. وَبِالْأَسْحَارِ هُمْ يَسْتَغْفِرُونَ

“They used to sleep but little in the night. And in the morning they asked forgiveness.”

The Salat al-Layl was Wajib upon the Messenger of Allah¹ and no Prophet had been sent before him except that it was obligatory upon them as well.²

In the ahadith from the Ahlul Bayt (peace be upon all of them), it has been emphatically mentioned that:

1. Salat al-Layl protects one during the daytime.³
2. Salat al-Layl is a Kaffarah for the sins committed in the day.⁴
3. That house in which Salat al-Layl is recited beams with light for those who are in the heavens just as the stars beam with light for those who are on earth.⁵
4. The great and noble people of our nation are those who are protectors of the Qur`an and who stay awake the night in worship.⁶
5. There are three things which raise a person's rank and station:
 - (i) Initiating the greeting to a fellow Muslim,
 - (ii) feeding poor people,
 - (iii) Salat in the darkness of the night when all other people are busy sleeping.⁷
6. Salat al-Layl makes one's face beautiful; beautifies one's etiquette; gives a pleasant smell to one's body and increases one's daily sustenance. It also removes sorrow and grief and gives strength to the eyes.⁸
7. One who does not read the Salat al-Layl is not considered as a Shi`a of the Ahlul Bayt.⁹
8. One who is not able to perform the Salat al-Layl is truly a very unfortunate person.¹⁰
9. Committing sins is one of the reasons for one to be unsuccessful in the performance of Salat al-Layl.¹¹
10. The performance of Salat al-Layl leads to gaining the pleasure of Allah (Glory and Greatness be to Him); love of the Angels; is the Sunnah of the Prophets; leads to the light of true recognition of Allah (Glory and Greatness be to Him); is the foundation of belief; tranquility of the soul; destruction of Shaitan; a weapon against one's enemies; acceptance of one's supplications; acceptance of one's actions; increases the blessings in one's sustenance; intercession when the Angel of Death comes; brightness in the grave; protects the person while in the grave; ease in the answering of the angels Munkir and Nakir and is the companion and friend in the grave.¹²

1. Bihar Al-Anwar, Vol. 87, Pg. 122

2. Bihar Al-Anwar, Vol. 87, Pg. 136; Tafsir Al-Qummi, Pg. 701

3. Bihar Al-Anwar, Vol. 87, Pg. 154; Mahasin Barqi, Pg. 53

4. Bihar Al-Anwar, Vol. 87, Pg. 136

5. Bihar Al-Anwar, Vol. 87, Pg. 161; Rawdhatu `l-Wai`dhin, Pg. 320
6. Bihar Al-Anwar, Vol. 87, Pg. 138; Amali Shaikh aduq, Pg. 141
7. Bihar Al-Anwar, Vol. 87, Pg. 141; Khisal, Vol. 1, Pg. 42
8. Bihar Al-Anwar, Vol. 86, Pg. 153, Thawab Al-A`mal, Pg. 38
9. Bihar Al-Anwar, Vol. 87, Pg. 162; Maqnah of Shaikh Mufid, Pg. 111
10. Bihar Al-Anwar, Vol. 87, Pg. 164; Ma`ani Al-Akhbar, Pg. 342
11. Bihar Al-Anwar, Vol. 87, Pg. 152; Tawhid Shaikh aduq, Pg. 17
12. Bihar Al-Anwar, Vol. 87, Pg. 161; Irshad Al-Qulub, Pg. 316

Method of Reciting Salat al-Layl

Salat al-Layl is 11 Rak`at in which the first 8 Rak`at are prayed in four Salat of two Rak`at each with the intention of *Salat al-Layl* (we finish each two Rak`at of Salat off with the Salam and then start the next set of Salat until we have completed 8 Rak`at). Following this, two Rak`at would be read with the intention of Salat ash-Shaf`. Once this is recited, one Rak`at with the intention of Salat al-Witr would be recited.

The time of Salat al-Layl is the last one third of the night.¹

It is a commonly held belief that the closer that the Salat al-Layl is read to the time of Salat al-Fajr, the better it is, however, in many ahadith it has been mentioned that a little bit after the middle of the night, the Prophet of Islam and the A`immah (blessings of Allah be upon all of them), performed the Salat al-Layl. The narrations that mention these are great and it has been mentioned that this is the time when one's supplications are answered.²

However, it has also been mentioned that the Messenger of Allah (blessings of Allah be upon him and his family) used to recite the Salat al-Layl in three stages:

1. Four Rak`at after the middle of the night.
2. Four Rak`at in the last one-third of the night.
3. Three Rak`at near to the time of Fajr while performing a very long Ruku.³

It has been narrated that when Imam `Ali ibn Musa al-Rida (peace be upon him) was on his way from Madinah to Khurasan, he first recited the Salat of Ja`far at-Tayyar and counted that Salat as a part of the Salat al-Layl.⁴

It is Mustahab that after each two Rak`at, the Tasbih of Fatima az-Zahra (blessings be upon her) is performed.⁵

In the second Rak`at of each of the two Rak`at Salat, it is Mustahab that before going into Ruku`, the Qunut is performed. It is also Mustahab that in the Qunut, if possible, one sheds tears for the fear of Allah and for the fear of the punishment of Allah (Glory and Greatness be to Him) and if one can not cry, he should at least 'pretend' to cry.⁶

It is Mustahab that in the first and second Rak`at of the Salat al-Layl that after Surah al-Fatiha, Surah al-Ikhlās is recited 30 times.⁷ If one is not able to recite this, then in the first Rak`at after al-Fatiha, one should recite Surah al-Ikhlās and in the second Rak`at after Surah al-Fatiha, one should recite Surah al-Kafirun.

It is better that in the second Rak`at of the first Salat, Surah al-Muzzammil is read and in the second Rak`at of the second Salat, Surah an-Naba is read. It is Mustahab that in the first Rak`at of the third Salat, Surah Ya Sin is read, and in the second Rak`at (of the third Salat), Surah ad-Dukhan is read – alternately, one can read Surah Waqiyah in place of Ya Sin and Surah al-Muddathir in place of Surah ad-Dukhan. It is Mustahab that in the first Rak`at of the fourth Salat, Surah al-Mulk is read and in the second Rak`at of the fourth Salat, Surah al-Insan is read.⁸

It has been mentioned that Imam Muhammad ibn `Ali al-Baqir (peace be upon him) used to recite Surah al-Ikhlās in the Salat al-Shaf` and Salat al-Witr and after reciting this Surah, would say:

كَذَلِكَ اللَّهُ رَبِّي

“This is Allah my Lord”⁹

Recitation of Surah al-Ikhlās is counted as the recitation of one-third of the Qur`an, thus, who ever recites this Surah in the three Rak`at (Salat al-Shaf` and Salat al-Witr) is as if he has recited the entire Qur`an.¹⁰

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1. Bihar Al-Anwar, Vol. 87, Pg. 223; Al-Hidayah, Pg. 35
 2. Bihar Al-Anwar, Vol. 87, Pg. 227
 3. Bihar Al-Anwar, Vol. 87, Pg. 228
 4. Bihar Al-Anwar, Vol. 87, Pg. 231; `Uyun Al-Akhbar ar-Rida, Vol. 2, Pg. 181
 5. Bihar Al-Anwar, Vol. 87, Pg. 243
 6. Bihar Al-Anwar, Vol. 87, Pg. 272; Misbah Al-Muttahajjid, Pg. 107
 7. Bihar Al-Anwar, Vol. 87, Pg. 232
 8. Bihar Al-Anwar, Vol. 87, Pg. 243
 9. Bihar Al-Anwar, Vol. 87, Pg. 226; Furu` Al-Kafi, Vol. 3, Pg. 441
 10. Bihar Al-Anwar, Vol. 86, Pg. 226; Tahdhib, Vol. 1, Pg. 171

Qunut of Salat al-Witr

The Salat al-Witr is one Rak`at and is the Salat and whispered supplication that completes the Salat al-Layl. As it has been mentioned in the ahadith, the Salat is the Me`raj of the believer, and the Salat al-Witr is the wave that carries the believer to the higher realms. It has been specifically mentioned in the ahadith that, “The more a person stands while in the Salat al-Witr will have to stand less on the Day of Judgement.” 1

The main item that carries one during this spiritual journey is the Qunut of the Salat al-Witr in which those who are the true servants of Allah, spend countless hours, engrossed in supplication and tears and asking forgiveness for their sins.

The Prophet of Islam Muhammad ibn `Abdullah (blessings of Allah be upon him and his family) has said: “Whichever of you prolongs the Qunut in his Salat al-Witr will have more ease on the Day of Judgement.”2

In the Wajib Salat, the Qunut is in place for the servant to supplicate to his Lord however in the Salat al-Witr, it is for asking forgiveness to Allah.3

The following verse of the Qur`an has been constantly mentioned in the ahadith in reference to asking forgiveness during the Salat and especially during the Salat al-Witr:

بِالْأَسْحَارِ هُمْ يَسْتَغْفِرُونَ

“...and in the morning time, they used to ask for forgiveness” 4

During the Qunut of the Salat al-Witr, there are many supplications, which can be recited, and although it is not possible to list all of them here, we will mention the most important forms of seeking forgiveness.

At the time of asking forgiveness, one should lift his left hand for asking forgiveness and use the right hand to count the number of times5 and if one uses a tasbeeh made from the dirt of Kerbala, then the reward of the forgiveness is increased.

It has been related that the Prophet of Islam Muhammad ibn Abdullah (blessings of Allah be upon him and his family) would ask forgiveness 70 times during the Salat al-Witr.6

Imam Ja`far ibn Muhammad as- adiq (peace be upon him) has said: “Whosoever recites the following in the Salat al-Witr 70 times and continues to do so for one entire year will be counted by Allah as a *Mustaghfirin bil ashar* or one who used to ask forgiveness during the night time and will make *Jannah*

Wajib upon that person.”7

أَسْتَغْفِرُ اللَّهَ وَأَتُوبُ إِلَيْهِ

“I seek repentance from Allah, my Lord and to Him I turn back.”

In another hadith it has been mentioned that, “Whosoever says the following 100 times at the end of his Qunut and continues to do so for forty nights will be counted as a *Mustaghfirin bil ashar* or one who used to ask forgiveness during the night time. 8

أَسْتَغْفِرُ اللَّهَ وَأَتُوبُ إِلَيْهِ

“I seek repentance from Allah, my Lord and to Him I turn back.”

The Prophet of Islam Muhammad ibn `Abdullah (blessings of Allah be upon him and his family) used to ask for forgiveness 70 times in the Qunut of Salat al-Witr followed by reciting the below line seven times:

هَذَا مَقَامُ الْعَائِدِ بِكَ مِنَ النَّارِ

“This is the station of the person who seeks refuge with You from the Hell Fire.”9

The method of asking forgiveness as taught to us by Amir al-Mo`minin `Ali ibn Abi Talib (peace be upon him) in the night as is follows:

1. Recite the following 70 times:

أَسْتَغْفِرُ اللَّهَ رَبِّي وَأَتُوبُ إِلَيْهِ

“I seek repentance from Allah, my Lord and to Him I turn back.”

2. Followed by reciting the following seven times:

أَسْتَغْفِرُ اللَّهَ الَّذِي لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ وَأَتُوبُ إِلَيْهِ

*“I seek repentance from Allah the One whom there is no god except Him, the Living and Self-Subsisting and to Him I turn back.”*¹⁰

One of the most important acts in the Qunut of the Salat al-Witr is supplication for forty believers (men or women) amongst one’s family, friends, those who have asked to be prayed for, the deceased and the Shi`a of Amir Al-Mo`minin `Ali ibn Abi Talib (peace be upon him). Whosoever does this will be assured that his supplications are answered.¹¹

One should then say the following three hundred times:

الْعَفْوُ

“I ask for forgiveness.”

Following this, the following should be said once:

رَبِّ اغْفِرْ لِي وَارْحَمْنِي وَتُبْ عَلَيَّ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ

*“Lord, please forgive me and have mercy upon me and turn back towards me. Verily You are the Oft-Turning back, Most Merciful”*¹²

It has been mentioned that Imam `Ali ibn al-Husain as-Sajjad (peace be upon him) used to recite the following line three hundred times in his Qunut during the Salat al-Witr:

الْعَفْوُ

*“I ask for forgiveness.”*¹³

Allamah Majlisi has mentioned that the word (الْعَفْوُ) can also be recited as (أَلْعَفْوُ) (with a fathah instead of a dhammah) on the last letter.

* Please do not forget this humble servant of Allah (Glory and Greatness be to Him) in your prayers and especially in the blessed Qunut of the Salat Al-Layl.

1. Bihar Al-Anwar, Vol. 87, Pg. 154; Fiqh ar-Rida, Pg. 1

2. Bihar Al-Anwar, Vol. 87, Pg. 287; Al-Faqih, Vol. 1, Pg. 308

3. Bihar Al-Anwar, Vol. 18, Pg. 261, Al-Faqih, Vol. 1, Pg. 311
4. Bihar Al-Anwar, Vol. 87, Pg. 207; `Illul ash-Shara'i, Vol. 2, Pg. 53
5. Bihar Al-Anwar, Vol. 87, Pg. 208
6. Bihar Al-Anwar, Vol. 87, Pg. 121; Tahdhib, Vol. 1, Pg. 272
7. Bihar Al-Anwar, Vol. 87, Pg. 120; Al-Faqih, Vol. 1, Pg. 301
8. Bihar Al-Anwar, Vol. 87, Pg. 221; Misbah of Kaf`ami, Pg. 53
9. Bihar Al-Anwar, Vol. 87, Pg. 287; Al-Faqih, Vol. 1, Pg. 301
10. Bihar Al-Anwar, Vol. 87, Pg. 308; Misbah of Al-Kaf`ami, Page 58
11. Bihar Al-Anwar, Vol., 87, Pg., 284; Misbah Al-Muttahajjid, Pg. 101
12. Bihar Al-Anwar, Vol., 87, Pg. 275; Misbah Al-Muttahajjid, Pg. 101
13. Bihar Al-Anwar, Vol., 87, Pg., 275; Misbah Al-Muttahajjid, Pg. 101

The Concise Method of Reciting Salat al-Layl

Salat al-Layl is 11 Rak`at in which:

1. The first 8 Rak`at are prayed in four Salat of two Rak`at each with the intention of *Salat al-Layl* (after each two Rak`at, give the Salam, finish the Salat and then stand for the next set of Salat.)
2. Following this, two Rak`at would be read with the intention of Salat ash-Shaf` (this Salat is performed exactly as Salatul Fajr).
3. Once this is recited, one Rak`at with the intention of Salat al-Witr would be recited. In this Salat, recite Surah Al-Fatiha once, Surah al-Ikhlâs three times followed by Surah al-Falaq and Surah al-Nas once each.

Once this part of the Salat is finished, we raise our hands in Qunut such that our palms are facing the sky and our hands are level with our eyes and perform the following.

Qunut of Salat al-Witr (in Concise Method)

1. Recite the following 70 times:

أَسْتَغْفِرُ اللَّهَ رَبِّي وَأَتُوبُ إِلَيْهِ

“I seek repentance from Allah, my Lord and to Him I turn back.”

2. Followed by reciting the following seven times:

أَسْتَغْفِرُ اللَّهَ الَّذِي لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ وَأَتُوبُ إِلَيْهِ

“I seek repentance from Allah the One whom there is no god except Him, the Living and Self-Subsisting and to Him I turn back.”¹

3. One of the most important acts in the Qunut of the Salat al-Witr is supplication for forty believers (men or women) amongst one’s family, friends, those who have asked to be prayed for, the deceased and the Shi`a of Amir Al-Mo`minin `Ali ibn Abi Talib (peace be upon him). Whosoever does this will be assured that his supplications are answered.²

4. One should then say the following three hundred times:

الْعَفْوُ

“I ask for forgiveness.”

5. Following this, the following should be said once:

رَبِّ اغْفِرْ لِي وَارْحَمْنِي وَتُبْ عَلَيَّ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ

“Lord, please forgive me and have mercy upon me and turn back towards me. Verily You are the Off-Turning back, Most Merciful”³

Please do not forget all of the believers throughout the world in your Salat al-Layl, especially those downtrodden and oppressed Muslims of Palestine, Iraq, Kashmir, Chechnya, Bosnia, and all over the globe – this humble servant of Allah (Glory and Greatness be to Him) as well.

May Allah (Glory and Greatness be to Him) hasten the advent of the 12th Imam (may Allah hasten his return) to fill this world with justice and equality.

1. Bihar Al-Anwar, Vol. 87, Pg. 308; Misbah of Al-Kaf ami, Page 58

2. Bihar Al-Anwar, Vol., 87, Pg., 284; Misbah Al-Muttahajjid, Pg. 101

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