

194615 - Commentary on the hadith: “the dearest of prayer to Allah is the prayer of Dawood (peace be upon him). He used to sleep for half the night, get up and pray for one third of it, and sleep for one sixth of it”

the question

I do not seem to understand the prayer/sleep of Dawud (saws); from the hadeeth in Saheeh al-Bukhaari it relates that he slept a half, prayed a third, and slept a sixth of the night—in which order did he (saws) perform these actions? Please bring a relation between this narration and the other authentic narrations regarding the last third of the night, as it would seem from the narrations I have come across that the most beloved sleep/prayer to Allaah (swt) would be sleeping the half and the sixth initially (after the prayer of ‘ishaa’) and then simply establish the voluntary night prayer at the last third of the night until the prayer of fajr

Detailed answer

Firstly:

Al-Bukhaari (1131) and Muslim (1159) narrated from ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amr ibn al-‘Aas (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said to him: “the dearest of prayer to Allah is the prayer of Dawood (peace be upon him). He used to sleep for half the night, get up and pray for one third of it, and sleep for one sixth of it, and he used to fast one day and not the next.”

What the hadith means is that the best of night prayers is the prayer of the Prophet of Allah Dawood (peace be upon him) as he - firstly - used to sleep for half the night. Whoever wants to put this into practice today should

work out the time from after 'Isha' prayer until Fajr, then sleep for half of that time.

Shaykh 'Abd al-Muhsin al-'Abbaad said:

Sleeping for half of the night means after 'Isha' prayer; he should work out the time from after 'Isha' prayer until the break of dawn, spend half of it sleeping, then after that wake up for one third of it.

Sharh Sunan Abi Dawood

(13/287)

Then after that time, Dawood (peace be upon him) would get up to pray, and he would pray for one third of the night, then he would sleep for one sixth, until dawn (Fajr prayer).

The wisdom behind that is so that one will not get tired or bored, and so that one will get up to pray Fajr and recite the morning adhkaar with energy, and will not feel tired or lazy, and so that he will start his daily activities in this manner. Then he will be able to do what is required of him of duties towards his family, children and other people, and towards his regular work, so he will not go to work feeling sleepy. And there are other benefits as well.

Al-Haafiz (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Al-Muhallab said: Dawood (peace be upon him) used to rest by sleeping at the beginning of the night, then he would get up at that time when Allah calls out: "Is there anyone who will ask, so that I may give him?" Then he would sleep for the remainder of the night in order to rest after spending time praying. This way is dearest to Allah because it is easier for the individual and helps him to avoid getting tired. The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "Allah does not tire until you tire." And

Allah loves to bestow His grace constantly and grant one favour after another. That is kinder to oneself because sleeping after praying qiyaam allows the body to rest, takes away any harm that results from staying up at night and protects one from feeling weak, unlike staying up all night until dawn. It also serves another interest, which is that one will be able to pray Fajr and recite the adhkaar with energy and focus, and it is closer to avoiding showing off, because the one who sleeps for the last sixth of the night will wake up with a regular colour (as opposed to looking pale and tired), which is more likely to help him conceal what he did at night, if anyone sees him. This was pointed out by Ibn Daqeeq al-'Eid. End quote.

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

This clearly indicates that it is only dearer to Allah for this reason, which is that it gives the individual a break in fasting and praying qiyaam, during which he may rest and re-energise himself, which will help him to fulfil his various duties.

End quote from Tahdheeb Sunan Abi Dawood (1/475)

Ibn 'Uthaymeen (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Praying tahajjud at night is one of the best acts of worship and is the best of prayers after the obligatory prayers. Prayer at night is better than prayer during the day, especially in the last third of the night. The best way to divide the night is the prayer of Dawood; he used to sleep for half of the night, get up and pray for one third of it, and sleep for one sixth.

The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) also used to do that sometimes; in fact he used to do that most of the time. Based on that, we say: the best of night prayers are those that are done after one half of the night has passed, until one sixth of the night is left. End quote.

Fataawa Noor 'ala ad-Darb

(1/161)

Secondly:

Al-Bukhaari (1145) and Muslim (758) narrated from Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "Our Lord, may He be blessed and exalted, comes down to the lowest heaven every night when the last third of the night is left, and He says: 'Who will call upon Me, that I may answer him? Who will ask of Me, that I may give him? Who will ask Me for forgiveness, that I may forgive him?'"

Muslim (1163) narrated that Abu Hurayrah said in a marfoo' report [i.e., attributed to the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)]: "The best prayer after the prescribed prayer is prayer in the middle of the night."

At-Tirmidhi (3579) narrated - and classed the report as saheeh - from 'Amr ibn 'Abasah that he heard the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) say: "The closest that the Lord is to His slave is in the last part of the night, so if you can be among those who remember Allah at that time, then do so."

Classed as saheeh by al-Albaani.

This indicates that the later part of the night is the best time for night prayers and supplication (du'aa').

We may reconcile between these hadiths and the hadith about the prayer of the Prophet of Allah Dawood by noting that the one who follows the pattern of the prayer of Dawood (peace be upon him) will catch the last third of the

night. In the answer to question no. [140434](#), we explained that the last third may also be described as the last two sixths, namely the fifth and sixth sixths. The beginning of this (last) third of the night is the fifth sixth.

So one may attain all of that and be praying at the time of the divine descent during the last third of the night, by waking up for the fifth sixth, which is half of the last third, then going back to sleep for as long as is needed to be energised and not feel lazy, and then pray Fajr with presence of mind and focus, without feeling too tired to recite the morning adhkaar.

Please see also the answer to question no. [140434](#).

Thirdly:

The questioner says: "It would seem from the narration is I have come across that the most beloved sleep/prayer to Allah (swt) would be sleeping the half and the sixth initially (after the prayer of 'ishaa) and then simply establish the voluntary night prayer at the last third of the night until the prayer of fajr." But this is not correct, because of what we have mentioned above that the best order in which to do these things is to sleep for half of the night, then get up for one third, then sleep for one sixth, then pray Fajr.

Whoever stays up for that third will catch the last third that is preferred, and he does not have to spend all of it in prayer. Spending half of it in prayer and half of it sleeping is preferable, because of what is explained above.

Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymeen (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

If

someone were to say: Why don't you make the best time to pray the last third of the night, because that is the time of the divine descent? The answer is: the one who prays qiyaam during one third of the night after half of the night has passed will catch the time of the divine descent, because he will catch the first half of the last third of the night. Thus he will attain the goal. The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) is the one who said: "The best prayer is the prayer of Dawood."

End quote from ash-Sharh al-Mumti' (4/75-76)

Al-Bukhaari (1133) and Muslim (742) narrated that 'Aa'ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) said: I never found him in my house before dawn but he was sleeping - referring to the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him).

Al-'Ayni (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

That is: the time before dawn never came, when he was in my house, but he was sleeping. Based on that, his prayers at night and other deeds must have been before the time before dawn. It was said that this sleeping during the time before dawn is the way that Dawood (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) slept: he would sleep at the beginning of the night, then get up and pray at the time when Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, calls out: "Is there anyone who will ask?" Then he would sleep long enough to rest after becoming tired from standing and praying during the night. This is the sleep before dawn, according to the chapter heading given by al-Bukhaari.

End quote from 'Umdat al-Qaari' (11/284)

Ibn al-Atheer (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

“The time before dawn never came but he was sleeping” means, after praying at night (qiyaam).

End quote from an-Nihaayah (4/530)

Ibn al-Jawzi (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) used to sleep at the beginning of the night, then get up halfway through the night or before that, and pray. Then when the time before dawn came, he would go back to sleep. And he said: “The best prayer is the prayer of Dawood; he used to sleep for half of the night, get up and pray for one third of it, and sleep for one sixth.” It was said the reason for pallor of the face is staying up at the end of the night, so if a person sleeps before Fajr, no pallor will appear in his face and there will be no sign in his face of having stayed up at night.

End quote from Kashf al-Mushkil min Hadith as-Saheehayn (p. 1224)

Thus it becomes clear that what the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) usually did with regard to praying at night was in accordance with the prayer of the Prophet of Allah Dawood (peace be upon him).

Fourthly:

It should be noted that the individual should try to offer prayers at night in the manner that is appropriate to his own situation, and do as much as he thinks it is most likely that he will be able to persist in. People vary in their circumstances; some of them sleep early so that they can get up early, some of them work at night, and some of them work both at night and during the day. Each Muslim should try hard to offer night prayers, as much as he is able to do on a regular basis, even if that is not in accordance with

what is described above, which is the best way to do it. Moreover, striving to regularly pray Fajr on time should be given precedence in all situations.

And Allah knows best.