

Taraweeh - 20 Rak'ah or 8 Rak'ah

By Ebrahim Saifuddin

With the commencement of Ramadan, the time to argue over matters established by the pious predecessors has arrived once again. The topic of argument is whether taraweeh consists of 20 or 8 rak'ah. Scholars have written myriad of books on this topic with overwhelming evidence, yet our ghair muqallideen brothers and sisters try to insist that it is 8 rak'ah.

It is important to first understand what taraweeh is. This is the prayer which comprises of 20 rak'ah and is offered in sets of 2 rak'ah in Ramadan, after 'isha salah and before witr. This salah is offered in congregation.

Maulana Jameel Ahmed Sakrodhwi, in "Ashraful Hidayah sharh Al-Hidayah" v.2 p.202, explains:

"Taraweeh is Sunnah Mu'akkadah for both men and women and this is the correct opinion. Imam Abu Hanifa is also of the opinion that taraweeh is Sunnah Mu'akkadah."

Evidence for 20 Rak'ah

Many have recorded a hadith by 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas (ra) where he is reported to have said:

"During Ramadan, the Messenger (saw) performed 20 rak'ah salah as well as the witr salah without the congregation."

This hadith has been recorded by the following:

- Ibn Abi Shaybah (rh) in his Musannaf
- Imam Bayhaqi (rh) in his Sunan
- Tabraani (rh) in his Kabeer
- Ibn Adi (rh) in his Musnad
- Baghawi (rh) in his Majma Sahabah

Critical Study of the Hadith

The ghair muqallideen try to argue that this particular hadith is da'eef. They criticize one person in the chain of narrator called "Ibrahim bin Uthman".

Maulana Allama Muhammad 'Ali, in "Sharh Muwatta Imam Muhammad" v.1 p.303 explains:

"Bayhaqi has declared this da'eef but not mawdu. Also, weakness of Ibrahim bin Uthman is not a unanimous opinion. In Tahzeeb al-Tahzeeb, v.1 p.145, it is stated 'Abbas Duri narrates Yahya ibn Mu'een said that Yazid ibn Haroon told him there was not a person more 'Adil (Just) than Ibrahim bin Uthman in the time."

Further on, Maulana Muhammad 'Ali compares him to Ibrahim bin Hayya and quotes "Lisan al-Mizan", v.1 p.53:

"Uthman ibn Sa'eed Darmi relates from Yahya ibn Mu'een that Ibrahim bin Hayya was a sheikh of great magnitude who was trustworthy."

Moreover, he writes:

"From this it is seen that Yahya ibn Mu'een called Ibrahim bin Uthman a great just person and has called Ibrahim bin Hayya as a sheikh who was trustworthy and reliable. Ibn 'Adi has stated Ibrahim bin Uthman is more Afdhal (greater/superior) than Ibrahim bin Hayya. This has been noted in Kamil fi Dh'aeeafa al-Rijal, v.1 p.241."

Maulana Muhammad 'Ali then concludes:

"This hadith cannot be declared da'eef because of Ibrahim bin Uthman. On the other hand, this narration is strong and trustworthy as seen by evidence above."

Omitting this Hadith does not affect anything

For argument's sake, even if we accept this hadith to be da'eef, it will not affect the position that taraweeh consists of 20 rak'ah.

Maulana Aziz al-Rahman, in "Aziz al-Fatawa" v.1 p.262, states:

"The hadith being weak will not make a difference because the text of the hadith gets established by the athar of Sahabah (raa) which is present in abundance. Hence, even if we leave out this hadith, the actions and sayings of the Sahabah (raa) can be the evidence of the actions and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (saw)."

Mufti Abdul Raheem Lajpuri, in "Fatawa Rahimiyyah" v.2 p.253, writes:

"They fail to realize that there is need for a strong chain of narrators only when there exists a difference of opinion on an issue (such as in the case of saying 'Ameen' loudly or softly). However the Fuqaha,

Muhadditheen and the entire Ummah throughout the centuries have always accepted and practiced the twenty rakaahs of Taraweeh and this unanimity is in itself a strong enough proof.”

More Evidence

In “Fatawa Rahimiyyah”, v.2 p.253 to 258, Mufti Abdul Raheem Lajpuri gives overwhelming evidence making it clear without a doubt that twenty rak’ah taraweeh salah was accepted by everyone. This is reproduced below:

“Here we will cite a few excerpts making it clear that twenty Rakaahs Taraweeh salah has been accepted by the Ummah throughout the ages:

1. Imam Tirmidhi (rh) [passed away 279 AH] states that ‘Umar (ra), ‘Ali (ra), Sufyan Thawri (rh) and Imam Shafi’i (rh) all accept the taraweeh salah as being twenty Rakaahs. He quoted Imam Shafi’i (ra) as saying that he saw the people of Makkah performing twenty Rakaahs. (Tirmidhi, v.1 p.99)
2. The famous compilation of Ahadith Kanzul Ummaal (v.2 p.284) reports that after ‘Umar (ra) instructed Ubay bin Ka’b (ra) to lead the people in twenty rak’ah of taraweeh salah, Ubay (ra) then led the Sahabah (raa) and Tabi’een in twenty rak’ah.
3. Bayhaqi (v.1 p.492; Nasbur Ra’yah, v.1 p.294) reports a narration in which Sa’ib bin Yazid (ra) states that they performed twenty rak’ah taraweeh during the periods of ‘Umar (ra), ‘Uthman (ra) and ‘Ali (ra).
4. The other narration of Yazid bin Rooman (rh) in the Muwatta of Imam Malik (p.40) states that during the Khilafah of ‘Umar (ra), people performed 23 rak’ah of taraweeh together with the Witr salah.
5. Ma’rifatus Sitta quotes an authentic narration from Imam Bayhaqi (v.1 p.477; his Sunan Kubra, v.2 p.496) stating that ‘Ali (ra) summoned the Qurra in Ramadan and appointed someone to lead the people in the twenty rak’ah of taraweeh salah. ‘Ali (ra) then himself led the witr salah.

6. The Muhaddith ibn Qudaamah (rh) writes in his al-Mughni (v.1 p.803) that the Sahabah (raa) were unanimous about performing twenty rak'ah taraweeh.
7. The research of the Muhaddith Ibn Hajar Haythami (rh) also reveals that the Sahabah (raa) were unanimous about performing twenty rak'ah taraweeh. (Tuhfatul Akhyaar, p.197)
8. The famous Hafidh of Hadith Allama Abdul Birr (rh) says that it is a fact that the Sahabah performed twenty rak'ah taraweeh during Khilafah of 'Umar (ra). (Mirqaat, v.2 p.174)
9. Allama ibn Taymiyyah (rh) writes that Ubay bin Ka'b (ra) led the Sahabah (raa) in twenty rak'ah taraweeh during the Khilafah of 'Umar (ra). (Fatawa Ibn Taymiyyah, v.1 p.148). He further writes (v.1 p.191) that because Ubay led the Sahabah (raa) in twenty rak'ah taraweeh and three rak'ah witr during Ramadan, most 'Ulema regard this to be a Sunnah because all of the Muhajireen and Ansaar performed the salah without an objection from any of them.
10. Imam Sharaani (rh) writes, "'Umar (ra) then gave the instruction for 23 rak'ah to be performed, three being the witr salah. This was then practiced in all the cities." (Kashful Ghumma, v.1 p.167)
11. The famous scholar of Ahl al-Hadith Nawab Siddique Hasan believes that "'Ulema regard as ijma the twenty rak'ah taraweeh salah that was performed during the Khilafah of 'Umar (ra). (Awnul Bari, v.4 p.307)
12. Allama Bahrul Uloom (rh) writes that twenty rak'ah taraweeh became a matter of consensus. (Rasaa'il al-Arkaan, p.138)
13. Allama Ibn al-Humam (rh) says that consensus was eventually reached that the taraweeh salah comprises of twenty rak'ah and this is what has been passed on from generation to generation. (Fathul Qadeer, v.1 p.407)
14. Allama Ayni (rh) says, "During the Khilafah of 'Umar (ra), the Sahabah (raa) performed twenty rak'ah taraweeh and this continued during the Khilafah of 'Uthman (ra) and 'Ali (ra). (Ayni's commentary of Bukhari, v.7 p.178)

15. When Imam Abu Yusuf (rh) asked Imam Abu Hanifa (rh) whether 'Umar (ra) had any proof from Rasulallah (saw) to perform twenty rak'ah taraweeh, Imam Abu Hanifa (rh) replied, "'Umar (ra) was never one who perpetrated acts of bid'ah." (Faydhul Bari, v.2 p.420; Maraaqil Falaah, p.81; Bahrur Raa'iq, v.2 p.66)
16. The Muwatta of Imam Muhammad (p.11-12) reads, "We go by this (twenty rak'ah taraweeh).....because the Muslims (the Sahabah) were unanimous about it and saw it to be a good act. It has been reported that Rasulallah (saw) said, "Whatever the Muslim (the Sahabah) regard as good act, is indeed a good act in the sight of Allah as well."
17. The following appears in the book Al-Mutaqaa min Akhbaaril Mustafa (p.78), "During the Khilafah of 'Umar (ra), the Sahabah (raa) and others performed 23 rak'ah, which included the witr salah."
18. Yahya bin Sa'eed Ansari (rh) who was the Qadhi of Madinah says that 'Umar (ra) instructed someone to lead the people in twenty rak'ah taraweeh salah. The narration is authentic albeit mursal. (Ibn Abi Saybah, p.406; Aathaarus Sunan, v.2 p.55)
19. Abdul Aziz bin Rafi' (rh) says that's Ubay bin Ka'b (ra) led the people of Madinah in twenty rak'ah taraweeh and three rak'ah witr. This narration is also authentic albeit mursal. (Ibn Abi Saybah, p.406; Aathaarus Sunan, v.2 p.55)
20. Abul Khaseeb (rh) says, "Suwayd bin Ghafala (ra) used to lead us in Ramadan with five resting periods and twenty rak'ah." The narration is authentic. (Bayhaqi, v.2 p.496; Aathaarus Sunan, v.2 p.55)
21. Shutayr bin Shakal (rh) who was the student of 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud (ra) used to lead the people in twenty rak'ah taraweeh salah and three rak'ah witr. This narration is also authentic. (Bayhaqi, v.2 p.496; Qiyaamil Layl, p.91; Mirqaat, v.2 p.174)
22. The eminent Tabi'ee and Mufti of Makkah Ataa bin Abi Rabaah (rh) says that he found the Sahabah (raa) and others performing 23 rak'ah (taraweeh salah) together with the witr.

(Ibn Ani Shaybah, v.1 p.406; Qiyaamul Layl, p.91, Fath al-Bari, v.4 p.219; Aathaarus Sunan, v.2 p.55)

23. Naafi (rh) who was the student of 'Abdullah bin 'Umar (ra) says that ibn Mulaykah (rh) used to lead them in twenty rak'ah taraweeh salah during Ramadan. The narration is authentic. (Aathaarus Sunan, v.2 p.56)
24. A'mash (rh) reports that 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud (ra) used to perform twenty rak'ah taraweeh salah and three rak'ah witr. (Umdatul Qari, v.11 p.127; Qiyaamul Layl, p.91)
25. Abul Bakhtari (rh) also took five resting periods and performed three rak'ah witr. (Ibn Abi Shaybah, p.406)
26. Abul Hasana (rh) says, "'Ali (ra) instructed someone to lead us in twenty rak'ah taraweeh with five resting periods. (Sunan Kubra of Bayhaqi, v.2 p.496). This narration is authentic. (See Jawaahirun Naqi, v.1 p.208 and Umdatul Qari, v.11 p.127 for details on authenticity)
27. Muhammad bin Ka'b Qurazi (ra) also says that the Sahabah (raa) performed twenty rak'ah taraweeh during the time of 'Umar (ra). (Qiyaamul Layl, p.91)
28. Sa'eed bin Ubayd (rh) reports that 'Ali bin Rabee'ah (rh) took five resting periods and performed three rak'ah witr during Ramadan. This narration is authentic. (Aathaarus Sunan, v.2 p.56)
29. Allama Subki Shafi'i (rh) writes, "We believe that the taraweeh salah is twenty rak'ah, as proven by authentic narrations." (Sharhul Minhaaj)
30. Abdul Qadir Jaylani (rh) says, "It comprises of twenty rak'ah with every two rak'ah ending with sitting and salam.....a person should make the intention of performing the taraweeh salah before every two rak'ah." (Ghunyatut Talibeen, v.2 p.10-11)
31. Imam Ghazali (rh) writes, "The taraweeh salah comprises of twenty rak'ah and is Sunnah Mu'akkadah. The method of performing it is well known." (Ihya'ul Uloom, v.1 p.208). He also writes, "Twenty rak'ah is the opinion of the consensus of

'Ulema because of the narration of Yazid bin Rooman (rh) in the Muwatta of Imam Malik, stating that during the Khilafah of 'Umar (ra), people performed 23 rak'ah of taraweeh together with witr salah. (Ihya'ul Uloom, v.2 p.66)

32. Ahmad Roomi (rh) says, "There were a great number of Sahabah (raa) present at the time (when 'Umar (ra) instructed Ubay (ra) to lead them in twenty rak'ah taraweeh). Amongst them were 'Uthman (ra), 'Ali (ra), Abdullah ibn Mas'ud (ra), 'Abbas (ra) and his son, Talha (ra), Zubayr (ra), Mu'aadh (ra) and many other Muhajireen and Ansar. None of them objected to 'Umar (ra), but rather supported him and practiced accordingly with steadfastness. In fact, 'Ali made du'a for 'Umar saying, "May Allah illuminate his grave just as he illuminated our Masaajid." Rasulallah (saw) also said, "Hold fast to my practices and the practices of the rightly guided Khalifahs after me." The taraweeh salah comprises twenty rak'ah". (Majaalisul Abrar, p.187)
33. Shah Waliullah Muhaddith Dehlawi (rh) also writes that the taraweeh salah during the times of the Sahabah (ra) and tabi'een comprised of twenty rak'ah. (Hujjatullahi Baaligha, v.2 p.67)
34. Shah Abdul Aziz Muhaddith Dehlawi (rh) also mentions that consensus was reached amongst the Sahabah (ra) to perform twenty rak'ah taraweeh and three rak'ah witr. (Majmoo'ah Fatawa Azizi, v.1 p.162)
35. Maulana Outbud Deen Khan Muhaddith Dehlawi (rh) also mentions that consensus was reached amongst the Sahabah (raa) to perform twenty rak'ah taraweeh. (Mazaahirul Haqq, v.1 p.433)
36. Allama Shabbir Ahmed Uthmani (rh) writes that since none of the Sahabah (raa) ever differed about the twenty rak'ah, all scholars are unanimous about it. (Fathul Mulhim, v.2 p.320)

Allama Nawawi (rh) writes in his commentary of Muslim that the twenty rak'ah taraweeh is a hallmark of Islam just like the Eid salahs (v.1 p.259). Therefore, the Ta'leeqaat of Hidayah (v.1 p.131) states that anyone performing only eight rak'ah of taraweeh will be guilty of forsaking the Sunnah."

There is an ocean of evidence proving the legitimacy of 20 rak'ah taraweeh salah. As seen from the quotes above, the Sahabah used to offer taraweeh in this manner. Not a single person from among the Sahabah ever stepped forward to say that the number of rak'ah are not 20 but are 8. Throughout the ages everyone agreed to the number being twenty, and now the ghair muqallideen all of a sudden claim that it is 8 rak'ah. They are going against practically all the Sahabah and the generations after them.

Response to Arguments by Ghair Muqallideen

The Hadith of 'Ayesha (ra) stating 11 Rak'ah

A ghair muqallid Imam, Muhammad bin Salih al-'Uthaimeen, in "Fatawa Arkanul Islam", v.2 p.509, states:

"The Taraweeh prayer is a Sunnah which was prescribed by the Messenger of Allah (saw)...As for the number of rak'ah, it is eleven according to what has been reported in the Two Sahihs on the authority of 'Ayesha (ra). She was asked how the prayer of the Prophet (saw) was in Ramadan, and she said: 'He did not pray more than eleven rak'ah, neither in Ramadan, nor in any other month.' (Reported by al-Bukhari in the Book of Tahajjud, in the Chapter: The Night Prayer of the Prophet (saw) (1147); and by Muslim in the Book of the Travelers' Prayers, in the Chapter: The Night Prayers (125)."

While 'Uthaimeen claims this hadith refers to Taraweeh, it is apparent from the text of the complete hadith, that 'Ayesha (ra), is referring to Tahajjud salah. The complete hadith, as recorded in Sahih Bukhari, is reproduced below:

Narrated Abu Salma bin 'Abdur Rahman:

I asked 'Ayesha, "How is the prayer of Allah's Apostle during the month of Ramadan." She said, "Allah's Apostle never exceeded eleven Rakat in Ramadan or in other months; he used to offer four Rakat - do not ask me about their beauty and length, then four Rakat, do not ask me about their beauty and length, and then three Rakat." Aisha further said, "I said, 'O Allah's Apostle! Do you sleep before offering the Witr prayer?' He replied, 'O 'Ayesha! My eyes sleep but my heart remains awake!'"

Explaining this hadith, Mufti Taqi Uthmani in "Inamul Bari", v.4 p.283, writes:

"I say this hadith is not about taraweeh, rather it is about tahajjud. The evidence rests here that taraweeh is offered in the first part of the night and tahajjud is offered in the last part of the night. In this hadith it is seen, 'Ayesha (ra) asks the Prophet (saw), "Do you sleep before offering the Witr prayer?" This shows that 'Ayesha (ra) saw the Messenger (saw) offer these in the last part of the night. The Messenger's (saw) directives to offer taraweeh was for the first part of the night. The evidence is that all the Sahabah (raa) would offer taraweeh in the first part of the night. When the Messenger led the congregation for three days, this was also done in the first part of the night. Thus, it is proven that taraweeh was offered in the first part of the night and the discussion in the hadith is regarding the last part of the night. This means, what is being discussed in the hadith is regarding tahajjud and not taraweeh."

In "Kowkabud Daraaree", v.9 p.155-156, Shams ud-Deen Kirmani states that the question and the reply, both concern the tahajjud salah. Moreover, even if one says that this hadith seems to contradict the hadith where the prophet (saw) led the congregation of Sahabah with 20 rak'ah, Allama Kirmani states that there is no contradiction as this hadith of 20 rak'ah affirms the actions of the prophet (saw) and thus will be given preference over any narration that seems to negate it. He states that this is the principle which is adopted in the case of an apparent contradiction.

Both Shah Abdul Haqq Muhaddith Dehlawi (Ashi'atul Lam'aat, v.2 p.544) and Shah Abdul Aziz Muhaddith Dehlawi (Fatawa Azizi, v.1 p.125) have stated that the 11 rak'ah performed by the Messenger of Allah (saw) were the tahajjud salah.

Maulana Zafar Ahmad Uthamani, in "Imdad al-Ahkam", v.1 p.639-640 analyses this hadith and states:

"Ghair muqallideen should take into consideration all the narrations of 'Ayesha (ra) regarding the Night Prayer which are present in Bukhari, Muslim and the four Sunan. If all the narrations would have been considered then they would never have dared to use this hadith as evidence because although this narration of 'Ayesha (ra) states that it is 11 rak'ah, others in Bukhari state it was 13, some others in Muslim state that after witr 2 rak'ah were prayed while seated making the total 15 rak'ah. Yet, other narrations state it was 17. Thus, Imam Qurtubi in Sharh Muslim states that many people of knowledge doubt the narrations of 'Ayesha (ra) and some 'ulema have said her hadith is 'muztarab'. For reference see Fath al-Bari, v.3 p.17.

Whoever has studied 'usool al-hadith would know that it is incorrect to use 'muztarab' hadith as evidence or proof unless the confusion and disturbance in the hadith is not removed...It should also be taken into consideration that 'Ayesha (ra), in other narrations have stated that Prophet Muhammad (saw) would do a lot more 'ibadah in Ramadan as compared to other days. Then why is it that both in Ramadan and otherwise he would offer only 11 rak'ah?"

Mufti Abdul Raheem Lajpuri, in "Fatawa Rahimiyyah" v.2 p.278-279 writes:

The essence of it all is that the narration in question cannot be used to prove eight rak'ah taraweeh. On the contrary, the narration of 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas (ra) proves twenty rak'ah and it is this that the Ummah has been practicing. Consider the following statements:

1. Imam Malik (rh) said that when there are two conflicting narrations about what Rasulallah (saw) did and it is known that Abu Bakr (ra) and 'Umar (ra) practiced on one of them and not the other, what they do will be sufficient to prove that this is the right way. (Ta'leequl Mumajjad, p.44)
2. Imam Abu Dawood Sajistaani (rh) said, "When there are two conflicting narrations about what Rasulallah (saw) did, it must be seen what the Sahabah (raa) did. (Abu Dawood, v.1 p.263)
3. Imam Abu Bakr Jassaas (rh) also said that when there are two conflicting narrations about what Rasulallah (saw) did and it is known that our pious predecessors practiced on one of them, the one they practiced on will be best to practice on. (Ahkaamul Qur'an, v.1 p.17)
4. Imam Bayhaqi (rh) reports that 'Uthman Daarmi (rh) said, "When ahadith of one subject conflict with each other and the most acceptable cannot be determined, it will be seen what the Khulafaa Raashideen did after Rasulallah (saw). In this manner, we will be able to choose a viewpoint. (Fathul Bari, v.2 p.269)
5. Khateeb Baghdadi (rh) reports that Imam Malik (rh) said, "if we were to practice the hadith stating that the followers should sit and perform salah when the Imam does, then the leaders Abu Bakr (ra), 'Umar (ra) and 'Uthman (ra) would have practiced accordingly." (Tareekh Baghdadi, v.6 p.247)

6. Muhaqqiq ibn Humam (rh) wrote that the fact that 'Ulema practice on a hadith lends to its authenticity. (Fathul Qadeer, v.3 p.349)
7. Shah Waliullah Muhaddith Dehlawi (rh) writes, "The consensus of the pious predecessors and what they had passed on from generation to generation is a great source of proof in Islamic Jurisprudence. (Izaalatul Khifaa, v.2 p.85)
8. Shah Abdul Aziz Muhaddith Dehlawi (rh) writes, "The understanding of the Sahabah (raa) and the Tabi'een is a criterion for right and wrong. It is wajib to accept what they understood from the teachings of Rasulallah (saw) as they kept the conditions and words of Rasulallah (saw) in mind." (Fatawa Azizi, v.1 p.157)"

Misconception that Taraweeh and Tahajjud is same

Muhammad bin Salih al-'Uthaimeen in "Fatawa Arkanul Islam", v.2 p.509 continues to state in his fatwa:

"If one prayed thirteen rak'ah, then there is no objection, according to the words of ibn 'Abbas (ra): 'The prayer of the prophet (saw) was thirteen rak'ah. That is, the night prayer.'" (Reported by Al-Bukhari in the Book of Tahajjud, in the Chapter: The Manner of the Prophet's Prayer, Hadith (1138); and it was reported by Muslim in the Book of the Travelers' Prayers, in the Chapter: The Supplication in the Night Prayer, Hadith 194 (764))

Here 'Uthaimeen uses the hadith regarding the number of tahajjud rak'ah the prophet (saw) would pray to prove that taraweeh consists of eight rak'ah.

Another ghair muqallid Imam, Maulana Mahmood Ahmed Mirpuri, in "Fatawa Sirat-e-Mustaqeem", p.180 writes:

"It is confirmed by authentic Ahadith that Tahajjud itself is Taraweeh. As in Tirmidhi, narrated by Abu Dhar, it says:

"One Ramadan we fasted with the Prophet (saw) and he did not pray with us at night. In the last 7 days, the Prophet (saw) prayed with us in one third of the night. On the 25th night we prayed with him for half of the night. We said it would be a pleasure if the Prophet (saw) prayed all night with us, but he replied, 'If someone prays with the Imam and returns home, it

is considered that he has prayed the whole night.' Then on the 27th night, we joined family members in prayer and prayed till we were doubtful of missing Sahoor."

This Hadith shows that the Prophet (saw) prayed with his companions, almost throughout the night. So, when did he pray Tahajjud prayer separately?"

Two points need to be addressed here. First one is whether taraweeh and tahajjud are the same prayer. The second is whether tahajjud was fardh on the Prophet Muhammad (saw) or not. Once both these points are addressed, the so called evidence used by the ghair muqallid Imams will not be able to prove the number of rak'ah of taraweeh.

Taraweeh and Tahajjud are not the same

Taraweeh and tahajjud are two different prayers. As seen earlier, the taraweeh salah is performed in the first part of the night while the tahajjud is performed in the last part of the night. Further, the tahajjud has to be performed after one has wakes up from sleep. Taraweeh is performed before one sleeps.

Mufti Muhammad Shariful Haq Amjadi, in "Nuzhatul Qari", v.2 p.687-688, writes:

"Ghair Muqallideen claim that Prophet Muhammad (saw) only prayed tahajjud in Ramadan. For us, both tahajjud and taraweeh are Sunnah in Ramadan. The evidence for this is the saying of 'Umar (ra): 'the prayer which they do not perform, but sleep at its time is better than the one they are offering.'"

The hadith in which this saying of 'Umar is found is in Sahih Bukhari in the Book of Taraweeh.

He further writes:

"To state one salah is better than the other, is evidence that these are two different salahs and not the same. Further evidence is that for tahajjud it is necessary for one to sleep after 'isha and then wake up to perform it. Tabraani, in Kabir and Ausat, has narrated from Hajaj bin 'Umro (ra) that he said 'you think that if you pray all night till morning, you have offered tahajjud. This is incorrect. Tahajjud can only be offered after sleep.' This is also apparent from the meaning of the word 'tahajjud'."

Allah (swt) says in the Quran in Surah al-Isra' (17):

وَمِنَ اللَّيْلِ فَتَهَجَّدْ بِهِ نَافِلَةً لَكَ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَبْعَثَكَ رَبُّكَ مَقَامًا مَّحْمُودًا

Wamina allayli fatahajjad bihi nafalatan laka AAasa an yabAAathaka
rabbuka maqaman mahmoodan

And during the night, wake up for Salah of tahajjud, an additional prayer for you. It is very likely that your Lord will place you at Praised Station.

[17:79]

Ibn Kathir, in his tafsir of the above verse, writes:

“(The Night prayer) Allah commanded His Messenger to pray the Night prayer after offering the prescribed prayers, and the term Tahajjud refers to prayer that is offered after sleeping. This was the view of ‘Alqamah, Al-Aswad, Ibrahim An-Nakha’i and others. It is also well-known from the Arabic language itself. A number of Ahadith report that the Messenger of Allah used to pray Tahajjud after he had slept. These include reports from Ibn ‘Abbas, ‘Ayesha and other Companions, may Allah be pleased with them.”

Mufti Muhammad Shariful Haq Amjadi, further writes on p.689:

“No one sleeps before taraweeh. Hence, it is extremely wrong to say that taraweeh is the same as tahajjud.”

Was Tahajjud Fardh on the Messenger (saw)

To address the argument of Maulana Muhammad Ahmed Mirpuri, it is important to first assess whether tahajjud was fardh on the prophet Muhammad (saw) or not.

The ghair muqallid Imam Maulana Mirpuri writes in his “Fatawa Sirat-e-Mustaqeem”, p.180:

“Tahajjud was obligatory for the Prophet (saw) as mentioned in Surah al-Muzzammil:

فَمِ اللَّيْلِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا
نِصْفَهُ أَوْ انْقُصْ مِنْهُ قَلِيلًا
أَوْ زِدْ عَلَيْهِ وَرَتِّلِ الْقُرْآنَ تَرْتِيلًا

Qumi allayla illa qaleelan
Nisfahu awi onqus minhu qaleelan
Aw zid AAalayhi warattili alqurana tarteelan

Stand (to prayer) by night, but not all night,
Half of it, or a little less,
Or a little more; and recite the Qur'an in slow, measured
rhythmic tones. [73:2-4]

Tahajjud is also recommended for us all."

A lengthy hadith reported in Sahih Muslim addresses this issue. It mentions Sa'd bin Hisham bin 'Amir who asked 'Ayesha (ra) about the tahajjud salah of the Prophet Muhammad (saw). Below is the reply by 'Ayesha (ra): She said: Did you not recite: "O thou wrapped up?" He said: Yes. She said: Allah, the Exalted and the Glorious, made the observance of the night prayer at the beginning of this Surah obligatory. So the Apostle of Allah (saw) and his Companions around him observed this (night prayer) for one year. Allah held back the concluding portion of this Surah for twelve months in the Heaven till (at the end of this period) Allah revealed the concluding verses of this Surah which lightened (the burden of this prayer), and the night prayer became a supererogatory prayer after being an obligatory one.

This hadith clearly mentions that the tahajjud was not always fardh on the prophet Muhammad (saw) throughout his life. Tahajjud was only fardh on him for a specific period of time. After this the fardh was abrogated and it became Nafil.

Imam Nawawi in Sharh Sahih Muslim, v.3 p.2240 writes:

"This is correct that tahajjud was later made nafil on the prophet (saw) and the Ummah. There is some difference of opinion regarding the abrogation of fardh of tahajjud for the prophet Muhammad (saw). For us, the opinion is correct which is seen in the hadith that it was abrogated and was not fardh anymore."

Allama Ghulam Rasul Sa'eedi, in Tibyan al Quran, v.12 p.337, quotes Imam Abu al-'Abbas Ahmed bin 'Umar bin Ibrahim Maliki Qurtubi to have said:

"The clear text of what 'Ayesha (ra) said is evidence that at first the tahajjud salah was fardh on the prophet Muhammad (saw) and other Muslims but later it was abrogated. In the initial verses of Surah Muzzammil, it is stated, 'Stand (to prayer) by night, but not all night, Half of it, or a little less, Or a little more.' Such wordings are not the sign of the obligation of something. This only signifies it being mustahab."

Further evidence for abrogation is found in Surah Bani Israel (17) where the following verse is seen:

وَمِنَ اللَّيْلِ فَتَهَجَّدْ بِهِ نَافِلَةً لَكَ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَبْعَثَكَ رَبُّكَ مَقَامًا مَّحْمُودًا

Wamina allayli fatahajjad bihi nafalatan laka AAasa an yabAAathaka
rabbuka maqaman mahmoodan

And during the night, wake up for Salah of tahajjud, an additional prayer for you. It is very likely that your Lord will place you at Praised Station.

[17:79]

Mufti Shafi' Uthmani, in Ma'ariful Qur'an, v.5 p.535 states:

"However, difference did exist about its obligatory nature. Was it abrogated in the case of the Holy Prophet (saw)? Or, did it remain an obligation on him as a matter of special consideration – and in the verse, the expression 'nafalatan laka' means exactly that 'the prayer of tahajjud is an additional obligation on you.'

But according to Tafsir al-Qurtubi, this is not correct for many reasons. Firstly, there is no justification for taking nafl as fardh. If it is supposed to be figurative speech, then, there will be no reality against it. Secondly, in authentic ahadith only five fixed prayers have been mentioned as obligatory. At the end of another hadith, it has been said that the fifty prayers made obligatory initially in the nocturnal journey of the Mi'raj were later reduced in number and set at five. Thus, the number was, though, reduced but the reward promised against these was that of no less than fifty. Then it was said 'The world (given to My servants) will not be changed with Me' [50:29]. It means: When the command was given for fifty, the reward shall be given for no less than fifty, though the number to be actually performed was reduced."

Further, he explains:

"Had the word 'nafilah' been used here in the sense of an additional duty, then, rather than using the word 'lak' (for you) after it, the word used should have been 'alaik' (on you) since the latter signifies obligation while the word 'lak' is used only for approval and permission."

Imam Raazi in Tafsir Kabeer, v.10 p.682 writes:

"Just like the fast of 'Ashura was abrogated with the fasts of Ramadan, similarly, with the obligation of five prayers, the obligation of tahajjud was abrogated."

Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, in Fath al-Bari, v.3 p.24 writes:

"The obligation of tahajjud was abrogated by the obligation of five prayers."

Coming to the original argument

The ghair muqallid imam, Maulana Mahmood Ahmed Mirpuri, after quoting a hadith from Tirmidhi asks the question:

"This Hadith shows that the Prophet (saw) prayed with his companions, almost throughout the night. So, when did he pray Tahajjud prayer separately?"

This has been quoted above along with the hadith.

It has been established that tahajjud was not fardh on the prophet Muhammad and hence even if one says that he missed it, it is not as if he was committing a sin by missing out a fardh salah.

Secondly, from the text of the hadith it is apparent that the companions joined their family members in prayers and prayed. It does not mention the inclusion of the prophet Muhammad (saw) in this all night long prayer.

The hadith is reproduced again:

"One Ramadan we fasted with the Prophet (saw) and he did not pray with us at night. In the last 7 days, the Prophet (saw) prayed with us in one third of the night. On the 25th night we prayed with him for half of the night. We said it would be a pleasure if the Prophet (saw) prayed all night with us, but he replied, 'If someone prays with the Imam and returns home, it is considered that he has prayed the whole night.' Then on the 27th night, we joined family members in prayer and prayed till we were doubtful of missing Sahoor."

The narrator says that in the last 7 days of Ramadan, the prophet Muhammad (saw) prayed with them in one third of the night only. 27th night of Ramadan falls under the last 7 days. Hence the part where it says "prayed till we were doubtful of missing suhoor," is the companions joining their family members in prayer, not the prophet Muhammad (saw).

It would not make sense for the prophet Muhammad (saw) to tell them on the 25th night "if someone prays with the Imam and returns home, it is considered that he has prayed the whole night," and then on the 27th night he would do the opposite of what he said 2 nights ago.

Moreover, Maulana Mahmood Ahmed has made an assumption that the prophet Muhammad (saw) did not ever miss out tahajjud.

"Ma'ariful Hadith", v.2 p.253 quotes a hadith from 'Ayesha recorded in Sahih Muslim:

"It is related on the authority of 'Ayesha (ra) that when due to illness or some other reason the Prophet (saw) missed the Tahajjud prayer, he offered 12 rak'ah during the day in the place of that."

Hadith where 'Umar (ra) ordered for 11 rak'ah Taraweeh

In "Fatawa Arkanul Islam", v.2 p.511, the ghair muqallid Imam Muhammad bin Salih al-'Uthaimeen writes:

"What is confirmed from 'Umar (ra), is that he prayed eleven rak'ah, since he ordered Ubay bin Ka'b and Tamim Ad-Dari (raa) to stand for the people and pray eleven rak'ah. [Reported by Malik in the Book of Prayer, in the Chapter on the Night Prayer in Ramadan (280)]."

This hadith has been recorded by Imam Malik through Sa'ib bin Yazid (ra). This Sa'ib bin Yazid (ra) is the same person who has also reported the following hadith as recorded in Baihaqi, v.2 p.496:

"Sa'ib bin Yazid said that in the time of 'Umar (ra), people would offer 20 rak'ah in the month of Ramadan. The person leading the prayer would recite Surahs which had about hundred verses. People at the time of 'Uthman would lean on their sticks as they had to stand up for very long."

Moreover, Hafidh Abdul Birr writes in al-Tamheed, v.8 p.114-115:

"Imam Malik has written this hadith from Muhammad ibn Yusuf who heard it from Sa'ib ibn Yazid. This hadith talks about taraweeh being 11 rak'ah. Other Muhadditheen have recorded ahadith with the same isnad, which mentions 21 rak'ah (20 for taraweeh and 1 for witr). Harith bin Abdul Rahman bin Abi al-Zabab has narrated from Sa'ib bin Yazid that in the times of 'Umar (ra) we used to end taraweeh when it was almost dawn. In his Khilafah, taraweeh was 23 rak'ah (including 3 witr)."

This makes it clear that from the same isnad that Imam Malik has reported 11 rak'ah, 21 rak'ah is also reported by other Muhadditheen. Moreover, from the same Sa'ib bin Yazid, 23 rak'ah is also reported.

Imam Malik, after quoting the hadith of 11 rak'ah, quotes the following hadith in his Muwatta, v.1 p.98:

"Yazid bin Rooman said that during the Khilafah of 'Umar ibn al Khattab, people would offer 23 rak'ah taraweeh in Ramadan (including 3 witr)."

Allama Ghulam Rasul Sa'eedi in Sharh Muslim v.2 p.498 writes:

"Imam Malik from Muhammad bin Yusuf from Sa'ib bin Yazid has narrated 11 rak'ah. However, Hafidh Abdul Razzak and others, from Muhammad bin Yusuf from Sa'ib bin Yazid have narrated 20 rak'ah and Ibn Nasr has also narrated 20 rak'ah from Sa'ib bin Yazid. This makes it clear that the narration recorded by Imam Malik is not correct."

However, even if we accept that the hadith recorded by Imam Malik of 11 rak'ah is correct, the only explanation which can be given to reconcile all the ahadith from Sa'ib bin Yazid is that at first the Sahabah offered 11 rak'ah but then they offered 20 rak'ah.

Imam Baihaqi in "al-Sunan al Kubra", v.2 p.496 writes:

"Reconciliation among these narrations can be brought in the way that the Sahabah offered 11 rak'ah but later offered 20 rak'ah taraweeh and 3 rak'ah witr."

The evidence for this explanation is seen from the practice of 'Uthman and 'Ali (raa). Refer to the evidences given above to prove 20 rak'ah taraweeh.

Mullah Ali Qari in "Mirqat Sharh al-Mishkat", v.3 p.123, after quoting this hadith writes:

"And this order for 11 rak'ah was in the beginning because Abdul Birr says the narration of 11 rak'ah was due to doubt and the sahih narration is that it was 20 rak'ah during the time of 'Umar (ra)."

Thus, the narration of 11 rak'ah from Sa'ib bin Yazid cannot be taken as evidence because of the discrepancies in the number of rak'ah which comes through the same person. At best, it can be said that due to some doubt created in his mind he mentioned 11, otherwise he has also mentioned the numbers 21 and 23 (including 1 witr and 3 witr respectively).

Hadith of Jabir bin 'Abdullah mentioning 8 Rak'ah

In Fath al-Bari, v.1 p.597, the hadith of Jabir bin 'Abdullah (ra) is mentioned where he says the Prophet Muhammad (saw) prayed only 8 rak'ah taraweeh in Ramadan. The ghair muqallideen use this hadith as evidence to prove their stand.

Mufti Kifayatullah, in "Kifayatul Mufti", v.3 p.399, while commenting on this hadith says:

"The hadith of Jabir (ra), which has been recorded by Tabraani, Marozi, Ibn Khuzaima and Ibn Hibban, has 'Isa bin Hariya in the chain of narrators. This narrator has been declared Munkar of hadith by Imam Abu Dawood and Imam Nasa'i has declared him to be Matrook and Munkar of hadith."

Mufti Abdul Raheem Lajpuri, in "Fatawa Rahimiyyah", v.2 p.280, has given a detailed analysis of the chain of narrators of this hadith. He writes:

"The strange thing about it is that the chain of narrators has no credence whatsoever. One of the narrators of hadith is a person named ibn Humayd Himyari. This is what the critics of narrators have to say about him [Mizaanul I'tidaal, v.3 p.49-50]:

- 'He is weak' – Hafidh Dhahabi (rh)
- 'He narrates many unacceptable (Munkar) narrations' – Ya'qoob bin Shaybah (rh)
- 'There are objections raised against him' – Imam Bukhari (rh)
- 'He lies' – Abu Zur'ah (rh)
- 'I can testify that he is a liar' – Ishaq Kowsaj (rh)
- 'He narrated Ahadith about everything. I have never seen anyone as daring as he is against Allah (swt) because he takes Ahadith from others and completely distorts them' – Saalih Jazrah (rh)
- 'I swear by Allah that he is a liar' – Ibn Kharaash (rh)
- 'He is unreliable' – Imam Nasa'i

The chain of narrators also contains a narrator called Ya'qoob bin 'Abdullah Ash'ari Alqami, about whom the critics have the following to say:

- 'He is not at all reliable' – Imam Daar Qutni (rh) [Mizaanul I'tidaal, v.3 p.324]

About a third narrator, the critics have the following to say:

- 'He is responsible for many unacceptable (Munkar) narrations' – Ibn Ma'een (rh)
- 'His narrations are unacceptable (Munkar) – Imam Nasa'i (rh)
- 'His narrations are ignored (Matrook)' – Imam Nisa'i (rh)

- 'His narrations are unacceptable (Munkar)' – Imam Abu Dawood (rh)
- 'He is amongst the weak narrators' [Mizaanul I'tidaal, v.2 p.311]

Indeed it is quite strange that the ghair muqallideen would use such a hadith as evidence.

Conclusion

The matter is quite clear that the number of rak'ah of taraweeh during the time of the companions (raa) was 20. This has been established through many narrations. While the four Imams (Abu Hanifa, Shafi', Malik, Hanbal) disagree in the total number of raka'ah of taraweeh, none of them has given a figure below 20. Taraweeh being 8 rak'ah is not supported by any of them. The 'ijma of the companions (raa) holds to be the last word on this subject for the Prophet Muhammad (saw) said that after him we should hold fast to the practices of the rightly guided khalifahs.