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Original Author: Muhammad Ibn Saalih Al-'Uthaymeen
Translator: Abu Az-Zubayr Harrison
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Fatwaa¹: Praying while Traveling

Question: What's the distance that a traveler can shorten his prayers? Is combining them permissible instead of shortening them?

Answer: The distance that prayers are shortened – some scholars specified it to be around eighty-three kilometers. Other scholars said it's whatever is typically considered traveling, even if he (the traveler) did not go beyond eighty kilometers. And whatever people consider not to be traveling then it's not traveling even if it reached a hundred kilometers.

This last (opinion) is the opinion of the famous scholar of Islaam, Ibn Taymiyyah and that's because Allaah didn't define a specific distance that shortening the prayers is allowed nor did the Prophet (ﷺ) specify an exact distance.

Anas ibn Maalik (رضي الله عنه) said:

“Whenever the Prophet (ﷺ) traveled for three miles or *Faraasikh* (a measurement of length) then he used to shorten the (4-unit) prayers and pray just two units.”²

The statement of Shaykh Ibn Taymiyyah is closer to what's correct. Even when there's a difference in what people customarily consider traveling, there's still no problem if the person acts according to the specified distance opinion because some of the Imaams and scholars sincerely striving towards a correct verdict have said it. So, there's no problem, if Allaah wills. As long as the issue is left undefined, then acting in accordance to what is normally considered travel is the correct opinion.

As for (the question), “Is combining (the prayers) permissible when shortening is allowed?” Then we say that combining (the prayers) is not associated with shortening. Rather, combining is

¹ Taken from Fataawaa Arkaan Al-Islaam (no. 312 & 315) by Shaykh Ibn Al-'Uthaymeen.

² Recorded by Muslim (no. 691).

associated with a need. So, whenever someone **needs** to combine whether he's traveling or not, then let him combine. For this, the people combine because of rain which because of it, it would be difficult to return to the mosques. Also, people combine if there's harsh, cold wind during the days of winter for the same reasons. A person can combine if he fears losing his wealth or any harm in it, or for similar reasons. It's reported in Saheeh Muslim from 'Abdullaah Ibn 'Abbaas (رضي الله عنه) that he said:

“The Prophet (ﷺ) combined between Thuhr and 'Asr, and between Maghrib and Ishaah while still in the city (not traveling) and not due to any fear or rain.”³

The people asked, “Why did he do that?” He (Ibn 'Abbaas) said he (ﷺ) did so in order not to cause any hardship upon his nation. Meaning, he did not want to place any difficulty that would cause someone to leave the congregation.

So, here's the condition: whenever a person finds a difficulty which would lead him to leave off the congregation, then it's permissible for him to combine; if there's no difficulty for him, then he doesn't combine. However, traveling is most likely to be hard and might lead someone to leave praying in congregation. If so, then it's permissible for the traveler to combine whether he was in the middle of his journey (actually traveling) or has reached his destination. If he's in the middle of his journey, then combining is preferable and if he has stopped traveling (reached his destination), then not combining is better.

The exception to this is when a person is residing (reached a destination) in a land where the congregational prayer is established. In this case, it's obligatory to attend the congregation; he should neither combine nor shorten (his prayers). However, if he missed the congregation, then he shortens and does not combine, unless he needs to combine (for some other reason).

Question: What's permissible (to leave off) during travels?

Answer: There are four things permissible during travels:

1. The prayers consisting of four units are shortened to just two units.
2. Breaking the fast during Ramadhaan, making up the same number of days during other days.

³ Recorded by Muslim (no. 705).

3. Wiping over the socks for three days and nights, beginning from the first time the person wipes over them.
4. The recommendation for the extra prayers of Thuhr, Maghrib, and Isha is lifted. As for the extra prayer before the Fajr prayer and the rest of the optional prayers, performing those remains legislated and preferred.

So, the traveler prays the night prayer, the optional prayer before Fajr, the two units of the forenoon prayer (Dhuhaa), the extra prayer after making Wudhoo, the two units for entering a mosque, and the two units of arriving from a journey – for certainly, it's from the Sunnah that when a person arrives from a journey and before he enters his house, he first goes to the mosque and prays two units inside.⁴

Likewise, the rest of the optional prayers remain legislated with regards to the traveler except for what I already said, and again they are: the optional prayers of Thuhr, Maghrib, and Isha because the Prophet (ﷺ) used not to pray these three extra prayers (while traveling).

⁴ This has been reported in the long Hadeeth of K'ab ibn Maalik regarding his repentance with the wording, "When he arrived from a journey, he used to begin with the mosque, praying two units in it." Reported by Al-Bukhaaree (no. 4418) and Muslim (no. 2769).