

Witr and the night prayer

The day's last prayer is an odd one, and the night it closes is where worship has the fewest witnesses and the most sincerity.



★ Stand some of the night

وَمِنَ اللَّيْلِ فَتَهَجَّدْ بِهِ نَافِلَةً لَّكَ

“And from the night, pray with it as additional worship for you.”
Tahajjud is the prayer you rise to after sleeping.

Qur'an 17:79

★ Who they are

كَانُوا قَلِيلًا مِّنَ اللَّيْلِ مَا يَهْجَعُونَ

“They used to sleep but little of the night.” “They arise from their beds, supplicating their Lord in fear and aspiration.”

Qur'an 51:17 · 32:16

★ How he prayed it

Asked about the night prayer, he ﷺ said: two rak'ah, then two, and so on — and when you fear the dawn, pray one rak'ah to make it odd.

Sahih al-Bukhari 990

★ Make Witr the last

“Make Witr as your last prayer at night.” However much or little you pray, seal the night with the odd rak'ah.

Sahih al-Bukhari 998

★ One, three or five

“If anyone wishes to observe it with five rak'ah, he may; with three, he may; and with one, he may.”

Sunan Abi Dawud 1422 · sahih

★ The last third

“When the last third of the night remains, our Lord descends and says: who is calling upon Me, that I may answer him?”

Sahih al-Bukhari 1145 · 6321

★ If you fear you will not wake

“Whoever fears he may not get up in the latter part of the night should observe Witr in the first part of it.”

- Abu Hurayrah kept to Witr before sleeping all his life

Sahih Muslim, Kitab Salat al-Musafirin · Sahih al-Bukhari 1178

★ If you sleep through it

When he ﷺ missed the night prayer through sleep or illness, he prayed it in the daytime instead, as an even number of rak'ah.

Sahih Muslim, Kitab Salat al-Musafirin

★ Is Witr obligatory?

The Hanafi school holds Witr to be wajib; the other three call it a strongly stressed sunnah. None of them treat leaving it as a small thing.

Sunan Abi Dawud 1422 · sahih · the positions of the four schools