

How to get up at night for Tahajjud

“It is related that there lived in a town a man of God whose neighbor was engrossed in worldly affairs. The man of God used to regularly offer voluntary prayers in the middle of the night. Seeing him, the neighbor one day thought that maybe he too should offer this voluntary worship in the middle of the night. Having made a firm resolve to do so, he got up one night and offered his prayers. He found it such a hardship that he developed a severe pain in his back. The man of God, hearing of his indisposition, came to ask after him. The neighbor told him that he thought he should offer the midnight prayers and having done so, he is now suffering in this way. The man of God replied that he should not have taken such a big step in such a hurry. He should have, instead, started gradually, first cleansing himself and then taking the further step of midnight worship.”

The following excerpts are from the book, Remembrance of Allah, by Hadhrat Khalifatul Masih II (ra):

Nawafil (voluntary and supererogatory acts of worship) are means of attaining nearness to God. They raise a man above *Najat* (deliverance from sin). Anyone desiring nearness of Allah should give special attention to *Nawafil*. Some *Nawafil* are performed during the day; others during the night. Those performed at night (between midnight and dawn) – called Tahajjud – carry special blessings. God Almighty says:

“Verily getting up at night is the most potent means of subduing the self and most effective in respect of words of prayer.” 73:7

The self can be reformed and great spiritual heights scaled with *Tahajjud*. **Anyone who performs it, will discover its importance.** The Companions of the Holy Prophet (saw) were very regular in saying *Tahajjud*. Even though it is voluntary, the Holy Prophet (saw) used to walk around to see who observed it. Once, the good qualities of Hadhrat Abdullah bin Umar (ra) were being mentioned. The Holy Prophet (saw) said, ‘Yes, he is very good, but he should also offer *Tahajjud*.’ He was a young man and was slack in *Tahajjud*. The Holy Prophet (saw) thus reminded him of his slackness in observing the *Tahajjud* prayers.

The Holy Qur'an tells us that getting up for Prayer at night straightens the self. Accordingly the Holy Prophet (saw) says that you must perform *Tahajjud*, even if it be of two *Raka'ats*. He also says that God Almighty accepts prayers in abundance during the late part of night. *Tahajjud*, therefore, is very important and beneficial.

Methods to get up at night for Tahajjud

One way – not very useful in my opinion – is to use the alarm clock. It creates dependency, and fails to produce the resolute will. If you go to sleep having resolved to get up for *Tahajjud*, you will be in a state of worship all night. Being determined, you will get up. Those depending on the alarm clock, but lacking determination, will often shut the alarm to go back to sleep. When they get up, they generally feel sleepy in Prayers. Their dependency prevents them from full awakening and alertness. Under certain circumstances the alarm clock may, however, be used by beginners or by others.

There are thirteen methods that can help in getting up at night. Anyone who sincerely tries them shall, God willing, benefit from them. There may be difficulties in the beginning, but in the end these methods will prove useful. I have derived these methods from the Holy Qur'an and *Ahadith*. It is Allah's Grace that these points which remained hidden from others, have been manifested to me. To save time, I will only give my conclusions without quoting the reference.

1. It is a law of nature that everything reverts to its original state if similar circumstances reappear. Often, in old age, a person suffers from his childhood diseases. The same happens to birds and trees. This law can be helpful in cultivating the habit of getting up during the night. **Perform Dhikr** (also spelt *Zikr*: words of remembering Allah) **for a while after Isha Prayers**. The more *Dhikr* you perform, the earlier will you get up for *Dhikr* before the morning.

2. **Do not talk to anybody after Isha Prayers**. Although sometimes the Holy Prophet (saw), continued his conversation after *Isha*, as a general rule he had forbidden it. There are two reasons: (a) If you start talking, you will sleep late and will not be able to get up in the morning; and (b) If the conversation concerns things other than faith, your attention will be diverted. You should go to sleep while thinking of your faith; you will get up with the same thoughts. It is not forbidden to carry out office work or other important assignments after *Isha*. But in that case it is better to spend some time in *Dhikr* before going to sleep.

3. **Perform Wudhu (ablution) before going to bed**, even if you are already in a state of ablution. It affects the heart and creates a special kind of freshness. If you go to sleep in that state of freshness, you will get up in the same condition. This is a common observation. Someone smiling at bedtime is generally smiling when he gets up; one who is crying, will wake up crying. With ablution you will be fresh at the time of sleep and fresh when you wake up. It will also help you in getting up.

4. **Recite some Dhikr before falling asleep**. This will cause you to wake up again for *Dhikr* during the night. The Holy Prophet (saw) used to perform *Dhikr* in the following manner before asleep: He recited *Ayatul-Kursi* (verse 2:256) and the last three chapters of the Holy Qur'an; then he gently blew upon his hands and moved his hands lightly over his body three times. Then he turned right and said:

“O Allah, I put myself in Thy protection, and turn my face towards Thee and assign all my affairs to Thee, with complete inclination and fear of Thee. There is no refuge or protection from Thee except toward Thyself. I believe in Thy Book which Thou hast revealed and Thy prophet that Thou hast sent.”

All believers should perform this *Dhikr* and then continue with another form of *Dhikr* until sleep takes over. An important recitation for this time is:

Subhan Allah wa bi Hamdihi Subhan Allah hil Azeem (Holy is Allah, with His praise; Holy is Allah, with His Greatness).

The condition in which a person goes to sleep stays with him all night. If someone sleeps while performing *Tasbeeh* (Glorification of God) and *Tahmeed* (Praise of God) he will remain in that spiritual state all night. It is a common observation that ladies or children who are disturbed or in pain at bedtime cry when they turn over their sides in sleep. Similarly, if someone goes to sleep reciting *Tasbeeh* he will recite *Tasbeeh* when he will turn his side. God Almighty says

Their sides keep away from their beds; and they call on their Lord in fear and hope, and spend out of what We have bestowed on them. (32:17)

To a casual observer, it may not appear that the Muslims keep away from their beds. The Holy Prophet (saw) went to sleep and so do all the Muslims. But in truth their sleep is not sleep; it is a form of *Tasbeeh*. They appear to be sleeping, but in reality they are not. Their sides keep away from their beds; they are busy in the remembrance of their Lord.

5. Resolve firmly at bedtime to get up for *Tahajjud*. God Almighty has given man the power to make his mind obey his will. Philosophers have accepted this principle. Decide firmly that you will get up for *Tahajjud*. While your body sleeps, your mind will be alert. It will wake you up exactly at the desired time.

6. The sixth method is for the strong in faith. Instead of performing *Witr* (three *Raka'at* prescribed as essential) after *Isha*, **leave *Witr* for *Tahajjud* time.** In general, people are regular in performing the obligatory worship, but show slackness in the voluntary. *Witr* are *Wajib* – an essential act of worship, not obligatory but more important than the voluntary. When a *Wajib* is combined with the *Nawafil* (supererogatory or voluntary acts of worship) it would strengthen the resolve to observe both. The soul will not rest until the *Wajib* has been observed. So the *Nawafil* will also be observed. One who has already performed *Witr* may not get up for *Tahajjud* even if he is awake. His soul will feel at ease. But if the *Witr* are still due, the soul will be restless and will awaken him. Only the strong in faith should practice this method. The weak ones may deprive themselves even of the *Witr* by doing so.

7. The seventh method is also for those who have excelled in faith. They should **start offering Nawafil after Isha Prayers and continue until** they begin to doze off in Prayer and are **overpowered by sleep**. Even though their total amount of sleep will be reduced, they will find themselves awake at the time of *Tahajjud*. This method is an exercise for the spirit.

8. The eighth method has been practiced by many Sufis. I have not felt the need for it myself; but it seems useful. If you get into the habit of over-sleeping, **change the soft bed to a hard one**.

9. **Take dinner several hours before going to bed**. Eat before *Maghrib* Prayer or immediately after it. Sometimes the spirit is there, but the body is not. The body acts like a yoke: if the yoke is too heavy, it strangles the spirit. The stomach should not be full at bedtime. It has an adverse effect upon the heart and makes a man lazy.

10. **Do not go to bed unclean**. Angels associate with those who are clean; they do not approach the unclean. Once the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, was offered something with a strong odor. He did not eat it, but permitted his Companions to do so. He explained to them that the angels, who visited him frequently, did not like such odors.

Angels abhor filth. Once Hadhrat Khalifatul Masih I (ra) went to bed without washing his hands after dinner. He saw a dream. His elder brother wanted to present to him the Holy Qur'an, but when he was about to touch it, his brother withdrew it and said, 'Do not touch the Holy Qur'an, your hands are not clean.'

Physical cleanliness affects purity of the heart. Those who are clean will have the angels' help to get up, but the angels will not approach the unclean. So keep your bodies clean.

11. **The bed should be clean**. Many people ignore this matter. Remember that spirituality is directly influenced by cleanliness of the bed. Take special care in this respect.

12. **Husband and wife should avoid going to sleep together**. Amongst ordinary Muslims, this habit can harm spirituality, but it does not affect the spiritually advanced. The Holy Prophet (saw) slept in the same bed with his wives. He possessed a lofty spiritual status and his spirituality could not be compromised. Ordinary Muslims should be careful. Carnal passions adversely affect spirituality. That is why Islam teaches:

"... eat and drink but exceed not the bonds." (7:32)

Why does Islam prohibit us from exceeding the limits? Because it harms spirituality. People with self-control will not suffer by sleeping together, but ordinary Muslims may find that it keeps their minds inclined towards passion. That hurts spirituality and prevents them from getting up.

13. The last method is superior. It helps in getting up for *Tahajjud* and saves one from many sins and weaknesses. **Before retiring for sleep, ponder if you have any malice or harbor any rancor or prejudice against anybody. If so, remove it.** The purification achieved by this exercise will enable you to get up for *Tahajjud*. The heart should be totally clean at bedtime. Anybody who considers such thought to be of some worth, should remind himself that he may be free to indulge in them during the day, but he has no need for them at night. After all, he is not going to fight anybody during the night. Once rooted out, such thoughts will generally not recur. Even if they do, their damage will not be very serious. The result of a thing depends on how long it has been influenced by something else. If you wipe something with a sponge, it will be moist. But if you soak the sponge for a long time, it will be drenched. Thoughts which linger and are repeated in your mind all night will overpower your heart.

Such thoughts cannot do much harm during the day because the mind is absorbed in other activities. But during the night the mind is free to be influenced. Eliminate all bad thoughts against others which occur at bed time lest they become rooted. To get rid of them will then not be difficult. Moreover, should you breathe your last during the night, you will miss the opportunity of asking forgiveness for this sin.

If you eliminate the rancor once, you will be free from it permanently. If you purge yourselves at night, you will definitely be blessed with the opportunity of getting up for *Tahajjud*.

NOTE: You may print the last page (#6) which summarizes the thirteen methods and display it in a convenient area for a quick reminder. Use these methods to slowly and systematically increase your regular offering of *Tahajjud* prayers. May Allah enable you to perform them and accept your humble supplications. Ameen.

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Thirteen Methods to get up at night for Tahajjud

1. Perform *Dhikr* for a while after *Isha* Prayers.
2. Do not talk to anybody after *Isha* Prayers.
3. Perform *Wudhu* (ablution) before going to bed.
4. Recite some *Dhikr* before falling asleep.
5. Resolve firmly at bedtime to get up for *Tahajjud*.
6. Leave *Witr* for *Tahajjud* time.
7. Offer *Nawafil* after *Isha* Prayers until overpowered by sleep.
8. Change the soft bed to a hard one (less recommended).
9. Take dinner several hours before going to bed.
10. Go to bed physically clean.
11. Sleep in a clean bed.
12. Avoid sleeping together with spouse.
13. Remove ill thoughts against anybody before retiring for sleep.