

Qaṣr Ṣalāh: The Ruling and Travel Distance in Sharī'ah

نحمده ونصلي على رسوله الكريم

Travel is an integral part of life, whether one travels for acts of worship like Ḥajj and 'Umrah, or for work and leisure. While it brings opportunities and new experiences, it also comes with challenges and hardships. Recognising these difficulties, Allāh ﷻ, in His infinite mercy, has provided ease in the form of concessions, such as the shortening of prayers (Qaṣr Ṣalāh), allowing believers to maintain their devotion without undue burden. In one narration, Abū Hurairah (RA) narrated that the Prophet ﷺ said:

"السَّفَرُ قِطْعَةٌ مِنَ الْعَذَابِ، يَمْنَعُ أَحَدَكُمْ نَوْمَهُ وَطَعَامَهُ، فَإِذَا قَضَى نَهْمَتَهُ مِنْ وَجْهِهِ فَلْيَعَجِّلْ إِلَى أَهْلِهِ"

"Traveling is a kind of torture, as it prevents one from sleeping and eating. So when one has finished his job, he should return quickly to his family." (Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī: 5429)

One of the most profound examples of Allāh's ﷻ mercy during travel is mentioned in the Qur'ān, where He grants permission to shorten prayers, making worship more manageable during the challenges of travel:

وَإِذَا صَرَبْتُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَلَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ جُنَاحٌ أَنْ تَقْصُرُوا مِنَ الصَّلَاةِ

"And when you travel throughout the land, there is no blame upon you for shortening the prayer".
(4:101)

The above verse about Qaṣr Ṣalāh highlights Allāh's ﷻ immense mercy and understanding of human circumstances. Allāh ﷻ commands us to follow His rulings, and in His wisdom, and He has allowed concessions during travel (safar), such as the shortening of prayers (Qaṣr Ṣalāh).

Is performing Qaṣr Ṣalāh an obligation or optional?

In the Ḥanafī school of thought, this falls under the discussion of 'Azīmah and Rukḥṣah. 'Azīmah refers to the original, strict ruling that applies in normal circumstances (when a person is not travelling such as our daily prayers and fasting), while Rukḥṣah is a concession granted by Allāh ﷻ for specific situations, such as travel, illness, or hardship. According to the Ḥanafī school of thought, the Qaṣr Ṣalāh is considered an 'Azīmah during travel, meaning it is the default ruling and an obligation (Wājib). A traveller must shorten their Farḍ prayers, and praying the full number of Rak'āt would not be allowed in this context.

The Ḥadīth phrase "So accept His charity" (Musnad Aḥmad: 174) uses the imperative form, which indicates obligation. Moreover, the Qur'ānic expression "There is no blame upon you" should not lead to the assumption that it merely signifies a concession. For instance, in Sūrah Al-Baqarah: "Whoever performs Ṭawāf between them, there is no blame upon him" (2:158), the act of performing Sa'ī is among the obligatory rituals, yet the expression "no blame" is used. Thus, the phrase "no blame" in the verse about Qaṣr cannot be limited to indicating mere permission.

In contrast, other schools of thought view Qaṣr Ṣalāh as a Rukhṣah, meaning it is a concession and not an obligation. They permit travellers to either shorten their Farḍ prayers or pray the full number of Rak'āt, allowing flexibility based on the traveller's preference or circumstance.

According to the Mālikī, Shāfi'ī, and Ḥanbalī schools of thought, both shortening the prayer (Qaṣr) and completing the full prayer are permissible during travel. However, shortening the prayer is considered preferable.

‘Allāmah Baghawī has reported that the majority of scholars hold the same opinion as the Ḥanafīs on this issue. Similarly, Ibn Mundhir has narrated this view from ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Umar (RA), ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abbās (RA), as well as Imām Mālik and Imām Aḥmad, in one of their narrations.

The following Ḥadīth supports the obligation (Wujūb) of shortening the prayer (Qaṣr):

عَنْ عَائِشَةَ، زَوْجِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَنَّهَا قَالَتْ فُرِضَتِ الصَّلَاةُ رَكْعَتَيْنِ رَكْعَتَيْنِ فِي الْحَضَرِ وَالسَّفَرِ فَأُقِرَّتْ صَلَاةُ السَّفَرِ وَزِيدَ فِي صَلَاةِ الْحَضَرِ

‘Ā'ishah (RA), the wife of the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ), reported: "The prayer was prescribed as two rak'āhs, two rak'āhs both in journey and at the place of residence. The prayer while travelling remained as it was (originally prescribed), but an addition was made in the prayer (observed) at the place of residence". (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim: 685a)

The Minimum Distance to Qualify as a Musāfir

Most Ḥanafī scholars generally define the Sharī'ah travel distance as 77.24 kilometers (48 miles), calculated in modern measurements. This was originally understood as a journey spanning three days, from morning to mid-afternoon, with moderate walking.

Shurayḥ ibn Ḥānī' (RA) reported: "I went to ‘Ā'ishah (RA) to ask about wiping over the socks. She said: 'Go to ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (RA), as he used to travel with the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ)'. So, we asked him, and he said: 'The Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) set the limit for wiping over the socks as three days and nights for a traveller and one day and night for a resident.'" (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim: 686).

The commonly accepted travel distance of 48 miles (77.24 kilometres) in the Ḥanafī school was calculated based on the average distance covered in three days of moderate walking. Maulānā Ḥusain Aḥmad Madani (RA) explained that Fiqh texts define travel not in terms of miles but as a journey of three days and nights at a moderate pace, considering essential human activities like eating, drinking, and praying. This typically amounts to 16 miles daily, although some estimate 12 or 15 miles. To err on the side of caution, the scholars adopted 16 miles per day as the standard. Thus, the 48-mile distance represents the average of three days of moderate travel, forming the basis for the Ḥanafī ruling on Qaṣr.

According to the Mālikī, Shāfi'ī, and Ḥanbalī schools of thought, the travel distance is equivalent to two days of walking, approximately 12 hours per day. This corresponds to the distance between Jeddah and Makkah, Ṭā'if and Makkah, or ‘Asfān and Makkah. The distance is calculated for a one-way trip to approximately 88.7 kilometers. The Ḥanafī approach, however, considers three days of walking from morning to mid-afternoon, including necessary breaks, which amounts to about six hours per day.

When Does a Traveller Perform Qaṣr?

A traveller intending to cover a distance of 48 miles (77.24 kilometres) without planning to stay at any place for 15 or more days will begin performing Qaṣr once they exit their city's limits. Upon returning and entering their city's limits, they will resume offering the full prayer.

When Does the Travel Distance Start? (Inqīṭā' of the Residential Area)

In Islamic jurisprudence, Inqīṭā' (انقطاع) of a residential area refers to the point where the continuous habitation of a city or town ends. This is significant for determining when a Musāfir begins their journey in the context of Ṣalāh and other rulings. Once a person intending to travel passes the Inqīṭā' of their city's residential area (the point where houses, buildings, or structures stop), they are considered to have left their city.

1. If the total distance from the starting point to the destination equals 48 miles (77.24 kilometers), the rules of travel apply once the traveller leaves the city limits. This applies even if the distance between the two cities is less than 77.24 kilometers. For example, if a person intends to travel to City B, which is 100 kilometers away from their house in City A, they can perform Qaṣr (shortened prayer) as soon as they pass the boundaries of City A, even if they have not yet traveled 77.24 kilometers. This is because the rules of travel apply once they leave the limits of their city.

2. City boundaries are usually marked by government signs or other indicators, which make identifying city limits easier. Once a traveller crosses these boundaries, they are considered a traveller, and the rules of travel apply.

Note:

- Areas adjacent to the city, such as colonies, neighbourhoods, or urban facilities like train stations, hospitals, or cemeteries, are considered within city limits.
- For expansive cities exceeding 77.24 kilometers, a traveller is not deemed a traveller until they exit the city limits.

There is consensus among scholars that the traveller must leave the city's or village's boundaries before travel rulings apply.

Distance Measurement: Two Opinions

1. Some scholars consider the distance from one's home to the destination, regardless of whether the distance between city limits equals 77.24 kilometres.
2. Others measure the distance from the boundary of one city to the boundary of the destination city.

Can I pray Qaṣr Ṣalāh at the airport?

If the airport is within the boundaries of the city, it will fall under the rule of the city and the person will not be considered a Musāfir when he reaches it. If it is outside the boundaries, then upon reaching it, the person will be regarded as a Musāfir.

How to pray Qaṣr Ṣalāh?

During travel, the four Rak'āt Farḍ prayers of Ṣuḥr, 'Aṣr, and 'Ishā' are shortened to two Rak'āt. This rule applies whether the prayer is performed individually or behind an Imām who is also traveling. However, the Farḍ prayers of Maghrib and Witr (Wājib) remain as they are. If a Musāfir prays behind a resident Imām during the journey, they must follow the Imām and perform the full prayer.

The Sunnah Mu'akkadah prayers, which are normally emphasised, become non-emphasised while traveling. However, if time and conditions permit, performing these Sunnah prayers is still encouraged. The Witr prayer of 'Ishā', being Wājib, must always be performed regardless of travel.

If a prayer is missed during the journey and becomes Qaḍā', it must be made up later in its shortened form, even if the individual has returned home by that time. Here's a clearer and more polished version of the example, including transliteration for the Arabic terms: For example, if a person missed Ṣuḥr Ṣalāh while traveling and needs to make Qaḍā' after returning home, they will still perform 2 Rak'āt instead of the full 4 Rak'āt. This is because the missed prayer was during travel, and the shortened Ṣalāh (Qaṣr) applies to the Qaḍā' as well.

Combining Two Prayers

According to the Mālikī, Shāfi'ī, and Ḥanbalī schools of thought, one of the specific allowances for a traveller is the ability to combine prayers with specific conditions, details of which are outlined in their respective books. This means combining Ṣuḥr with 'Asr or Maghrib with 'Ishā' and performing them together in one time. Both forms of combining prayers are permissible: performing the later prayer at the earlier prayer's time (Jam' Taqdīm) or delaying the earlier prayer to the later prayer's time (Jam' Ta'khīr). For example, 'Asr can be performed at the time of Ṣuḥr, and 'Ishā' can be performed at the time of Maghrib, and vice versa.

However, Imām Abū Ḥanīfah does not allow combining two prayers in one time under normal circumstances. Exceptions to this are only two cases: performing Jam' Taqdīm at the plains of 'Arafāt during Ḥajj and performing Jam' Ta'khīr at Muzdalifah during the night of Ḥajj. These are the only instances where combining prayers is permitted according to the Ḥanafī school of thought.

Hence, it is incumbent upon a person to follow the rules of the Madh-hab they adhere to, to ensure consistency in practice and to avoid mixing rulings from different Madh-habs, which could lead to incorrect application of Shar'ī rulings.

References: Badā'i' al-Ṣanā'i' (Al-Kāsānī), Fatāwā Shaikh al-Islam (Maulānā Syed Ḥussain Aḥmed Madani), Nafaḥāt Al Tanqīḥ (Maulānā Saleemullah Khan), Al-Fiqh 'alā al-Madhāhib al-Arba'ah (Abdul Raḥmān al-Jazīrī), Al-Fiqh al-Islāmi Wa Adillatuhū (Dr. Wahbah al-Zuhayli), Qāmūs al-Fiqh (Maulānā Khālīd Saifullāh Raḥmānī)

Written by: Dr. Shabbir Ahmed