

يَتَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لَا تَقْرَبُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَأَنتُمْ سُكَرَىٰ حَتَّىٰ تَعْلَمُوا مَا
 تَقُولُونَ وَلَا جُنُبًا إِلَّا عَابِرِي سَبِيلٍ حَتَّىٰ تَغْتَسِلُوا وَإِن كُنتُمْ مَّرْضَىٰ أَوْ
 عَلَىٰ سَفَرٍ أَوْ جَاءَ أَحَدٌ مِّنْكُمْ مِنَ الْغَايِطِ أَوْ لَمَسْتُمُ النِّسَاءَ فَلَمْ تَجِدُوا
 مَاءً فَتَيَمَّمُوا صَعِيدًا طَيِّبًا فَامْسَحُوا بِوُجُوهِكُمْ وَأَيْدِيكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ

عَفُوًّا غَمُورًا ﴿٤٣﴾

An-Nisa (The Women) 4:43

O You Who Believe!

- Approach not prayers with a mind befogged.
- Until you can understand all that you say.
- Nor in a state of ceremonial impurity until after washing your whole body.
- If you are ill, or on a journey, or one of you comes from offices of nature, or you have been in contact with women, and you find no water, then take for yourselves clean sand or earth, and rub therewith your faces and hands.
- For Allah does blot out sins and forgives again and again.

Commentary

Allamah Taba Tabai (AR)

It was mentioned [vide al-Mizan (Eng. Transl.), vol.3, pp. 282-286 (tr.)] under the verse, *They ask you about intoxicants and games of chance, (2:219)*, that there are five different verses on the subject of intoxicants; if we put all of them side by side, it will appear that this verse (*.... do not go near prayer when you are intoxicated*) was revealed after the verses, *.... you obtain from them intoxication and goodly provision (16:67)*; and Say: *“My Lord has only prohibited indecencies, those of them that are apparent as well as those that are concealed, and sin” (7:33)*; but before the two remaining verses: *They ask you about the intoxicants and games of chance. Say: “In both of them there is a great sin and (some) profit for men; and their sin is greater than their profit.” (2:219)*, and, *O you who believe! intoxicants and games of chance and (sacrificing to) stones set up and (dividing by) arrows are only an abomination of Satan’s handiwork; shun it therefore, that you may be successful (5:90)*. This was the last-revealed verse on this subject.

Of course, if you say that praying while intoxicated means here praying lazily and sluggishly (as has been interpreted in some coming traditions), then there is nothing to argue.

Prayer in this verse means mosque; that is why it goes on to prohibit entrance to those who are in a state of major ritual impurity [which one gets on sexual intercourse or after ejaculation]. The question arises as to why the house of prayer has metaphorically been called 'prayer'. The reply: It was necessary because of the clause, "until you know (well) what you say".

Had Allah said, 'do not go near mosque until you know what you say', it would have appeared disjointed, or given some other unintended meaning. The real purpose is to make them appreciate that during prayer they stand before the Most High, the Most Great God and get the honor of addressing the Lord of the worlds; it is not proper for them to become intoxicated and lose their sense with the abomination of intoxicant, not knowing what they were speaking. This meaning was more relevant to 'prayer'. But prayer is mostly offered in mosque with congregation, according to the system established by the Prophet (S); and also it was intended to describe the law about entry of a person in condition of major ritual impurity into mosque. Therefore, brevity demands this metaphorical use and style, as you see.

Accordingly, the words, "until you know (well) what you say", give the reason of prohibition of drinking liquor in a way the intoxication continues till beginning of prayer. In other words, We have forbidden you liquor in order that you may know what you are saying; but it is not the main purpose of the prohibition – it does not mean that do not start prayer until you know what you say, but if you know what you say you may drink.

Muhammad ibn al-Fadhl narrates from Abul-Hasan (AS) about the words of Allah: *do not go near prayer when you are intoxicated*, that he said:

It was before liquor was prohibited.
(at-Tafsir, al-Ayyashi)

This tradition must be taken to mean that the verse was revealed before the prohibition of liquor was clearly expounded. Otherwise, it will go against the Qur'an. The 33rd verse of the seventh chapter had clearly forbidden sin which includes intoxicants; and the 219th verse of the second chapter explicitly says that there is a great sin in liquor. It means that liquor was forbidden in Makkah before the *hijrah*, because the seventh chapter is of Makkan period [and the second chapter was the first one revealed at Madina], and everyone knows that the verse under discussion was revealed in Madina [after the second chapter].

Zurarah narrates from Abu Ja'far (AS) that he said:

Do not stand for prayer sluggishly, sleepily or sullenly, because it is a trait of hypocrisy; surely Allah has forbidden the believers to stand for prayer while intoxicated – that is, from sleep.

(ibid)

There are other traditions interpreting the intoxication as sleepiness. Al-Ayyashi has narrated two such *ahadith* in his at-Tafsir; and al-Kulayni has reported it in his al-Kafi through Zayd ash-Shahham from as-Sadiq (AS.) and through Zurarah from al-Baqir (AS). Also al-Bukhari has narrated in his as-Sahih through Anas from the Messenger of Allah (S).

Mir Ahmed Ali (AR) and Aqa Mahdi Puya (AR)

Sukara may mean the state of intoxication, or, according to Imam Muhammad bin Ali al-Baqir, slumber and sleepiness.

Junuban means the state of seminal pollution- after the emission of semen, either in waking or in sleep. A total ablution or bathing is obligatory before praying the salat. Physical cleanliness, in Islam, is a sine qua non for moral and spiritual purification. If water is unobtainable (or injurious to health) tayammum should be performed.

Ayatullah Sayyid Kamal Faqih Imani and a Group of Muslim Scholars

The following Islamic legal ordinances can be extracted from the above-mentioned verse:

1- Canonical prayers are invalid when the person is intoxicated. The holy verse says:

" O' you who have Faith! do not approach prayer when you are intoxicated, until you know what you say, ..."

The reason of it, of course, is clear, because 'prayer' is the talk and invocation of the servant with Allah and the action must be performed in an utmost conscious state.

2- The prayer is invalid for the person who is in ritual impurity. So, the Qur'an says that you should not approach prayer when you are polluted:

"... nor when you are polluted - ..."

Next to that, it has stated an exception for this ordinance. It says:

"... unless you be passing through - ..."

In this state establishing prayer is permissible on the condition of dry ablution, which will be dealt with in the following.

3- The words refer to the allowance of establishing prayer or passing through a mosque after performing a legal bathing, which has been stated by saying:
"...until you wash yourselves..."

Dry Ablution for the Excused

Through the next phrase, all religious aspects of dry ablution are stated. At first, it points to the situation in which water is harmful for the health of the body.

"...And if you are ill or on a journey, ..."

Then, it continues saying:

"...or one of you come from privy or you have touched the women, ..."

And, when in this situation, there is not water for ablution:

"...and you cannot find water, ..."

In this condition, you must have recourse to dust:

"... then betake yourselves to pure earth, ..."

In the next sentence, it has stated the style of having recourse to dust. It says:

"...then wipe your faces and your hands; ..."

At the end of the verse, the Qur'an points to this fact that this ordinance is a kind of facilitation and discount for you, since:

"...verily Allah is Pardoning, Forgiving."