

يَتَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا إِذَا قُمْتُمْ إِلَى الصَّلَاةِ فَاغْسِلُوا وُجُوهَكُمْ وَأَيْدِيَكُمْ
إِلَى الْمَرَافِقِ وَامْسَحُوا بِرُءُوسِكُمْ وَأَرْجُلَكُمْ إِلَى الْكَعْبَيْنِ
وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ جُنُبًا فَاطَّهَّرُوا وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ مَرْضَىٰ أَوْ عَلَىٰ سَفَرٍ أَوْ
جَاءَ أَحَدٌ مِّنْكُمْ مِنَ الْغَائِطِ أَوْ لَمَسْتُمُ النِّسَاءَ فَلَمْ تَجِدُوا
مَاءً فَتَيَمَّمُوا صَعِيدًا طَيِّبًا فَامْسَحُوا بِوُجُوهِكُمْ وَأَيْدِيكُمْ مِنْهُ
مَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيَجْعَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِنْ حَرَجٍ وَلَٰكِنْ يُرِيدُ لِيُطَهِّرَكُمْ وَلِيُتِمَّ
نِعْمَتَهُ عَلَيْكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٦﴾

Al-Ma'idah (The Table Spread) 5:6

O You Who Believe!

- When you prepare for prayer, wash your faces, and your hands (and arms) as far as the elbows.
- Rub your heads (with water).
- And (wash) your feet to the ankles.
- If you are in a state of ceremonial impurity, bathe your whole body.
- But 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.
- Allah does not wish to place you in a difficulty, but to make you clean, and to complete his favour to you, that you may be grateful.

Commentary

Allamah Taba Tabai (AR)

The first verse contains rules of all three types of *at-taharah* (cleanliness): *wudhu*, *wajib ghusl* and *tayammum*; and the second verse emphasizes or complements this order. There is another verse already mentioned in the chapter of “Women” which deals with these three modes of cleanness:

O you who believe! Do not go near prayer when you are intoxicated until you know (well) what you say, nor when you are in a state of major ritual impurity, unless (you are) traveling on the road – until you have washed yourselves; and if you are sick or on a journey or one of you comes from the privy or you have touched the women, and you cannot find water, betake yourselves to clean earth, then wipe a part of your faces and (a part of) your hand. Surely Allah is Pardoning, Forgiving (4:43).

al-Qiyam (to stand up, to rise up), when followed by preposition *ila* (to) generally connotes the intention of doing that thing; because when one intends to do a thing one usually moves towards it. Let us suppose a man is sitting and he intends to perform an act, usually he would rise to do it. In other words, rising up for a work is inseparable from its intention. There is a similar example in the words of Allah: *And when you are among them and establish the prayer for them (4:102)*, that is, you intend to establish the prayers. Conversely, there is a verse which uses the word wish or intention to allude to the actual deed: *And if you wish to have (one) wife in place of another and you have given one of them a heap of gold, then take not from it anything (4:20)*; it means when you divorce a wife and marry another; so the verse uses the word “wish” for the actual deed.

In short, the verse shows that prayer must be preceded by bath and *wudhu*. If it had been unrestricted it would have meant necessity of *wudhu* before every prayer irrespective of the words: *and if you are under obligation to perform a total ablution, then wash (yourselves)*. However, legislative verses are seldom unrestricted in all aspects. Moreover, it is possible to say that the coming words: *but He wishes to purify you*, explain this obligatoriness of bath, as will be explained later. It is only this much explanation that can be given here for this verse; the exegetes have written at length about it but it is all related to the matter of *fiqh* and not *tafsir*.

al-Ghasl (pouring water on something); it is usually done for cleaning, removal of dirt and filth. *Al-Wajh* (the side of a thing that faces you); but mostly it is used for the front side of man's head, that is, the side which has eyes, nose and mouth in it; when somebody faces you his features become manifest to you. The traditions narrated from the Imams of *Ahlul-Bayt* (AS) interpret it as the area from the beginning of the hairline in the forehead up to the tip of the chin length wise and that which is covered by the thumb and middle finger breadth wise. There are some other delineation mentioned by the exegetes and jurists.

Al-Aydi (plural of *al-yad*); it is the organ which is used for folding and unfolding, catching and releasing, attacking someone, etc.. It begins from shoulder ending at fingertips. Because most of these activities like catching and releasing are done through that part which begins from elbow down wards, that section is also called hand; and for this very reason the section from wrist to fingertips is also called hand. In this way, the word becomes common between the whole and its' parts.

It is this commonality which makes it necessary to mention some association to point to the intended meaning; and it is for this reason that Allah has added: “as far as the elbows” to show that the area of the hand to be washed is that which ends at the elbows; also it shows that the whole area up to the finger tips is covered. The traditions also support this meaning. The preposition *ila* (to, as far as) indicates the limit of action and it connotes continuation of movement.

This preposition does not show whether or not the elbows are included in the order of washing; the order to wash the elbows is derived from the traditions, not from this preposition.

Moreover, the *ummah* unanimously agrees that the *wudhu* of those who begin washing from the elbows coming to the fingertips is correct (vide Majmaul-bayan). And this unanimity emanates from the fact that the verse gives this meaning and it could only be correct if the clause: “as far as the elbows”, is connected with the “hands” and not with the washing.

This sentence is in conjunction with the clause: *wash your faces*, as the verse is meant to show the necessary stipulation of cleanliness for prayer. The sentence means: perform a total ablution if you are in *al-janabah*. This condition alludes to an unspoken condition in *wudhu*. The verse then will mean: *wash your faces and your hands as far as the elbows, and wipe a part of your heads and your feet to the ankles, if you are not junub; and if you are junub, then perform a total ablution*. It may be inferred from it that *wudu* is prescribed if there is no *janabah*, but with *janabah* the *ghusl* is enough as the traditions show.

Allah has mentioned sickness and journey and in these two conditions one is generally unable to get or use water whenever he wishes; and He has mentioned coming from toilet and touching the women – an unavailability of water in these two conditions is matter of chance. Conversely, it may be said that looking at the physical structure of man, his being sick or on a journey is a matter of chance while going to toilet or touching of the women are physical necessities. The first causes small *hadath*, which is removed by *wudu* and the second brings on big *hadath* which is removed by *ghusl*. In all the four situation with which man becomes involved sometimes by chance and at other times by nature, he is obliged to do *tayammum* when he cannot get water.

The phrase: “and wipe a part of your faces and (part of) your hands therewith”, shows that one has to wipe those organs in *tayammum* which one is required to wash in *wudhu*. We may say that *tayammum* is a shortened alternative of *wudhu* from which the two wipings (of head and feet) have been omitted and the two washings (of face and hands) substituted with the wiping; and water has given way to soil – to remove hardships.

This shows that the two organs of *tayammum* are the same two which were washed in *wudhu*. As Allah has used the preposition “*bi*” with the verb of wiping, it indicates that the wiping in *tayammum* should apply to only some parts of the two organs, that is a part of face and a part of hands. It totally fits on the explanations narrated from the Imams of *Ahlul-bayt* (AS) that the part of face to be wiped in *tayammum* is the forehead only and the part of hand to be wiped is from wrist downwards.

This explanation shows invalidity of some people’s opinion that the hand to be wiped in *tayammum* covers from armpit to finger tips; or what has been said by others that the whole part of hand washed in *wudhu* should be wiped in *tayammum*. Clearly, the verb *al-mash* (to wipe) followed by preposition “*bi*” indicates that only a part of the organ is to be wiped.

“*Min*” in “*minhu*” translated here as “therewith” shows that wiping of face and hands should begin with earth; and *ahadith* have explained that *tayammum* should start with hitting the hands on earth and then wiping the face and hands with it.

The phrase: “but He wishes to purify you” after preceding clause: “Allah does not desire to put on you any difficulty”, shows that Allah has not laid down any rule with the aim of creating difficulties for human beings. The verse means: Our aim in these laid down rules is to purify you and the main purpose is to complete our favors on you; not that We want to put you in trouble and difficulty. That is why when We found that *wudhu* or *ghusl* was difficult for you in the absence of water, We changed that order to *tayammum* which you can easily do; we have not totally waived the order of *taharah* because we want to purify you and complete our favors on you, so that you may be grateful.

It may be inferred from these words that if a person continued in *taharah* and does not get any *hadath*, then he is not required to repeat his *taharah* for the next prayer. Although the opening phrase: *when you rise up to prayer*, is unrestricted, it does not mean that one has to do *wudhu*, *ghusl* or *tayammum* before every prayer because not every order is obligatory. [In the situation mentioned above, one is only recommended to renew one’s *taharah*.]

The verse gives two reasons for this order:

- i. To purify the believers;
- ii. To complete His favor on them.

These two are different from one another. The first reason gives the purpose of legislating the three modes of purification while completion of favor is the purpose of legislating the whole *shari'ah*, and the three modes of *taharah* are a small part of it. In other words, the two reasons are particular and general. Accordingly, the clauses would mean as follows. We have laid down the three purifications so that you could purify yourselves with them. They are a part of the religion. When the whole *shari'ah* will be legislated, Allah's favor on you will be completed in order that you may be grateful to Allah, so that He may choose you for Himself. Ponder on it.

At-Tusi narrates with his *asnad* from as-Sadiq (AS) about the words of Allah: *when you rise up for prayers*, that he said, "When you rise up from sleep." The narrator (Ibn Bakir) said, "I said 'Does sleep break *wudhu*?' He (the Imam) said, 'Yes, when it overwhelms hearing and he doesn't hear voices.'" (Tahdhibul-ahkam).

Also al-Kulayni narrates through his chain of narrators from Zurarah and Bakir that both of them asked Abu Ja'far (AS) about the *wudhu of the Messenger of Allah (S)*.

- He (the Imam) asked for a wash-bowl with water;
- he dipped his right hand,
- scooped a handful of water and
- pouring it on his face
- washed the face with it;

- then he dipped his left hand and
- scooped a handful of water and
- pouring it on his right arm
- washed the arm from the elbow to the palm without returning the hand to the elbow;
- then he dipped his right palm (in the water) and
- poured it on his left arm and did as he had done with the right arm;

- then he wiped his head and feet with wetness of his palms without adding new water to them.

Then he said, "One should not insert his fingers under the shoelace." Then (the Imam) said, "Surely Allah, the Mighty, the Great, says: *When you rise up to prayers, wash your faces and your hands*, it is therefore not proper to leave any part of one's face without washing and Allah has ordered to wash the hands to the elbows. It is therefore not proper for him to leave any part of his hands up to the elbows without washing, because Allah says: *wash your faces and your hands as far as the elbows*. Then Allah has said: *and wipe a part of your heads and your feet to the ankles*. So, if he wiped a part of his head or a part of his feet between the ankles and toe-tips, his *wudhu* will be completed."

The narrators said, “We asked, ‘Where are the ankles?’ (The Imam) said, ‘Here (pointing to the joint of feet with bone of leg).’ We said, ‘What is this?’ (The Imam) said, ‘This is the bone of leg, and ankle is below it.’ Then we asked, ‘May Allah make your affairs good! One handful (of water) is enough for the face and one handful for the arm?’ (The Imam) said, ‘Yes, if you use it properly and two handfuls cover the whole *wudhu*.’” (ibid)

The author says: This tradition is well known; al-Ayyashi has narrated it from Bakir and Zurarah from Abu Ja’far (AS) and has narrated a similar tradition through Abdullah ibn Sulayman from Abu Ja’far (AS); also there are other traditions having similar connotation as well as of the preceding tradition in other books.

Al-Ayyashi has narrated from Zurarah ibn A’yan; and Abu Hnifah has narrated from Abu Bakir ibn Hazm that they said,

A man did *wudhu* and did *mas-h* on his socks and entering the mosque performed his prayer. Then came there Ali (AS) and trampled his neck under foot and said, ‘Woe unto you! You are praying without *wudhu*!’ He said, ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab has ordered me (to do *wudhu* like this).’

So, Ali (AS) caught his hand, brought him to Umar and said, ‘Look what this (man) is narrating from you (and his voice was raised).’ Umar said, ‘Yes. I have ordered him (to do like it). Verily, the Messenger of Allah (S) had done *mas-h* (in similar way).’

Ali (AS) said, ‘Was it before the revelation of (the chapter of) “The Table” or after it?’ He said, ‘I don’t know.’ Ali (AS) said, ‘Then why do you give *fatwa* when you don’t know. The Book (of Allah) has left socks behind.’” (Tafsirul-burhan).

Al-Ayyashi narrates from Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Khurasani (and the *hadith* is *marfu*) that he said,

A man came to the Leader of the Faithful (AS), and asked him about the *mas-h* on socks. The Imam bowed his head for sometime; then he raised the head and said, ‘Verily Allah, the Blessed, the High, has ordered His servants to do *taharah* and divided it among the organs; so He gave a share of it to the face and a share of it to the head and a share of it to the feet and a share of it to the hands. Now, if your socks are among these organs you may do *mas-h* on them.’”

(At-Tafsir, al-Ayyahi)

Again, he narrates from al-Hasan ibn Zayd from Ja'far ibn Muhammad (AS) that he said,

Verily Ali opposed the people in the reign of Umar ibn al-Khattab regarding the *mas-h* on socks. They said, 'We had seen the Prophet (S) doing *mas-h* on socks.'

Ali (AS) said, 'Was it before the revelation of "The Table" or after it?' They said, 'We don't know.' Ali (AS) said, 'But I know that the Prophet (S) left wiping on the socks when "The Table" was revealed. And that I do *ma-sh* on a donkey's back is preferable to me than doing *mas-h* on the socks.' Then he recited the verse: *O you who believe! When you rise up to prayer wash your faces and your hands as far as the elbows, and wipe a part of your heads and your feet to the ankles.*" (ibid)

Al-Ayyashi narrates from Zurarah that he said,

I asked Abu Ja'far (AS), about *tayammum*. He said, 'Verily, Ammar ibn Yasir came to the Prophet (S) and said, "I was in condition of *janabah* and I had no water with me." The Prophet (S) asked. "What did you do? O 'Ammar!" He said, "I removed my clothes and then I turned round over the earth."

(The Prophet) said, "The donkeys too do the same. Allah has said: *and wipe a part of your faces and (part of) your hands therewith.*"

Then (the Prophet) put his hands together on the earth and wiped them. Then, he wiped from his forehead until below the eyebrows; then rubbed on hand with the other on the back of the palm, beginning with the right hand."
(at-Tafsir, al-Ayyashi)

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

Wudhu and *tayammum*, the two methods of cleansing for praying salat, have been prescribed in this verse.

The emission of seed, whether in waking or in sleep, makes bathing (*ghusl*) obligatory.

Wudhu (ablution) is done with water. If water is not available, or there is a genuine danger to health if used, then *tayammum* (use of dust to cleanse) has been prescribed. For details refer to *fiqh*. It is written in *Sahih Bukhari* and other books of history that the second caliph disliked this divine ordinance so much that he was prepared not to pray at all rather than observe these commands.

Aqa Mahdi Puya says:

Those who wipe the whole head with a wet hand and wash the feet instead of wiping them with the wet hands do not take into consideration that which the *ba* in *biru-usikum* implies.

In tayammum, again due to the possessive particle *ba* in *biwujuhikum*, only a portion of the face and the hands have to be wiped-the parts which have to be washed in wudhu are wiped in tayammum, and the parts which are wiped in wudhu are omitted in tayammum.

The intention of Allah is to purify and complete His favour. This verse is legislative. It implies that whoever submits to Allah's command will get His blessings. The will of Allah as in Ahzab: 33 is creative which means "Be; and it becomes".

Ayatullah Sayyid Kamal Faqih Imani and a Group of Muslim Scholars

In the former verses there were different statements mentioned about: 'bodily purification and some material bounties'. This verse has pointed to the 'soul purification' and what causes the purification of the self of Man. Here, a notable amount of the ordinances upon: ablution, major ritual ablution, and dry ablution have been referred to, the which are effective in soul purification. At first, it addresses the believing people and states the ordinances of ablution as follows:

"O' you who have Faith! when you stand up for prayer, wash your faces, and your hands up to the elbows, and wipe a part of your heads and your feet up to the ankles; ..."

Thus, only that part of the hand, has been mentioned in the verse which must be washed. But its manner in the practice of the Prophet (S) to us by Ahlul-Bayt (AS) denoting that the elbows must be washed down to the fingers.

Then, it pays to the ordinance of the major ritual ablution when it says:
"...and if you are polluted, then perform a total ablution; ..."

It is clear that the objective meaning of the phrase: 'then perform a total ablution' is to wash the whole body thoroughly.

The Arabic term /junub/ philologically means 'something goes away'. So, a person in a state of ritual impurity is called /junub/ for the reason that the one must avoid doing actions such as: establishing prayer, staying in a mosque and the like of them while the person is in that state.

By the way, when the Holy Qur'an in this verse enjoins the persons in the state of ritual impurity to perform a major ritual ablution for establishing prayers, it is understood that major ritual ablution substitutes ablution.

Then, the verse continues its words referring to the statement of the ordinance of 'dry ablution', for the person who gets up and intends to keep prayers. It says:
"...and if you are sick or on a journey, or one of you comes from the privy, or you have touched the women and you can find no water (for ablution or major ritual ablution) then betake yourselves to clean soil ..."

Next to this statement, the style of performing dry ablution is shortly stated. It says:

"...and wipe a part of your faces and your hands with some of it. ..."

And, to make it clear that there has been no restriction in the previous commandments when all of them have been legitimated for the sake of some considerable expedences, at the end of the verse, it says:

"... Allah does not intend to put on you any difficulty, but He intends to purify you, and to complete His favour upon you in order that you might be thankful."

In deed, the statements mentioned in the holy verse once more emphasizes on this fact that all divine commandments and Islamic enjoiments are assigned for the sake of people and for the protection of their rights. There has been no aim other than that. By these instructions, Allah intends people provide both spiritual and bodily purification for themselves.

However, the final sentence of the holy verse states a general law. It denotes that the divine ordinances, in no aspect, are in the form of difficult proposals or onerous duties.