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Introduction

One of the tasks of all prophets (a) in general and of the Noble Prophet of Islam (s) in particular was to purify people. Regarding this, Surah 62 reads,

هُوَ الَّذِي بَعَثَ فِي الْأُمَمِينَ رَسُولًا مِّنْهُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُنَزِّلُهُمْ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَإِنْ كَانُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ

It is He who sent to the unlettered [people] an apostle from among themselves, to recite to them His signs, to purify them, and to teach them the Book and wisdom, and earlier they had indeed been in manifest error. (62:2).

This fact has also been referred to in three other ayat of the Glorious Qur'an. Among these tasks, purification holds an important position and indeed it is the summation of the whole mission of the Noble Prophet (s). He has the ability to purify other people because he is already purified, as Surah 33 explains:

إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمُ الرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا

Indeed Allah desires to repel all impurity from you, O People of the Household, and purify you with a thorough purification. (33:33).

It should be mentioned that the Infallibles (a) were pure due to their own actions; and God then made them thoroughly and completely purified. One should do one's best to become pure; and then God purifies one completely because complete purification cannot be achieved without divine assistance.

Hence, in the Glorious Qur'an, a distinction has been made between *mutahhar* (the one who has been purified [by God]) and *mutatahhir* (the one who seeks purification through his actions). Some people have also been described in the Glorious Qur'an as those seeking purity (*tazakka*) and some people as those who are purified (*muzakka*).

In the same way, some individuals seek closeness (taqarrub) to God and there are some who are brought near (muqarrab) to Him (swt).

Therefore, one should make the utmost efforts to become purified as much as one is able to do so. As a metaphor, a man who wants to visit a king approaches as close as he can by himself, however, eventually he reaches a point at which he cannot make any more progress, and the king himself has to take him in.

In any case, the mission of the Noble Prophet (s) is to purify people. However, he (s) is not able to do so unless people themselves desire this.

According to many exegetes of the Glorious Qur'an, ayah 108 of Surah Tawbah has been revealed regarding the Quba mosque in Medina. This ayah reads:

لَمَسْجِدٌ أَسَّسَ عَلَى التَّقْوَىٰ مِنْ أَوَّلِ يَوْمٍ أَحَقُّ أَنْ تَقُومَ فِيهِ رِجَالٌ يُحِبُّونَ أَنْ يَنَطَهِرُوا وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُطَهَّرِينَ

A mosque founded on God-wariness from the [very] first day is worthier that you stand in it [for prayer]. Therein are men who love to keep pure, and Allah loves those who keep pure. (9: 109).

This description of the Quba mosque is in direct contrast to the Qirar mosque, which was built in Medina by the hypocrites in order for them to create problems for the Muslim community.

According to this ayah, there are some righteous people who intend to be purified and God loves those who, although not yet pure, are seeking to be purified. So, those with bad qualities and bad moral characters fall into the category of those whom God loves as long as they earnestly desire and seek to remove them and attain purification. Thus, the Noble Prophet (s) is commanded to say his prayer in a mosque where there are those who want to be purified, not in a mosque where nobody has such an intention.

Along the same lines, Surah 87 reads:

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ تَزَكَّىٰ

Felicitous is he who purifies himself. (87: 14).

Man tazakka means the one who seeks purity. One of the ways to reach this goal is to give alms (zakat) because when one gives one's money and property for the sake of God one removes love of worldly affairs from oneself, which is the major source of corruption and pollution. Imam Sajjad (a) has indicated this in the following phrase,

حُبُّ الدُّنْيَا رَأْسُ كُلِّ خَطِيئَةٍ

The main cause for every sin and mistake is loving this world.[1](#)

The Significance Of Wudu' In The Process Of Purification

In any case, all Prophets (a) have been sent by God to humankind in order to help them in the process of purification. Prayer is the best means of attaining such a precious goal and after this comes zakat. Prayer and giving alms have been mentioned jointly in numerous ayat of the Glorious Qur'an. Seeking purity through prayer alone and without giving alms is impossible and vice versa; rather, both of them together are necessary. In order for us to attain purity through prayer, God has ordered us to do some physical actions which bring about some experience of purity. The best example of these actions is ablution (wudu').

In reference to this, Surah 5 reads:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا قُمْتُمْ إِلَى الصَّلَاةِ فَاغْسِلُوا وُجُوهُكُمْ وَأَيْدِيْكُمْ إِلَى الْكَعْبَيْنِ وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ جُنُبًا فَاطَّهِرُوا وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ مَرْضَى أَوْ عَلَى سَفَرٍ أَوْ جَاءَ أَحَدٌ مِنْكُمْ مِنَ الْغَائِطِ أَوْ لَمْسَتُمُ النِّسَاءَ فَلَمْ تَجِدُوا مَاءً فَتَمَمُّوا صَعِيدًا طَيِّبًا فَامْسَحُوا بِوُجُوهِكُمْ وَأَيْدِيْكُمْ مِنْهُۚ مَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيَجْعَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِنْ حَرَجٍ وَلَكُنْ يُرِيدُ لِيُطَهِّرُكُمْ وَلَيُتَمَّ نِعْمَتُهُ عَلَيْكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ

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. If you are junub, purify yourselves. But if you are sick, or on a journey, or any of you has come from the toilet, or you have touched women, and you cannot find water, then make tayammum with clean ground and wipe a part of your faces and your hands with it. Allah does not desire to put you to hardship, but He desires to purify you, and to complete His blessing upon you so that you may give thanks. (5:6).

According to this ayah, purification is the main goal of making wudu' and tayammum (dry ablution). It is a mistake to assume that in the ayah purity refers to physical purity through washing some parts of the body since such a thing does not occur in tayammum. It is a preliminary condition to make the areas on which wudu' will be performed clean before starting wudu', which then gives us spiritual purity. Tayammum also has the same function.

The phrase 'and to complete His blessing upon you' in the above ayah refers to a very subtle point. The blessings of God are completed by purity.

Thus, wudu' has been designed by God in such a way that one can experience some form of purity while one is not still a completely pure person. As long as one keeps one's wudu', one possess a manifestation of purity. This is a great blessing from God because through an easy action like wudu' one may attain a kind of purity, albeit partially. It is difficult for ordinary people to distinguish between being in

a state of wudu' or not. However, those whose inner vision is opened are able to realise how different they are when in the state of ablution.

The Light Of Wudu'

It is said that one of the students of Ayatullah Ansari Hamadani once had a vision and saw some spiritual light. He asked his master about this special light which was not comparable to any other lights, asking whether it was the light of God. His teacher replied in the negative because the light of God cannot be seen. He told the student that it was the light of his wudu' that he had seen. Therefore, the light of wudu' is so great that it cannot be compared to any physical light. Many people may not be able to witness such a light, yet they should not reject the reality of such a light since this fact has been confirmed in several narrations by the Noble Prophet (s) and his purified progeny. One of the Infallibles (a) has been quoted as saying,

الوضوء على الوضوء نور على نور

Wudu' upon wudu' is light upon light.[2](#)

Status of Water Used for Wudu'

Interestingly, the water used for making ablution is blessed. Although it is initially normal water, when it is used for wudu' it receives a different reality. This water turns into drops of light and this light is then put onto the relevant parts of one's body when one makes ablution. According to the history of early Islam, being aware of the blessings contained in the water used for wudu', Muslims used to catch the water dripping from the face and hands of the Noble Prophet (s) while he was making wudu'. It has been reported that they did not allow a single drop of that water to be wasted.

In their practical books of religious laws, Muslim jurists have issued a decree to the effect that it is disapproved (makruh) to wipe off the remaining drops of water on one's face and hands after making ablution. These drops are rays of light and one is recommended to keep these rays of light on one's body. Since water in itself is not the main factor for the appearance of this light, the same is true about tayammum, because what is important is what God has placed into this action. So, it can be performed with water, soil, dust and so on.

According to a passage in Misbah al-Shari'ah, Imam al-Sadiq (a) is reported to have said,

إذا أردت الطهارة والوضوء، فتقدّم إلى الماء تقدمك إلى رحمة الله، فإن الله - تعالى - قد جعل الماء مفتاح قربته ومناجاته، وليلًا إلى بساط خدمته، وكما أن رحمة الله تظهر ذنوب العباد كذلك النجاسات الظاهرة يظهرها الماء لا غير قال تعالى: (وَهُوَ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ الرِّبَاحَ بُشْرًا بَيْنَ يَدَيْ رَحْمَتِهِ وَأَنْزَلْنَا مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً طَهُورًا) وقال تعالى: (وَجَعَلْنَا

مِنَ الْمَاءِ كُلُّ شَيْءٍ حَيٍّ أَفَلَا يُؤْمِنُونَ). فَكَمَا أَحْيَا بِهِ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ مِنْ نَعِيمِ الدُّنْيَا كَذَلِكَ بِفَضْلِهِ وَرَحْمَتِهِ جَعَلَ حَيَاةَ الْقُلُوبِ بِالطَّاعَاتِ وَتَفْكِيرِ فِي صَفَاءِ الْمَاءِ وَرِقْتَهُ وَطَهُورَهُ وَبِرْكَتِهِ وَلَطِيفِ امْتِزاجِهِ لِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَفِي كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَاسْتَعْمَلَهُ فِي تَطْهِيرِ الْأَعْضَاءِ الَّتِي أَمْرَكَ اللَّهُ بِتَطْهِيرِهَا وَأَتَ بِآدَابِهَا فَرَائِضَهُ وَسُنْنَهُ فَإِنَّ تَحْتَ كُلِّ وَاحِدَةٍ مِنْهَا فَوَائِدٌ كَثِيرَةٌ إِذَا اسْتَعْمَلَتْهَا بِالْحَرْمَةِ انْفَجَرَتْ لَكَ عَيْنُ فَوَائِدِهِ عَنْ قَرِيبٍ، ثُمَّ عَاصِرَ خَلْقَ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى كَامْتَرَاجَ الْمَاءِ بِالْأَشْيَاءِ يُؤْدِي كُلَّ شَيْءٍ حَقَّهُ وَلَا يَتَغَيَّرُ عَنْ مَعْنَاهُ مُعْتَبِرًا لِقَوْلِ الرَّسُولِ (ص) (مُثْلُ الْمُؤْمِنِ الْخَالِصِ كَمُثْلِ الْمَاءِ)

When you intend to make wudu', go towards the water as if you were going towards the mercy of God, since God has put this water as a key for people to get close to Him and talk to Him and has made it as a guide which takes people where they can serve Him. In the same way that one's sins can only be removed by divine mercy, physical impurities (najasat) can only be removed by water. God says, 'And it is He who sends the winds as harbingers of His mercy, and We send down from the sky purifying water'(25:48). And He also says, 'And We made every living thing out of water. Will they not then have faith' (21:30)?'

In the same way that all blessings in this world have been given life by God through water, He has also made, by virtue of His mercy and grace, the life of the hearts dependant on acts of obedience. And think about the clarity and tenderness and purity and blessing of water and the fact that it is flexible to the extent that it can be put into any container. Thus, use this water in order to purify those parts of your body that God has commanded you to purify and use in His obligations and traditions, each of which has lots of benefits. If you use those parts with respect, soon the fountains of blessings and benefits will gush forth. Live with Allah's creatures like water which gives everything its right while it still remains as water, as the Noble Prophet (s) said, 'The example of a believer is the example of water.'³

As Surah 21:30 describes, everything on this planet (and perhaps on all planets) that has life depends on water. Interestingly, just as our physical lives depend on water, our spiritual lives are connected to water as well.

According to the above-mentioned narration, water can be regarded as a symbol for living with other people. If water is poured in a dish, glass, jar, pot or anything else, it takes on the shape of its container but remains as water. A believer should be the same. If one finds oneself in a shop, office, school, bus, mosque, bank or anywhere else, facing good and bad circumstances, Muslim or non-Muslim people, one should remain a believer.

The Merits Of Wudu' As Mentioned In A Prophetic Narration

Once, two people went to the Noble Prophet (s) after the Morning Prayer when he used to sit in the mosque, answering peoples' questions. He asked them, 'Do you want me to tell what your questions are?' 'Yes,' they replied. 'It would bring us more certainty.' The Prophet said, 'One of you has a question about wudu' and its significance and the question of the other is about pilgrimage (hajj and 'umrah).' Then regarding wudu' he said,

فأعلم أنك إذا ضربت يدك في الماء وقلت: بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم تناثرت الذنوب التي اكتسبتها يداك، فإذا غسلت وجهك تناثرت الذنوب التي اكتسبتها عيناك بنظرهما وفوك بلفظه، فإذا غسلت ذراعيك تناثرت الذنوب عن يمينك وشمالك، فإذا مسحت رأسك وقدميك تناثرت الذنوب التي مشيت إليها على قدميك، فهذا لك في وضوئك فإذا قمت إلى الصلاة وتوجهت وقرأت آم الكتاب وما تيسر لك من السور ثم ركعت فأتممت ركوعها وسجودها وتشهدت وسلمت غفر لك كل ذنب فيما بينك وبين الصلاة التي قدمتها إلى الصلاة المؤخرة فهذا لك في صلاتك

When you put your hand in water and you say in the name of Allah the Beneficent, the merciful, the sins that you have committed by your hands will fall away. When you wash your face, the sins that you have committed by your eyes through [sinful looking].., and by your mouth through talking will fall away. When you wash your hands, then the sins will fall away from your right and left. When you do ritual wiping (mash) on your head and feet, the sins that you have walked towards will fall away.

These are only the merits of your wudu'. When you stand up for prayer, facing the qibla, and recite Surah al-Hamd and after that whatever other Surah which is possible for you and then complete your ruku' and prostration and tashahhud and salam, then, whatever sins you committed between the previous prayer and the prayer you performed it later will be forgiven. And these are the merits of your prayer.⁴

However, even with all these virtues of wudu', there is still a problem; since we become polluted again after being purified through making ablution because we have not changed our nature. Thus, we are like a clean child who makes themselves dirty again after a few minutes and as long as the child keeps this habit, the child will remain nice and clean only for a few minutes at a time. Wudu' and prayer can make us pure, and this purity can potentially remain forever. However, this purity does not remain because we do something wrong. This is the reason why we have to purify ourselves again and again.

Therefore, the purity of wudu' and tayammum should be appreciated. One has to regard wudu' as a great opportunity. Wudu' in itself is an act of worship by which God completes His blessings.⁵ Therefore, every time one is going to make ablution, one should perform it with due respect towards this wudu'.

In a contemplative narration, the Noble Prophet (s) said,

يحشر الله عز وجل أمتى يوم القيمة بين الأمم غرًا محجلين من آثار الوضوء

On the Day of Judgment, Allah (swt) will resurrect my nation among other nations while their faces are white and they are bright and this merit is one of the effects of their wudu'.⁶

Furthermore, it is recommended for a person who is making ablution to say while washing his face:

اللهم بيض وجهي يوم تسود فيه الوجوه ولا تسود وجهي يوم تبيض فيه الوجوه

O Allah! Please make my face shining and bright on the day when faces may become dark and do not make my face dark on the day when there are shining faces.[7](#)

Therefore, it can be concluded that there are two kinds of faces visible on the Day of Judgment. Describing these two, Surah 80, ayat 38–42 read:

وُجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ مُسْفَرَةٌ

(Many) faces on that day shall be bright (80:38).

ضَاحِكَةٌ مُسْبَشِرَةٌ

Laughing, joyous. (80:39).

وَوُجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ عَلَيْهَا غَبَرَةٌ

And (many) faces on that day, on them shall be dust (80:40).

تَرْهَقُهَا قَتَرَةٌ

Darkness shall cover them. (80:41).

أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْكَفَرَةُ الْفَجَرَةُ

These are they who are unbelievers, the wicked. (80:42).

Wudu' As Described On The Night Of The Mi'raj

The significance of wudu' may also be perceived from the narrations concerning the night journey of the Noble Prophet (s) to the heavens (known as the Mi'raj). In one part of His conversation to the Noble Prophet (s), God instructed him about how to make ablution and enumerated some of its merits:

قال لي ربي تعالي يا محمد مد يدك فيتلاقاك ماء يسيل من ساق العرش اليمين، فنزل الماء فلتقيته باليمين فمن أجل ذلك صار أول الوضوء اليمني، ثم قال يا محمد خذ ذلك الماء فاغسل به وجهك وعلمه ذلك فانك تريد أن تنظر إلى عظمتي وأنت ظاهر ثم اغسل ذراعيك اليمين واليسار وعلمه ذلك فانك تريد أن تتلقى بيديك كلامي وامسح بفضل ما في يديك من الماء رأسك ورجليك إلى كعبيك وعلمه المسح برأسه ورجليه، وقال: اني أريد ان أمسح

رأسك وأبارك عليك فاما المسح على رجليك فاني اريد ان اوطئك موطئا لم يطأه أحد من قبلك ولا يطأه أحد غيرك فهذا علة الوضوء.

God told me, Oh Muhammad! Stretch your hand. Some water will come from the right side of My throne. So I received the water with my right hand. Therefore, in wudu', the right hand is washed before the left hand. Then God said, Oh Muhammad! Take this water and wash your face since you want to look at my magnificence while you are pure. Then Allah Himself taught him how to wash his face. Then God said, Wash your right and left forearms since you want to take my words through your forearms. Then Allah Himself taught him how to wash his forearms. Then God said, with the remaining drops of water on your hands, wipe your head and your feet up to the ankles. Then Allah Himself taught him how to do that. And then God said, I want to touch your head and bless you. As for wiping your feet, it is because I want you to be able to put your feet on a place where no one else has ever, and will never, put their feet and this is the wisdom behind wudu'.⁸

Thus, we can realise that wudu' is full of lessons and secrets, many of which can be understood through studying narrations, although there are still many more that we do not yet understand.

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1. Kulayni, Al-Kafi, (Tehran: Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiyya, 1388 A.H.) vol.2, 131, no. 11.

2. Shaykh Hurr al-'Amili, Wasa'il al-Shi'a, (Qom: Mu'assasah Al al-Bayt Lilhya' al-Turath, 1409 A.H.) vol. 1, 377, no. 8.

Shaykh Hurr cites this hadith from Man La Yahduruh al-Faqih where the name of the Infallible to whom this hadith belongs has not been mentioned, but in 'Awali al-La'ali, vol. 2, p. 170, this hadith has been attributed to the Prophet (s).

3. Misbah al-Shari'ah, (Tehran: Anjoman-e Hikmat va Falsafeh, 1360 A.H.S.) 43, verse 10. This is a valuable book attributed to Imam Sadiq (a), which has been accepted by Shi'ite scholars as a reliable source due to the profound content and ideas it contains, even though the chain of narratives is not completely authentic.

4. Shaykh Hurr al-'Amili, ibid., 393, no. 12.

5. Cf. Surah 5, ayat 3, where Imamate has also been described as the completion of Allah's blessings. The similarity between wudu' and Imamate may lie in the fact that the philosophy of both is purification.

حُرِّمَتْ عَلَيْكُمُ الْمَيْتَةُ وَالدَّمُ وَأَحْمُرُ الْخِنْزِيرِ وَمَا أَهْلَ لِغَيْرِ اللَّهِ بِهِ وَالْمُنْخَنِقَةُ وَالْمَوْقُوذَةُ وَالْمُتُرَدِّيَةُ وَالْأَطْبَحَةُ وَمَا أَكَلَ السَّبُعُ إِلَّا مَا ذَكَرْتُمْ وَمَا ذَبَحَ عَلَى النُّصُبِ وَأَنْ سَتْفَسُمُوا بِالْأَرْلَامِ ذَلِكُمْ فِسْقٌ الْيَوْمَ يَئِسَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ بَنِيكُمْ فَلَا تَخْشُوْهُمْ وَاخْشُوْنِي الْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ بِيَنِكُمْ وَأَتَمَّتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نَعْمَلِي وَدَضَبِّتُ لَكُمُ الْإِسْلَامَ دِيَنًا فَمَنْ اضْطَرَّ فِي مَخْمَصَةٍ عَيْرَ مُتَجَانِفٍ لِأَنَّمِ قَاتَ اللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ

Forbidden to you is that which dies of itself, and blood, and flesh of swine, and that on which any other name than that of

Allah has been invoked, and the strangled (animal) and that beaten to death, and that killed by a fall and that killed by being smitten with the horn, and that which wild beasts have eaten, except what you slaughter, and what is sacrificed on stones set up (for idols) and that you divide by the arrows; that is a transgression. This day have those who disbelieve despaired of your religion, so fear them not, and fear Me. This day have I perfected for you your religion and completed My favor on you and chosen for you Islam as a religion; but whoever is compelled by hunger, not inclining willfully to sin, then surely Allah is Forgiving, Merciful (5:3).

[6.](#) Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Wafa', 1403 A.H.) vol. 77, 237, no. 11.

[7.](#) Shaykh Hurr al-'Amili, ibid., 402, no. 1.

[8.](#) Saduq, 'Ilal al-Shara'i, (Iraq, Najaf: al-Maktabat al-Hiydariyyah, 1966) vol. 2, 314, no. 1.

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