

A Description Of The Ablution

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Source: His Book As-Salaat (pg. 13-18)

As for what is related to the ablution (*wudoo*), then the foundation with regard to it is Allaah's saying:

"O you who believe, when you intend to perform the prayer, wash your faces and your hands up to the elbows, and wipe (with wet hands) your heads and (wash) your feet up to the ankles." ¹

And also the saying of the Prophet (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*):

"Allaah does not accept the prayer of any of you, when he is in a state of impurity, until he performs the ablution." ²

And there is also the hadeeth of the Prophet (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*):

"The key to the prayer is purification. Its tahreem ³ is the takbeer (saying Allaahu Akbar), and its tahleel ⁴ is the tasleem (saying as-Salaam 'Alaikum)." ⁵

Before beginning, one must make the intention for his ablution for the prayer or for whatever else ablution is legislated for. This is because 'Umar (*radyalloahu 'anh*) reported that Allaah's Messenger (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said:

"Verily, the actions are only based on their intentions.
And indeed, every person will have what he intended." ⁶

Then he must say: "*Bismillaah*" (In the Name of Allaah).

This is based on what An-Nasaa'ee reported with an authentic chain from Anas (*radyalloahu 'anh*) where he said: "Some of the Companions of the Prophet sought (water) to perform the ablution, so Allaah's Messenger (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said: 'Does any of you have water?' So he placed his hand in the water, while saying: 'Perform the ablution (saying) in the Name of Allaah.'"

Thereafter, one should begin the ablution by washing his hands one time. But if he washes them more than that, this is more preferable. However, the complete number of times prescribed to wash them is three times.

This washing of the hands is *mustahabb* (recommended) and not obligatory, so long as it does not occur when waking up in the morning after having slept at night, for in this case, washing the hands would be obligatory. This is due to the hadeeth of Abu Hurairah, recorded in the two Saheehs, in which Allaah's Messenger (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said:

¹ Surah Al-Maa'idah: 6

² Reported by Al-Bukhaaree and Muslim from the narration of Abu Hurairah

³ **Translator's Note:** Tahreem here means the point in prayer in which normal acts such as talking and eating become forbidden

⁴ **Translator's Note:** Tahleel here means the point in prayer in which normal acts such as talking and eating become permissible again

⁵ Reported by At-Tirmidhee from 'Alee with a good chain

⁶ Reported by Al-Bukhaaree and Muslim

“When one of you wakes up from his sleep (at night), he should not dip his hand into a vessel, until he (first) washes them three times, for indeed none of you knows where his hand spent the night.”

Then he does the Madmadah, which is when one washes his mouth by rinsing water in it, and also the Istinshaaq, which is inhaling water into the nose. Then he does the Istinthaar, which is when one blows out the water from his nose that he had inhaled.

He should perform these three acts of Madmadah, Istinshaaq and Istinthaar with one handful of water, meaning the water that he takes for doing the Madmadah should be the same water used for the Istinshaaq. This is based on the hadeeth of 'Abdullaah bin Zayd found in Al-Bukhaaree and Muslim, in which he describes the Prophet's ablution saying:

“The he would wash his mouth and nose (performing Madmadah and Istinthaar) three times, using the (same) handful he took water in.”

If one were to perform Istinshaaq one time only, that would be sufficient and his action would be valid, due to what has been authentically reported in Saheeh Al-Bukhaaree from the hadeeth of Ibn 'Abbaas, who narrated that:

“Allaah's Messenger (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) performed ablution (washing each body part) once.”

Then he must wash his face. The boundaries of the face are: from where the hair of the head begins to the chin, lengthwise, and from the right ear to the left ear, widthwise. He should wash it with one washing by which he will cover all of his face.

But if he washes it more than that, this is preferable, however the complete amount is three times.

It is also recommended for him to rub his (wet) fingers through his beard, if it is thick, to the point where the water will enter below his chin palate (i.e. touch the skin). This is based on what 'Uthmaan (*radyAllaahu 'anhu*) reported that: “The Prophet (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) would run his fingers through his beard.”⁷

Then he must wash his hands from the tips of his fingers to the end of his elbows. Some people think that washing the hands means starting from the wrists to the elbows, since they feel that they already washed their hands in the first part of the ablution. However, we say that washing the hands in the first part of the ablution is not obligatory. But as for washing them after washing the face, then this is obligatory – one's ablution is not complete unless he washes his hands.

There is nothing wrong with washing the upper arm (above the elbow), to ensure that one has washed his elbow thoroughly. This is since this has been authentically reported in Saheeh Muslim from the hadeeth of Abu Hurairah that he (*radyAllaahu 'anhu*) performed ablution once and washed over his upper arms. Then he informed the people that Allaah's Messenger (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) would perform ablution in the same manner.

He should begin by washing his right hand. Then he should wash his left hand, in the same manner he washed his right hand.

⁷ Reported by At-Tirmidhee and authenticated by Ibn Khuzaimah. Al-Bayhaqee has a similar narration from Anas with a good chain of narration

Then he should wipe all of his head with water. The manner of how the head should be wiped is described in the hadeeth reported by Al-Bukhaaree and Muslim from 'Abdullaah bin Zayd (*radyaAllaahu 'anhu*) that:

“When Allaah’s Messenger (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) wiped his head, he began from the front of his head, using both hands, until he reached his nape. Then he returned his hands (wiping his head) to the place from where he had begun.”

He should also wipe his ears along with his head, with the same water he uses to wipe over his head. This is due to the hadeeth of 'Abdullaah bin 'Amr, in which he said:

“Then he (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) wiped over his head and then entered his two forefingers into his ears, while wiping the back of his ears with his thumbs.”
[Reported by Abu Dawood & An-Nasaa’ee and its chain of narration is hasan]

Then he must wipe his feet up to (and including) the ankles. He must pass over the heels and run his fingers through his toes. This is based on what At-Tirmidhee, Abu Dawood and others reported with an authentic chain from Laqeeb bin Sabarah (*radyaAllaahu 'anhu*) who said that: “Allaah’s Messenger (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said:

‘Complete the ablution and rub (water) between the fingers/toes. And exert in inhaling water in the nose, unless you are fasting.’”

The description of the ablution, as mentioned before, has been indicated in the hadeeth reported by Al-Bukhaaree and Muslim from 'Uthmaan bin 'Affaan (*radyaAllaahu 'anhu*) that:

“Once 'Uthmaan called for water for ablution, so he washed his hands three times. Then he rinsed his mouth (*madmadah*), inhaled water in his nose (*istinshaaq*) and blew it out (*istinthaar*). Then he washed his face three times. Then he washed his right hand up to (and including) his elbow three times, then the left hand in the same manner. Then he wiped over his head. Then he washed his right foot up to (and including) the ankle three times, and then his left foot in the same manner. Then he said: ‘I saw Allaah’s Messenger (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) perform ablution in the same manner as I have performed it.’”

From the obligations of the ablution is that one maintain the order in which each part is washed. This is due to the apparent meaning of the above ayah and also because Allaah placed the act of wiping between several acts of washing. I am referring to the wiping of the head – Allaah placed it between the washing of the face and the hands and between the washing of the feet. According to the Arabs (i.e. the language), two similar acts are not cut off from each other unless it is for a beneficial purpose, which is, in this case, the order. What also provides evidence for this is that Allaah’s Messenger never abandoned performing the ablution in this order (mentioned in the ayah).

The proof for this is the hadeeth reported by Jaabir bin 'Abdillaah, describing the Hajj of the Prophet, in which Allaah’s Messenger (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said: “*Begin with what Allaah began.*” This is how An-Nasaa’ee reported it – in the form of a command from the Prophet. It is also in Saheeh Muslim in the form of the Prophet informing about it.

Also, from the obligations of the ablution is what is known as *Al-Mawaalah*. This is based on the report of 'Umar Ibn Al-Khattaab (*radyaAllaahu 'anhu*) who said: "The Prophet (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) once saw a man who had left a spot on his foot the size of a fingernail untouched by water, so he said to him:

'Go back and complete your Wudoo.'"

This hadeeth is also found in Sunan Abee Dawood from the path of some of the Companions that: "Allaah's Messenger (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) once saw a man who had left a spot on his foot the size of a fingernail untouched by water, so he commanded him to redo the ablution and the prayer."

Imaam Ahmad said that the chain of narration of this hadeeth was good. The meaning of *Al-Mawaalah* is: To not delay in washing a body part to the point where the part washed previously becomes dry (i.e. leaving no gaps in between each act of ablution).