

Fast 9: Prayer — Means of Purification

- In a hadith, the saying of prayers is compared to washing oneself in a river. It is reported:

The Holy Prophet said: “Tell me if there were a stream running by the door of any of you and he takes bath in it every day five times, what do you say, will it leave anything of the dirt which was on him?” They said: “Nothing of the dirt on him will be left.” He said: “So that is the example of the five prayers by which Allāh obliterates the sins.” (Bukhari, hadith 528)

By the obliterating or blotting out of evils is meant curbing the tendency to go against God’s commands. The person who feels himself in the presence of God five times a day has his mind purified of all scum, just as the bather is purified of physical dirt.

- Prayer, according to the Holy Quran and Hadith, is the means for the purification of the **soul**. The purification of the **body** and the **garments** that we wear is declared in the Quran to be necessary as a preparation for prayer.
- The 74th chapter of the Quran is the second revelation which the Holy Prophet received. Its first five verses are quoted below to show the importance of outward cleanliness in the religion of Islam. Addressing the Holy Prophet, it says:

“O you who wrap yourself up! Arise and warn, and your Lord do magnify, and your garments do purify, and uncleanness do shun” (74:1–5).

يَا أَيُّهَا الْمُدَّثِّرُ ﴿١﴾ قُمْ فَأَنْذِرْ ﴿٢﴾ وَرَبِّكَ
فَكَبِّرْ ﴿٣﴾ وَثِيَابَكَ فَطَهِّرْ ﴿٤﴾ وَالرُّجُزَ
فَاهْجُرْ ﴿٥﴾

Three fundamental duties are laid down here: “Warning the people” (i.e., warning them of the consequences of wrong-doing), “magnifying the Lord” which is done through prayer, and “**purifying the garments, and the body**”.

- The two ideas, the purification of the body and of the soul, are very often mentioned together in the Quran, for example:

“Surely Allah loves those who turn much to Him, and He loves those who purify themselves.” (2:222)

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ التَّوَّابِينَ وَيُحِبُّ الْمُتَطَهِّرِينَ ﴿٢٢٢﴾

“Certainly a mosque founded on observance of duty from the first day is more deserving that you should

لِمَسْجِدٍ أُسِّسَ عَلَى التَّقْوَى مِنْ أَوَّلِ يَوْمٍ أَحَقُّ
أَنْ تَقُومَ فِيهِ ﴿٢٤٤﴾

stand in it. In it are men who love to purify themselves. And Allah loves those who purify themselves.”
(9:108)

فِيهِ رِجَالٌ يُحِبُّونَ أَنْ يَتَطَهَّرُوا وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ
الْمُطَهَّرِينَ ﴿١٠٨﴾

In the first verse above, the words “those who turn much to Allah” refer to the need for us to purify ourselves spiritually, in mind, heart and character. The words “those who purify themselves” refer to the need for us to purify ourselves bodily. The two kinds of purifications are connected with each other.

In the second verse above, by those “who love to purify themselves” are meant those who purify themselves bodily to go to the mosque for prayer. But before that, the “observance of duty” is mentioned, which can only be done by purifying the heart.

- Hadith also lays special stress on outward purification of the body. According to one hadith: “The key to paradise is prayer, and the key to prayer is purification” (Mishkat, hadith 294). According to another hadith: “Purification is one-half of faith” (Sahih Muslim, hadith 223).
- The word translated as “purify”, in the verses and hadith reports quoted above, is based on the word *tahārat* طهارة.
- Inward purity is the real aim, but outward purity is a necessary preparation. A **pure mind in a pure body** is the watchword of Islam. Here cleanliness is not *next* to godliness, as runs the common saying, but it is *half* of godliness or faith.
- The Holy Quran further says:

“O children of Adam, attend to your adornment at every time (or place) of prayer” (7:31).

يَبْنَیْ آدَمَ خُذُوا زِينَتَكُمْ عِنْدَ كُلِّ مَسْجِدٍ

This shows that when assembling in mosques for prayer, attention must be paid to outward appearance and purity as well. One who is dirty in clothing or in his body would undoubtedly be offensive to others. Hence it is specially laid down that, in the larger gatherings on Fridays, everyone must take a bath before coming to prayer, and use scent if possible.

But what is specially aimed at is adornment or beautification **in a spiritual sense**. A Muslim must attend to inner beautification, for prayer is really meant as an aid to the beauty of the soul. He must come to prayer with a **heart** free from all impurities and full of the highest aspirations and noblest sentiments.